



**The Representation of Mali 2013's War Through  
French Soldiers' Writings**

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## *Acknowledgements*

*It is important to stress this thesis is based on books written in French. Thus, all except that demonstrate the main axes of my analysis are originally in French and are translated by myself. As a translation is never perfect, the reader, non-French speaker, might miss some nuances of words.*

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## ***Abstract***

*This thesis is written for the purpose of attaining a double-master's degrees in Political Science, International Relations Orientation, World Finality at the University of Brussels, Belgium and in Political Sciences, Global Studies, at Luiss Guido Carli University, Rome, Italy. This research is based on a qualitative analysis of books written by French soldiers about their war experience during the military intervention that occurs in Mali in 2013. This study is included in the work of researchers working on popular culture and its impact on international relations. The aim of this research is to reveal and understand the perspectives of French soldiers through their writings. Through a post-structuralist framework and using the discourse analysis methodology, this study distinguishes three assumptions: those books contribute to the legitimization of the French intervention, reinforcement of the North/South cliché and the legitimization of the use of violence against the enemy.*

*Keywords: France, Mali, intervention, autobiography, soldiers, representation, popular culture.*

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## *List of Acronyms*

AFISMA: African—led International Support Mission to Mali

ALAT: Army Light Aviation

AQIM: Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb

ATT: Amadou Toumani Touré

CDI: Centre de Droit International/ International Law Center

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

GAM: Airmobile Group

MNLA: National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

MUJAO: Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

RHC: Combat Helicopter Regiment

RIMa: Marine Infantry Regiment

RoE: Rules of Engagement

PID: Positive Identification

UN: United Nations

US: United States



## **I. Introduction: 2013 French Intervention in Mali, the Soldiers' Narration**

In 2013, after an official request from Dioncouda Traoré, the Malian's acting President, a French intervention occurs in Mali, mostly in the North, to stop the rebels from advancing South. Mali is a former French colony and became independent in 1960. After their coming back to France, some soldiers wrote about their "warrior memoirs". Our aim through this research is to deepen into these books and try to identify which reality is shared by the soldiers.

Five books have been selected for this study: "*Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l'opération Serval.*" from Olivier Hanne, in 2014; "*Offensive éclair au Mali*", from the Battalion Commander Rémi Scarpa, in 2015; "*Envoyez les hélicos!*" from the Colonel Pierre Verborg, in 2015; "*Opération Serval.: Notes de guerre, Mali 2013*" from the General Bernard Barrera, in 2015 and "*Libérez Tombouctou! Journal de guerre au Mali*" from the Colonel Frédéric Gout, in 2015. Those five books represent the empirical material of this research, over one thousand pages.

### **A. Aim of Research: Soldiers' Writings Shaping a Certain Type of Reality**

The scientific works and researches of academics<sup>1</sup> (Bat, 2013; Bergamaschi, 2013, Charbonneau, 2017; Chafer, 2013; Mathias, 2014) who deal with the subject are often intended to answer the question of "why": what the reasons are, the stakes or the interests behind this intervention. Even if these questions are extremely important, and we do not question them. This research aims to focus on questions of representation, rather than material questions. Reason for which we have rejected realism and we have chosen the post-structuralism approach. It gives to discourse, language and word choice an importance that other theories refuse to acknowledge. This study is included in the work of researchers working on popular culture and its impact on international relations.

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<sup>1</sup>Many other authors wrote about the French intervention and the Serval Operation.

This made it possible to situate this research in academic knowledge and to justify the empirical material that books are. According to some authors (Keith Brown and Catherine Lutz, 2007), actors intervening directly in the field are not often taken into account unlike state actors. It seemed interesting to consider this issue, dealing with a recent event in international relations, from a different perspective. This is indeed a contemporary subject, since interventions have become part of the daily life of the Western armed forces, as professors in International Relations at the University of Brussels: Barbara Delcourt, Christian Olsson and Christophe Wasinski regretted in their 2014 article: "*Le piège de la routine interventionniste*". In this press article,<sup>2</sup> they criticize the Belgian government's decision to intervene in Iraq and highlight the misdeeds of recent interventions: "which could now claim that the intervention in Libya is a victory in view, among other things, of the negative effects on Mali where another intervention, headed by France, was conducted?" (p.2).

The temporality of this subject takes place from January 2013 to March 2013 covering the period of the French intervention. The aim of this thesis is not to study the causes or consequences it had. However, we will start with a contextualization of the events to understand the genesis of the intervention without presuming to discover the "real" cause of it.

Thus, the focus of this research is more specifically on the how-questions, "how-possible questions are concerned with explaining how meanings, subjects and interpretative disposition are constructed" (Doty, 1993, p.299). Which leads to the main question that this research is trying to answer: **Which representations are shaped through the French soldiers' writings about the 2013 Mali intervention?**

Three hypotheses are made here: First, the soldiers' narrative contributes to legitimize their actions in Mali. Second, books reinforce the North /South cliché. Third, it justifies and then legitimatizes the use of violence against the enemy.

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<sup>2</sup>La libre Belgique.

## **B. Through War, Culture, Discourse and Soldiers' Writings**

This research is divided in three main parts. Part one: "Through war, culture and discourse" has three sections. First, a contextualization of Mali's 2012 crisis is going to be detailed, explaining how the French intervention occurs and why, with a quick review of the principal actors. This section is important for a better understanding of the political context in which the intervention occurs. The second section of this First Part focuses on popular culture, including soldiers' writings. Popular culture influences international relations in many ways by reinforcing the official discourse, legitimizing State actions, giving a certain representation of oneself and others, by valorizing the self. Movies, media, books or soldiers' writings are part of this popular culture. Thus, the soldiers' narrative and its influence on international relations and on the creation of a certain reality is going to be specified. The third section concentrates on theoretical framework. The main concepts of our hypotheses- representation and legitimation- are going to be defined. Then, the theoretical position of this research- the poststructuralist is going to detail. The poststructuralist theory is the one that fits best to this research's as it focuses on language and discourse and on how the discourse shapes reality. As the empirical materials of this research are books, the methodology applied in this research is discourse analysis, which will be deepened in the last section of the theory.

Part two "Through French Soldiers' Writings" is divided in five main sections. The first section is devoted to the description of the empiric material- soldiers' books, including title, publishing house, information about authors... The next three sections are devoted to the principal axes of this research, which became clear after reading the books. First axis "Featuring French Heroes", exemplifies the staging of French soldiers as liberators sacrificing their family life, risking their health, body and life, with a lack of means and comfort to save the Malian population and give back its sovereignty to the government. It focuses on which representation of themselves they give. The second axis: "Representation of "Others" is dedicated to the French soldiers' representation of Mali, the Malian population, ally armies and the enemy. The third and last axis: "Destruction of the Enemy and Asymmetric War" is dedicated to how soldiers describe their use of violence against the enemy and their feeling of being part of an asymmetric war as the two sides are not bound by the same rule, do not share the same values and are not put under pressure in the same way. After exposing this empirical material, the last section will try to confirm or deny the three hypotheses previously made: legitimation of their

actions and the intervention; reproducing the North/South cliché and the justification and legitimation of the use of violence by the French soldiers.

This leads to the last part: “Recommendation and Conclusion”. It is divided in two sections. First, the limits are presented as “recommendations”, this research could be included in a larger work by adding axes and sources to the study. Moreover, this research could have been developed further by comparing its results with other soldiers’ narratives. This work is ended by a brief conclusion.

# Part I: Through War, Culture and Discourses

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## II. Contextualization

This part will focus on giving a brief contextualization to the French's justifications and Malian's issues that lead to intervention in 2013.

### A. War Declaration

On January 11, 2013; the President Hollande<sup>3</sup> declared:

*Mali faces a **terrorist aggression from the North**, whose brutality and fanaticism is known worldwide. So today, it concerns the **very existence of this friendly state**, Mali, the security of its population, and our nationals who live there. They are 6000 there. **I, therefore, on behalf of France, responded to the request to help from the President of Mali supported by the West African countries.** As a result, the French armed forces have this afternoon given their support to Malian units to fight against these terrorist elements... (Hollande, 2013)<sup>4</sup>*

With this declaration, the French President Hollande announced the beginning of the French intervention in Mali, the so-called: "Operation Serval". 3,500 French soldiers were deployed in Mali to reinforce the Malian army and they were supported by 1,400 Chadians 500 Nigériens, more than 350 Togolèse, nearly 200 Nigeriens, more than 150 Burkinabes, 100 Beninèses and about 50 Sénégalèses and by 5,000 troops from an African-led International Support Mission to Mali, AFISMA (Le Monde, 2013). The French Prime Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, on January 15, 2013; at the General Assembly, had mentioned three main (official) motivations to this intervention: stopping the terrorist

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<sup>3</sup> President of France, in office from 15 May 2012 to 14 May 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Translation. V. Mattered, original : "Mesdames, Messieurs Le Mali fait face à une agression d'éléments terroristes<sup>4</sup>, venant du Nord, dont le monde entier sait désormais la brutalité et le fanatisme. Il en va donc, aujourd'hui, de l'existence même de cet Etat ami, le Mali, de la sécurité de sa population, et celle également de nos ressortissants. Ils sont 6000 là-bas. J'ai, donc, au nom de la France, répondu à la demande d'aide du président du Mali appuyée par les pays africains de l'Ouest. En conséquence, les forces armées françaises ont apporté cet après-midi leur soutien aux unités maliennes pour lutter contre ces éléments terroristes, [...]"

offensive; preserving the Malian's State, its territorial integrity and its sovereignty; and preparing the deployment of the African armed forces (Assemblée Nationale, 2013). François Hollande added to these: securing Bamako, the place where thousands of (French) nationals live (GRIP, 2013). The unofficial reasons were the defense of the French economic interests in the Region and, specifically, Niger's uranium mines and Mali's natural resources (GRIP, 2013).

This intervention was legally and politically legitimized (GRIP, 2013). The legal legitimization came first from Dioncouda Traoré,<sup>5</sup> the Malian's acting President, asking for help, orally on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and then by letter on the following day. It was supported by the assistance's request from Alassane Ouattara,<sup>6</sup> President of Ivory Coast, on the behalf of Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS]. Second, the intervention is conformed to the United Nations Charter, Article 51:

*Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security* (United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, 2016).

And third, it is conformed to the Security Council Resolution 2085 and approved by the Security Council members on the 14<sup>th</sup>–January 2013 (GRIP, 2013). 2085's resolution Security Council Resolution authorizes:

*[...] the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year, which shall take all necessary measures, in compliance with applicable international humanitarian law and human rights law and in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Mali to carry out the following tasks: (a) To contribute to the rebuilding of the capacity of the Malian Defense and Security Forces [...] (b) To support the Malian authorities in recovering the areas in the North of its territory under the control of terrorist, extremist and armed groups and in reducing the threat posed by terrorist organizations [...] (c) To transition to stabilization activities to support the Malian authorities in maintaining security and consolidate State authority through*

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<sup>5</sup> President of Mali – acting, in office from 12 April 2012 to 4 September 2013.

<sup>6</sup> President of Ivory Coast since December, 2010 and President of ECOWAS from 17 February, 2012 to 28 March, 2014.



*appropriate capacities; (d) To support the Malian authorities in their primary responsibility to protect the population; (e) To support the Malian authorities to create a secure environment for the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees [...] (f) to protect its personnel, facilities, premises, equipment and mission and to ensure the security and movement of its personnel (United Nations, 2012b).*

It has not been justified by the defense agreement<sup>7</sup> holding France to its ex-colonies, to avoid being accused of neo-colonialism (Bergamaschi, 2013).

The political legitimization was reflected by the “Islamist Threat” and the need to protect the existence of Mali, an important African partner for France (Bergamaschi, 2013). The intervention had international and national support including the majority of the French parties (except from the far-left parties), the ECOWAS, European Union, United States, Russia, China and African countries. Some critics were provided by Egypt and Qatar (GRIP, 2013). The intervention was also welcome by Malian’s population (GRIP, 2013).

This subsection focused on France's justifications for intervening in Mali in 2013. The next one will focus on the events that preceded the French intervention.

## **B. 2012’s Mali Coup**

On the 22nd March 2012, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo<sup>8</sup> led a *coup d’état* against President Amadou Toumani Touré,<sup>9</sup> known as ATT. The mutineers took the national television under control and arrested some personalities of the regime (Bergamaschi, 2013). Sanogo put himself at the head of the *National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State of Mali*. It happened just before the Mali’s election that should have been held on the 29 of April. The French Mali’s specialist, Pierre Boilley declared, at the

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<sup>7</sup> Décret n°90-1075 du 28 novembre 1990 portant publication de l'accord de coopération militaire technique entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de la République du Mali signé à Bamako le 6 mai 1985 (ensemble un échange de lettres en date des 8 et 28 juillet 1986) [ Decree No. 90-1075 of 28 November 1990 on the publication of the Military Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Republic of Mali signed at Bamako on May 6, 1985, of July 8 and 28, 1986)].

<sup>8</sup> Chairperson of the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State of Mali in office 22 from March 2012 to 12 April 2012.

<sup>9</sup> President of Mali in office from 8 June 2002 to 22 March 2012.

time, that this “coup was a surprise” as ATT had confirmed that he would respect the Constitution and not run for another mandate (Nossiter, 2012). Captain Sanogo and his soldiers were opposed to the States and accused it to be too weak to face rebels in the North. They were against an international intervention and thought that the Malian army was able to recapture the rebel territory (GRIP, 2013). The main aim was to restore the State’s authority and it failed. The coup had the opposite effect and led to less control and a deterioration of the State (Bergamaschi, 2013).

In her 2013’s article “French military Intervention in Mali: Inevitable, Consensual yet Insufficient”, Isaline Bergamaschi points some events out which led to the *coup* such as the attack on the Malian army by Tuareg rebels, in Aguel’Hoc, and the “strategic retreat” led by the government at the end of 2011. Also, as Bergamaschi noticed, in her article, a first warning to the President ATT: the *women march* that took place on the 2 February 2012. The wives and spouses of the soldiers marched to Presidential palace, as a sign of protestation and in order to claim more financial support for the Malian troops and army. The day before the *coup*, 21 March 2012, the Minister of the Defense, Sadio Gassama<sup>10</sup> visited the Kali’s military camp and was welcomed by soldiers’ throwing stones at him. The main issue was the lack of financial support and management support from the government. The lack of a concrete response from the government was the last straw and has triggered the 2012’s military coup (Bergamaschi, 2013). On April 12, 2012, as the new election could not be held, Diancando Traoré was assigned as acting President (Reuters, 2012).

After describing briefly the 2012 mail crisis, we will focus on the term "Islamic threat".

### **C. Islamist Threat**

The focus in the media was on the terrorist and the “Islamist Threat” (Bergamaschi, 2013). It was one of the main justifications for the French intervention. Terrorist groups had crossed the symbolic border between the North and the South (GRIP, 2013). There are four main rebel groups fighting and occupying in the Nord of Mali: Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb [AQIM]; Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa [MUJAO], they

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<sup>10</sup> Minister of Defense of Mali from 2 February 2012 to 22 March 12.

have similar ambitions even if MUJAO is more regional; National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad [MNLA], laic Tuareg organization fighting for Tuareg independence and Ansar Dine, a Tuareg rebel group which main purpose is to impose the Shari in Mali (GRIP, 2013).

The United Nations [UN] recognizes only two of those as terrorism groups: AQIM and MUJAO. They are associated to Al-Qaida; they are included in the 1267's UN list (United Nations, 2018).<sup>11</sup> The word terrorism has not a consensual definition, in 2005, the UN Secretary, Kofi Annan,<sup>12</sup> in his report: "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", has defined it as it follows:

*Any action constitutes terrorism if it is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a Government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act.*

After the *coup*, MNLA took advantage of the instability of the country. In alliance with Ansar Dine and AQIM, on the first April 2012, they took Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu under control. However, MNLA was kicked out of those cities by the other groups shortly after (Bergamaschi, 2013). MNLA, on the 6 April 2012, declared the independence of Azawad. The Azawad Region includes (see figure 1): Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu and a part of Mopti. It is not based on common culture, political or language but it is a pure creation (Bergamaschi, 2013). The army was unable to free the North of Mali and the negotiations organized by the ECOWAS and the United Nations failed. The main reason was that Blaise Compaoré,<sup>13</sup> President of Burkina Faso and the official mediator, was not trusted by the Malians population (Bergamaschi, 2013). "Mali's government, Ansar Dine, and Tuareg separatist group MNLA [had] agreed to end hostilities at peace talks organized by regional mediator Burkina Faso on December 5" (Reuters, 2013). The UN with the resolution 2085, authorized deployment of troops, in practice this deployment could have been possible only in September 2013 (Bergamaschi, 2013). In January 2013 Ansar Dine suspended the cease fire (Reuters, 2013). The main pretext to justify it was the lack of sincerity from the Malian government to reach a peace agreement (Reuters, 2013). The

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<sup>11</sup> "By resolution 2368 (2017), the Security Council imposes individual targeted sanctions (an assets freeze, travel ban, and arms embargo) upon individuals, groups, undertakings and entities designated on the ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List" (United Nations, 2018b).

<sup>12</sup> Un general secretary mandate from 1997 to 2006.

<sup>13</sup> President of Burkina Faso in office from 15 October 1987 to 31 October 2014.

rebel group attacked Konna's military bases and tried to take Mopti's airport under control. The army ran away. Those last events justified the need for the French to intervene (Bergamaschi, 2013).



Figure 1 Mali's map (Le Monde, 2012)

The different protagonists of the conflicts have been detailed. In the next subsection, we will see how the French intervention unfolds and conclude this chapter of contextualization.

#### D. French Intervention

As said above, the French intervention was required by President Traoré and got supported by Mali's population. This operation was a collaboration between the Malian and French's armies, but France headed it. The strategy was based on a combination of air raids and ground troops (Bergamaschi, 2013). The operation had been led in four phases: the first phase, so-called: "*le coup d'arrêt*", took place between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and has consisted in sending air raids to stop the rebel groups advance in the South of Mali. The second, "*la reconquête*", took place just afterwards until the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2013 and was about surveillance missions monitored by the Harfang drone of the Niger Belt including the cities of Gao to Timbuktu and ground operations with the support of aircraft patrols. The third phase, "*la neutralisation*", took place from the end of January until the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2013. It was dedicated to air raids mainly in the Tessalit Region,

supported by ground troops that have destructed a few combat outposts and neutralized armed groups. The fourth and ultimate phase, “*la sécurisation*”, was the withdrawal of the French troops (La Défense - Ministère des Armées, 2013). It was a victory; the operation could be presented as a model of success. The northern part of Mali was free within a few months.

After having presented the genese of the intervention, the next part will introduce the authors that have worked on similar topics and which constitutes our literature review.



### III. Popular Culture and International Relations

The International Relations' field is usually approached with a realist point of view, and especially concerning the concept of war. States are perceived as rational actors focus on achieving their (security) interests. The realist school does not consider the non-State actors and by doing so neglects the role of individuals and their experiences (Sylvester, 2012). As Sylvester, mentioned in her 2012 article: "War Experience/War Practices/War Theory", stresses that actors are not always rational. She illustrates her statement with the example of the United States' foreign policies on Israel and qualifies their support as "blind" and then, irrational. She states that some wars distance themselves from the cost benefits calculation, such as the so-called concept of "new wars" and the "post-colonial tradition wars". New wars might perceive a decrease of the number of wars but following by an increase of the harm and the scale of violence (Sylvester, 2012).<sup>14</sup> She defines the "post-colonial tradition wars", using Tarak Barkawi's work,<sup>15</sup> as:

*[...] A form of connection between groups designated as enemies. Wars are not indicative of a break of international balances of power, norms or structures of conflict resolution as much as they are an intensification of social relations (Sylvester, 2012, p.489).*

An important point for Barkawi (Sylvester, 2012) is that western wars, presented as "international interventions", are negatively perceived from the former colonies and, as Barkawi stressed that the western part totally omits it. Besides, anarchy is the core concept of the Western views of international relations but, from the point of view of former colonies, what rules international relations is imperialism and colonialism.

International relations are affected by many actors. As said above, the main aim of this paper is to study the impact of the French soldiers' memoirs on the representation of the 2013 Malian's conflict; this literature is part of the so-called popular culture. Therefore, this literature review is going to give a global perceptive on how popular culture affected international relations and, then, more specifically how military memoirs can challenge or not representations.

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<sup>14</sup> Notably harm and violence targeting the most vulnerable as women and children (Sylvester, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Sylvester refers to Tarak Barkawi "Connection and Constitution: Locating War in globalization Studies" (2014) and Barkawi and Shane "Powers of war" (2011).

## A. Popular Culture

This part focuses on detailing popular culture's major roles in international relations. To give a first definition of mass/popular culture, it is important to stress that it is not necessarily the one produced by the people<sup>16</sup> but it is surely the one consumed by them (Ahall, 2009). The Centre of International Law [CDI], from the Brussel University, has devoted on its website a section about popular culture and International Law. CDI defines popular culture as:

*First, in its most common sense, the expression opposes an elitist culture that was the prerogative of the upper classes. Rather, it refers to a mass culture, largely transcending social classes, which covers blockbusters or other productions [...]. Then, "pop culture" covers the idea of appropriating and mixing various cultural elements or everyday life into new creations (Centre de droit international, n.d.).*

Culture is a creator of sense and meaning, therefore, as mass/popular culture reach a larger audience, "interpretations or reading the world often come to us through the media and the mass communication" (Ahall, 2009, p.28). International Relations scholars tend to only consider discourses of elites or "high" media publications. Popular culture is a significant actor and tool of the international relations. Through movies, media, books, television or radio podcasts, foreign policies and dominant discourses are reproduced; identities are shaped; and actions, policies or ideologies are legitimated. In addition, popular culture can be used to disseminate propaganda or as a soft power and integration mechanisms.

Jutta Weldes (1999) argues that mass culture is reproducing and popularizing foreign policy discourses and actions of states. Her article is taking the example of "Star Trek" to demonstrate that popular culture can be used to help to "construct the reality of international policies for official and non-official" (1999, p.119). She qualifies popular culture as a "background-meaning" that gives a representation of foreign policies.

One of the most important tools of popular culture, in the case of Star Trek, it is that it provides a definition of the **self/others**. For instance, Weldes shows that the "we" in the Star Trek universe correspond to the "New Empire"<sup>17</sup> and can be related to the State,

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<sup>16</sup> To use Ahall words the "subordinate classes".

<sup>17</sup> New Empire is the name of the Star Trek's crew.



United States. “New Empire” is described as: liberal, tolerant, promoting equality, explorer going beyond the borders, respectful of others and allowing them some autonomy (unless or until they are considered as a threat), advocating liberalism by encouraging leisure activities and a multiculturalist environment. Weldes (1999) asserts that this description can be found in United States’ [US] foreign discourses. US officials describe themselves as liberal, exploring frontiers and in favor of individual rights and liberties. This description can be found in Eisenhower, Reagan and Kennedy’s discourses about individual freedom and policy and in favor of self-determination (*ibid*).

Then, she goes a bit further in her analysis by claiming that Star Trek “contributes to the constitution of a world in which hierarchy, intervention, and militarism are taken for granted” (1999, p.127). Star Trek plays a role of legitimization of intervention by hierarchizing space’s races and species. For doing so, three main criteria are used: level of development, level of militarism and level of individualism (or collectivism). The same criteria are used by the United States by differencing democratic versus totalitarian countries or pluralism versus communist world. It helps to spread the idea that an intervention<sup>18</sup> is needed if the “other” is qualified as less-advanced and that surveillance is needed if the “other” is qualified as primitive or developing society.<sup>19</sup> In the case where “others” looks like “us”,<sup>20</sup> relations can be joined.

Besides, the policy pursued in case of resistance for the Federation/New Empire (Star Trek) is to use military force to compel, as it has been seen for United States and their use of force in Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> Weldes supports that Star Trek reflects post-war United States discourses by “the naturalization and indeed the proliferation of intervention” (1999, p.130).

Jason Dittmer (2005) states that popular culture structures expectations. It “is one of the ways in which people come to understand their position both within a larger collective identity and within an even broader geopolitical narrative, or script” (p.626).

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<sup>18</sup> As the Marshall Plan or alliance for progress.

<sup>19</sup> In Star Trek but also in the western world by the IMF or World Bank.

<sup>20</sup> In Star Trek “us” is the federation, the “new empire” and “others” represent aliens, in the real world us is “United States” and others can be any other countries.

<sup>21</sup> Refers to the Vietnam war that took part in 1955 and it ends in 1975.

He argues that the Gramsci's hegemony<sup>22</sup> concept itself is constructed in the script everyday life.

In his article, it is the comic book "captain America"<sup>23</sup> that it is analyzed. He describes it as influencing "the way readers view the world and locate their own place as American within it" (2005, p.627). Captain America plays multi roles. One of them is helping to construct the role play by US in the world. It produces a geopolitical reality. It defends the idea that American's is led only by security.

A second role is to give to reader key elements to define itself as American<sup>24</sup> and contrast itself to "others".<sup>25</sup> Unlike Superman, who is an outsider alien, Captain America is an insider, is seen as a territorial symbol. He represents American values and is always distancing himself from "others". After the 9/11 events, Captain America script was focusing more on geopolitical problematics and the construction of American identity. The post-terrorist attacks episode "Ground Zero"<sup>26</sup> illustrates it: Captain America articulates two ideas: it is war starting and the reader has already choice his side (US). Dittmer enunciates the other possibilities that could have been given to the reader instead of declaring war: "this event could have been specified a disaster, an act of madness or perhaps most obviously a crime, an act that required careful police work internationally and in the United States" (2005, p.638).<sup>27</sup> Also, post-9/11, the "others" had a specific face: terrorists. Captain America started to fight against those terrorists and share a particular image of them. Terrorists were described in contrast to Christianity: the Christian priest is defined as tolerant, open-minded and contrasts with the rude and violent terrorists. The effect of this distinction, as Huntington formulated in "clash of civilization",<sup>28</sup> is that it shows that "the conflict itself is an inevitable result of incompatible cultures" (Dittmer, 2005, P.639). Therefore, this article outlines that popular culture helps to construct

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<sup>22</sup> Gramsci hegemony concept, in brief, questions the consent of the mass to be dominated, and this consent is constructed in the civil society.

<sup>23</sup> Dittmer justify his choice by explaining that Captain America is a symbol of America, it represents the best aspect of it (Dittmer, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Construction of national identity.

<sup>25</sup> "Others" refer to the rest of world, this very similar idea that Jutta Weldes expressed, in her 1999 article: "Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture".

<sup>26</sup> In this episode, Captain America is talking to a rescuer over a dead body, and the scene is view from the victim.

<sup>27</sup> This citation is used by Dittmer but come from the 2004 Dalby article: "Calling 911: Geopolitics discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the South Pacific. Political Geography, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> In 1993, Samuel Huntington argued that: "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington, 1993, p. 22).

identity (in contrast to “others”), structures people expectations and builds a specific and subjective reality.

Weldes and Rowley try to answer the question they have brought in the title of their article “how does popular culture relate to world politics?” (2015) They answer to this question in four steps:

First, they relate to the use popular culture by States for propaganda,<sup>29</sup> in time of war, and as a soft power in peace time. The two authors illustrate popular culture as a form of soft power with the example of South Africa<sup>30</sup> organizing the Rugby World Cup, in 1995.

Second, they link popular culture and the global political economy: “most forms of popular culture are produced and consumed in industrial and these industries, their inputs, practices, and output transcend State boundaries” (Weldes and Rowley, 2015).

Third, popular culture plays a key role of the representation for the world politics. It has a political impact. Weldes and Rowley demonstrate their claim by pointing out that the media and fictional are the principal source of most Americans’ knowledge about the Arab-Israeli conflict. They show that media attention has an influence on their readers as it gives a subjective representation of reality, i.e., during the Cold World the media coverage about deaths was different depending on which side the death came from. A priest’s killing by communist police had a huge coverage because it complies with the US’ anti-communist propaganda (Weldes and Rowley, 2015). The legitimization of State policy also goes through popular culture, as it was seen above with Star Trek, and the authors gave few illustrations as decriminalization of torture and gender violence:

*Similarly, through a variety of mechanisms (the ‘ticking time bomb’, the certainty that the person being tortured knows something, the hero’s suffering about the moral dilemma), the television series 24 constructs torture as legitimate – indeed, as legitimate state policy – for the US (Mayer 2007, Van Veeren 2009). Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2010, p. 27) has shown that women in rural Egypt understand and interpret the pan-Islamic notion of ‘Muslim women’s rights’ in part*

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, with posters defining the nation and the enemies, movies about the war world two with the aim to legitimizing it.

<sup>30</sup> As Weldes and Rowley precise the Soft power is working in two ways: reintegration international and nationally the creation of the rainbow nations.

*through representations of gender violence in popular national television serials like A Matter of Public Opinion (Qadiya ra'y 'amm)* (Weldes and Rowley, 2015).

Weldes and Rowley conclude their article by giving a last global example: the diamond. The diamond is linked to popular culture in different ways. Its popularity emerges thanks to a commercial,<sup>31</sup> in 1947, that boost the sales and, further it expands the western image of marriage through the global economy. Diamond is involved not only in the global economy but also in African politics and more importantly in African national and international conflicts, legal and illegal trade. In 2006, with the Edward Zwick's movie "*Blood Diamond*" brought the public's attention to the issue of "conflict diamond".<sup>32</sup>

Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies and Simon Philpott expose (2009) that popular culture and world politics are a continuum. The production of popular culture made the world as it is. Politics are created by the representational imaginaries. Grayson, Davies and Philpott highlight the importance of emotions on how they affect decision-making and the rationality of the (political) actors.

So, as this first part of the literature review has shown: popular culture is "indivisible from politics [...]. Popular culture [has been identified] as an important site where power, ideology and identity are constituted, produced and/or materialized" (Grayson, Davies and Philpott, 2009, pp. 155-156).

This section has aimed to demonstrate the importance and impact of popular culture in international relations. Within the framework of pop culture and through the authors, we will now focus on the soldiers: in the media and their writings.

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<sup>31</sup> Created by De Beer (Weldes and Rowley, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Define by the United Nations, in 1990, as "Conflict diamonds are diamonds that originate from areas controlled by forces or factions opposed to legitimate and internationally recognized governments and are used to fund military action in opposition to those governments, or in contravention of the decisions of the Security Council."

## **B. Soldiers' Through Popular Culture and their Roles in International Relations**

Linda Ahall, (2009) exposes that political violence is gendered and that US media regards women and men and their roles in the army with a stereotype-based view. Media and popular culture are building identity. Woman soldiers are approached with three different types of narratives:

*Women engaged in proscribed violence [...] are often portrayed either as 'mothers', women who are fulfilling their biological destinies; as 'monsters', women who are pathologically damaged and are therefore drawn to violence; or as 'whores', women whose violence is inspired by sexual dependence and depravity (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2007, seen in Ahall, 2009, p.5).<sup>33</sup>*

The way media describes women soldiers shaped the representation of their actions. Ahall compares how it was portrayed by media to two US female soldiers. First, Jessica Lynch, fighter during the 2003 Iraq war, is presented as a heroine and a victim saved by man (US soldiers). Second, Lynndie England was a prison guard in 2003 Abu Ghraib, in Iraq. She was implied and found guilty in the Abu Graib's scandal.<sup>34</sup> The three narratives can be found in the way she is depicted. Media focuses on her pregnancy (mother's narrative), her appearance (monster's narrative) and her sexual relationships (whore's narrative). Even guilty, Lynch's actions were justified by a manipulative boyfriend. Ahall claims that US media and people could not support the idea that such violence and torture came from a woman. This example shows that female actions are rather explained with personal and emotional motives than political ones.

Keith Brown and Catherine Lutz (2007) denounce the absence of consideration from social scientists to soldiers' literatures. They regret the limited scope for soldiers' writing about wars. There are a variety of motivations for soldiers to write, after being on the battlefield but, as Brown and Lutz point out, they often shared common imageries. Soldiers present themselves as warriors, defining themselves in contrast to the identified

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<sup>33</sup> This citation is used by Ahall but come from the 2007 Sjoberg and Gentry article: Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics, p.12.

<sup>34</sup> Reveal after the leak of photos of prisoners being torture by guards.

enemy. They get reverse criticisms, by their authorities. This can be explained by the content of their works that does not valorize the army (Brown and Lutz, 2007).

However, soldiers are empowered to speak about wars and they are legitimate sources as they have been on the combat zone (Pomarède, 2016). Soldier's war experiences shape the representation of wars and can be a source of legitimization of western wars, production of identities, the trivialization of violence and neutralization of critical judgment. Identities are constructed by distancing "self" from "others" as the "self" represents civilized western and "others" the barbaric terrorist (Weldes, 1999; Dittmer 2005; Pomarède, 2016) and "this differentiation is crucial in politics as it works to secure a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives" (Pomarède, 2016, p.4).<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, military memoirs are not truth delivers. It must be understood as constructed by the own experience of the writer and "these will always be influenced by and productive social, political, cultural, gendered, racial and sexual prescriptions and notions of normalcy" (Dyvik, 2016, p.136).

Wasinski (2015) studies British soldiers' autobiography about the British intervention in Afghanistan. The author argues that there is a military culture that valorizes the military use of force. Wasinski observes that soldiers in their autobiographies refer a lot to the previous interventions such as in Northern Ireland, Kosovo or Iraq.

He states that a great element that can be found in those books is the relationship with the "others". He identified three "others": population, allies and enemy. He stresses that the population has only a "peripheric role" in the books. For allies, soldiers distinguish western from non-western ones. The western allies are described in more technical ways, by their logistics help such as air support. While, local allies are describing as ineffective, weak fighting capacity, untruthful, willing to take unconsidered risks – that could harm civilians. The enemy is portrayed as the "bad guy" and using drugs, through its actions

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<sup>35</sup> It exists many examples to illustrate this, Brown and Lutz (2007, p. 325), give a particularly relevant one: "To roughly diagnose the potential for post-traumatic stress disorder, Army test designers asked the following questions: Did you ever feel your life endangered, did you use your gun, and have you seen any casualties? The third question asked for clarification: Was the casualty "Friendly, Enemy, [and/or] civilian"? The assumption is that it matters deeply which of the three categories the dead bod-ies belonged to—fellow U.S. soldier, enemy soldier, or civil-ian".

and it is sometimes dehumanized by the soldiers. Wasinski states “there is no context for the social and political evolution of their enemies” (2015, p.6).

Another element pointed out by Wasinski (2015) is the use of violence. He makes four observations about it. Firstly, the effect on the target’s body such as explanation about the impact of the bullet on the opponent. Secondly, the description of their weapons and their level of destruction: the most destructive one is the best. Thirdly, the lack of ethic consideration of individuals’ life and celebration of military violence. Fourthly, the psychology effect and the post-traumatic stress that can result from the use of violence. The author's final point is about political ends. He shows that soldiers question the purpose and necessity of the intervention.

Julien Pomarède (2016) argues that Chris Kyle’s story of war produces an impact on representation and shared imageries of war. Chris Kyler was an American soldier, more specifically sniper, which is presented as a hero in United States. He holds the dubious record of 160 insurgents killed, even if he claimed having killed over 255, during the Iraq war.

Pomarède shows that Chris Kyler memoirs provides a glorification of violence through the description of weapons, enemies and his family situation. Besides, the emotional framing is significant as it minimizes violence. The compassion that is created for the soldier makes the use of violence more acceptable.

Violence is reported as “techno-fetishism” by detailing weapons and describing Kyle’s satisfaction to use them against insurgents. At Chris Kyle’s funeral, his sniper rifle was put on his grave as a symbol of his life. “Violence is hidden by an emotional framing that makes weapons a component of immortalized human qualities” (Pomarède, 2016, p. 13).

The way in which the “enemy” is described is also relevant. “Bad guys”, “evil”, “fanatics” “archaic”, “violent”, “religious” and other characteristics are terms to denote insurgents. It has for consequence that “the enemy is not seen through his rationality, but as a flow of violence that is **detached from its human dimension**” (Pomarède, 2016, p.

11). Enemies represent violence and that is a way to justify eliminating them. The large number of kills is seen as a “technical sniper performances”.

The last element is the role of family, Chris Kyle confirms his “addiction to the violence of war” and transfers “his war behavior into the private sphere” (Pomarède, 2016, p.11). This is illustrated by a story where Kyle was willing to shoot a presumed thief in his house. He does not hide that he misses war. On top of this, he is perceived as a victim, sacrificing his family and his private life for his country.

Pomarède demonstrates that American Sniper has a political effect by “encouraging an apologetic violence representation of war as agonistic struggle of life” (2016, p.16) and by contributing to the trivialization of violence. To conclude with Pomarède’s words:

*This article fundamentally suggests that an apparently apolitical narration that ‘modestly’ pretends to transcribe the reality of war is at least a political discourse that encourage under specific forms the continuity of western interventions* (2016, p.16).

On one hand, as a part of popular culture, and as said above, soldiers’ memoirs can be a tool to support foreign policies, official discourses and legitimize interventions. On the other hand, as Synne Dyvik exposes (2016) soldiers’ memoirs can challenge public narrative, dominant representations and discourses as did Norwegian ones.

Norway military took part on the “operation enduring Freedom”, supporting the United States, in Afghanistan, in 2001. This intervention was barely ever qualified as a war and Norway kept its international image of a peaceful country. This presence was muted until the so-called “vahalla scandal”. This scandal came from some soldiers’ quotes that were published in a men magazine about “Norway in war”. It has shocked the public and started a debate about the “warrior Norway culture” (Dyvik, 2016).

Norway soldiers identified themselves as warrior, distancing themselves from their peaceful nation. They qualify war as “better than sex”. Their writing and quoting reveal a pleasure of joining the war, being a part of something greater than them. Dyvik (2016) underlines the process of identity production, politic constructions and geopolitics shared imageries. Those publications (soldiers, books, quotes) “reveal a chasm between the



public narrative told about the war in Afghanistan and the experience of some the Norwegian military personnel serving there” (Dyvik, 2016, p.138).

This section has demonstrated that popular culture, including media, comics, books, soldiers writing... has a great impact in the field of International Relations and on the public that it reaches. Popular culture can be a way of legitimating the proliferation of interventions (Weldes 1999, Weldes and Rowley 2015, Pomarède 2016), the (western) wars, the foreign policies discourses and states’ actions. Popular culture helps to constructs identities (Weldes 1999; Dittmer 2005; Ahall 2009; Dyvik 2016, Pomarède, 2016; Wasinski 2016): distancing the self from the “others”, strengthening the national one and reproducing the gendered one. It justifies the use of violence against the other (Pomarède, 2016). It also can challenge public narrative and built ideology (Dyvik, 2016). It is a tool during war and peacetime (Weldes and Rowley, 2015) and it underlines the importance of considering the individual level (Brown and Lutz, 2007).

It leads to the three assumption of this thesis: first, that soldiers’ narrative contributes to legitimize their actions in Mali. Second, the given representation of others- mostly about Mali (country, army, population), for this side, reinforces the North /South cliché as Ahall (2009) demonstrated in a similar way that media emphasizes woman/man and passion/reason stereotypes. Third, legitimization of violence against the enemy, through the representation of it. In part two, through an empirical analyse and excerpts from soldiers’ books, those assumptions are going to be verified.

The following section is going to present the theoretical frame of this research: the definition of the main concepts, post-structuralist theory and the discourses analysis method.



## IV. Theoretical Framework

This section will present the theoretical tools and framework used for this thesis. First, the principal notions of the hypotheses are going to be specified. Second, this study's theoretical post-structuralist-approach is going to be explained. Then, as it is essential for the following part of this work, the presentation of the discourse analysis method will be done.

### A. Hypotheses

As it was exposed previously, this work will try to answer the question: Which representations are shaped through the French soldiers' writings about the 2013 Mali intervention? Soldiers contribute through their writing to shape a reality and three assumptions have been made.

- First that their books legitimize the French intervention in Mali,
- Second that they reinforce the North/South cliché;
- Third that they legitimize and justify their use of violence.

Part two will verify those through the content of the soldiers' books. However, the first step is to define the principal notions of those assumptions: the concept of representation, including the North/South cliché and the concept of legitimization, including the legitimization of violence.

#### 1. Representation

The notion of representation is overwhelmingly studied and used in academic papers, and covers all fields (sociological, political, economic, geographic...). This thesis concentrates on the writing of French soldiers as an indicative of their representation of reality. In the discourse analysis, "representation refers to the **language used** in a text or talk to assign meaning to groups and their social practices, to events, and to social and ecological conditions and objects" (Wenden, 2005, p.90). Wenden adds that representations are influenced by ideology, that will impact important questions such as how to reach peace.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>A soldier or a civilian may not share the same vision and that would influence their way to solve issue.

This research is interested by the North/South cliché. This North/South representation is exemplified in Doty's 1993 work. She argues that discourses position the subjects in relation to the others. She applies this to the North/South relations, and in the specific case of the United States and the Philippines.<sup>37</sup> She distinguishes the "first world" from the "third world", the "us" from the "others". She argues that there is a superiority taken for granted from the North. This hierarchy position is based on the different economic and military powers. The "third world" is qualified as developing, traditional, chaotic and characterized by disorder, inaptitude and corruption. Whereas, the "first world", is seen as "needed", in the sense that its presence is necessary for the South, superior (economically and militarily), modern, developed. It is the "good guy" looking after kids to educate them (Doty, 1993).

The second concept of this research is going to be explained: the legitimization and more specifically the legitimization of violence.

## 2. Legitimization

Legitimacy includes two meanings. It comes from the Latin word *roof*: "*legitimus*", meaning lawful. The legitimacy based on law is usually provided by the common law. Political legitimization is the second part and it is based on the State authority. To legitimize their intervention, as it was explained in the contextualisation, France provides those two justifications. The legitimization provides the answer to the why-question (Oddo, 2001), i.e., "why there is a French intervention in Mali?" It can be defined as: "discourse that explains and justifies social activity, and typically involves providing good reasons, grounds, or acceptable motivations for past or present action" (Van Dijk, 1998 p.255 seen in Oddo, 2001, p.3). Van Leeuwen distinguishes four categories of legitimization:

1. **Authorization**, that is, legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested.
2. **Moral evaluation**, that is, legitimation by (often very oblique) reference to value systems.
3. **Rationalization**, that is, legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action and to the knowledge that society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity.

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<sup>37</sup>United States as the "North" and Philippines as the "South".

4. *Mythopoesis, that is, legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish nonlegitimate actions.* (2008, p.118).

Moreover, in the literature review's section, this concept of legitimization has already been addressed. Popular culture, in its own way, legitimizes the actions of the State, producing in its discourse a certain vision of reality (this could fit Van Leuuwen's fourth category – "mythopoesis").

Weldes (1999) affirms that the American military interventions are legitimized by Star Trek, which through the episodes invade planets while justifying it in relation to the level of individualism of the planets and by their military and economic level - which is not without reminding the criteria chosen to distinguish the North from the South.

This research is interested by the legitimization of violence. The legitimization of violence came first from the definition of a State: "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1946, p. 78). Military are, according to this definition, applying the monopoly of violence under State authority. So, first, the legitimization comes through the law. Rules of Engagement (RoE) is one of the most important documentaries for military operation, which lists the situations and conditions in which soldiers are led to use force, with all the details relating to them (against whom, or, how, what implications). Moreover, the use of force is legal if the target has been identified positively (PID), as a danger (carrying arms, without civilians ...). Second way of legitimization is through the representation of the enemy. It was already reported in the literature review above through Pomarède 2016's article. The enemy is represented as the evil and "[enemy] is no more than the incarnation of violence" (Pomarède, 2016, p.11). A third way to legitimize violence, in an international conflict, is fighting terrorism while being under the umbrella of democratic armies (Le Huérou and Regamey, 2008). Fourth, the definition of an "us" versus "them" is also a strategy of legitimization as Oddo demonstrated in 2001. He examines three techniques of legitimization: referring to moral value, temporality and referencing "to group membership demarcation" (2001, p.289).

We have seen and described the main concepts of our research: representation and legitimization. The next subsection focuses on the theory chosen for this research: post-structuralism.

## **B. Poststructuralist Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical position that has been chosen for this paper is the poststructuralist position because its main concern is the construction of meaning. This position already appears in the literature review. It “challenges neo-realism’s and neo-liberalism’s concept of the State as a rational actor driven by self-help and relative or absolute gains” (Hansen, 2016, p.169). It has been influenced by philosophic and social theories.

“Poststructuralist practices have been used critically to investigate how the subject of International Relations is constituted in and through the discourses and texts in world politics” (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989, preface). The world is understood as a political community, and the State is the core of it (Hansen, 2016). Aishling Mc Morrow (2018) introduces poststructuralism on raising questions about the power of certain actors, and how their dominance over others is strengthened by policies, facts, beliefs that seems natural and that are widely accepted. Thus, common knowledge is provided by those dominant actors, empowered to do so thanks to their expert status (*ibid.*). For instance, the famine issue was qualified as a "natural disaster", and this qualification has removed the problem from the political agenda (Edkins 2006 see Mc Morrow 2018). Another example is the debate between security and liberty, inside of the State. The security discourses and policies implemented within the State, justify some abridgments of civil liberties. This example also demonstrates that language is where the dominant discourse is produced. These two elements (language and discourse) are crucial in poststructuralist theory (Mc Morrow, 2018).

Identities of “others” and “us” are one of the main elements of how poststructuralists conceive foreign policies. Foreign policies involve a certain identity, that is not fixed, and a representation of the “self” and of the “other”. Hansen (2016) adds that identity is established in the language. Thus, “foreign policies rely upon representations of identity, but it is also through the formulation of foreign policy that identities are produced and reproduced” (Hansen, 2006, p.1.). She also argues that States construct the representation of the enemy. She illustrates this with the Cold War period where each bloc creates an identity of enemies (Hansen, 2016).

This section first links post structuralism with popular culture, then presents the key concepts of poststructuralist: discourse, deconstruction, genealogy and intertextualization, third explained the notion of binary opposition. The main goal of this section is to give a global view of what post structuralism is.

## **1. Poststructuralist and Popular Culture**

Hansen (2016) argues that popular culture has to be taken seriously: first because States take it into consideration, second because it reaches a large public and through popular culture discourses are quickly produced and spread and third it can also give a critical view of the world politics. Popular culture is an optimal place where discourses can be expanded, it is where people get the information and as it was demonstrated before it shapes a certain reality. In addition, "how we receive information and the way that news events are presented to a society shapes how we conceptualize and react to political events" (Mc Morrow, 2018, p.59). One of the most used examples in the International Relations field, is the media's representation of terrorists as "evils", "irrational", " mad" ... Those portrayals have a political impact, and they legitimize some foreign policies, and national and international reactions to attacks (Mc Morrow, 2018).<sup>38</sup>

However, there is always a neglected part in the dominant discourse that does not consider the whole situation and actors. The dominant discourse may be the one the most relayed but other competing discourses also play a role and shape the international relations (*ibid.*).

## **2. Key Concepts**

Post structuralism identifies four key concepts: discourse, deconstruction, genealogy and intertextuality (Hansen, 2016).

### *a) Discourse*

Discourse is an essential element for poststructuralists. This concept was defined by Michel Foucault as:

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<sup>38</sup>By the same process excludes other methods of responses to the attacks.

*Ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p.108).*

Without the collective codes that society shares, the world would be incomprehensible. A neutral use of a word does not exist. The choice of a term has an (political) impact, e.g. the term “genocide” or “tribal warfare” will have a different political implication (Hansen, 2016). The first term implies and, in a way, pushes the international community to intervene and the second does not (*ibid.*). The main claim is that language produces meaning, and the discourse that is chosen shapes our vision of the world. To be more precise, the understanding of an event will be driven by the type of discourse that has been given to describe it, as an earthquake can be perceived as a punishment by God (religious discourse) or as a natural disaster (environmental discourse) (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 see Hansen 2016). It argues that within the discourse practice elites impose a reality (Doty, 1996). So, as it was demonstrated in the literature review, other actors have this influence. We argue that soldiers through their books, relate a certain type of reality. The use of words and their different meaning, such as verbs used to talk about the killing of individuals are the heart of the thesis. As it is going to be demonstrated in part two, soldiers use verbs like destruction, neutralization, cleaning, etc. They do not have the same implication as the choice of words such as: killing or murder because it takes away the ethic links to respect of individual and avoid facing that the destruction of the enemy means killing a person.

#### *b) Deconstruction*

*“Il n'y a pas de hors-texte”/ “There is nothing outside of the text”*, it is one of the most famous sentences of the well-known Jacques Derrida who conceptualizes deconstruction. Language is understood as “a set of words/signs” (Hansen, 2016, p.172) and each sign is defined inside a collective set as the meaning of a "woman" can be only comprehensible if it is part of the category of “human”. It is also defined by what is not a “man” (*ibid.*). In addition, Hansen (2016) refers to Derrida’s work and shows that language creates meaning through a hierarchy of signs. Terms are understood by defining what they are not, for example civilized goes with uncivilized, developed with under developed, rational with irrational and so on. The different signs do not have the same weight and valorization. Deconstructionists have two moves to proceed: the first one is to overthrow the hierarchy



and the second one is to undo the pairing. Logocentrism is linked to this phenomenon (Derrida 1981 see Hansen 2016).<sup>39</sup> This research will try to show this “set of signs” and binary opposition such as “good/evil” that is the soul of the representation of the Self/French Soldier/Good and the Other/Opponent/Evil.

c) *Genealogy*

The notion of "genealogy" has also been conceptualized by Foucault and refers to the study of the "history of the present", meaning tracing the past of current issues such as climate change. The objective is to identify which options have been marginalized and driven away from the discussion and to recognize which actors are not allowed to speak and who occupies the public space. For instance, in the United Nations, before 2012,<sup>40</sup> Palestine was considered as nonmember observer State of the United Nations, and this position left it without the right to speak. Hansen (2016) introduced Foucault's notion of power as produced by discourse, “it comes about when discourses constitute particular subject positions as the 'natural' ones” (Hansen, 2016, p.173). The intervention in Mali, through the books is presented as being the only solution to solve Mali’s crisis, the ones allowed to speak about the war are mostly the most graded militaries as General Barrera, General Saint-Quentin or the regimental Commander Gout.

d) *Intertextuality*

Julia Kristeva has established this theory. It acknowledges that any text relates to previous texts and this forms an intertext. A text cannot be read as an isolated element. Hansen, 2016 (p.174) assumes that “we can understand the social world as comprising texts”. She divided intertext in two categories: the “self-evident”, when the connection between texts is obvious, as texts from international organizations and the less obvious ones, when the connection is "more abstract".

On the one hand, this theory also argues that, therefore, as a body of text exists, the elements formulated within the discourse are already taken for granted, e.g. during the Cold War's time, Soviet Union is barely mentioned in the North Atlantic Treaty

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<sup>39</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (The Athlone Press, 1981).

<sup>40</sup> On 29 November 2012, 138 United Nations members voted accorded the status of a State Observer to Palestine (United Nations, 2012a).

Organization's papers and documents as it presupposes that the reader knows who the paper is about (Hansen, 2016).

On the other hand, it (intertextuality theory) regards a text as a single entity. Even when it is incorporated in a body of texts; the context, the meaning or how it is understood change (*ibid.*). The Mohammed cartoon illustrates this as it has been reproduced several times, since 2005, nevertheless the reading of it will not be the same and it will not produce the same effect today as at the first publication (*ibid.*). In this research, the intertextuality can be within the books: all written by French soldiers sharing common codes and knowledge. Soldiers use the same narrative, the same vocabulary such as “destruction” to talk about killing the enemy, “brother” to talk about the allies, soldier refer to each other’s. There is an obvious connection between the books.

This subsection explained the post-structuralism theory and its main concepts. The next one will focus more specifically on binary opposition's the concept, which is important for this theory and for this research.

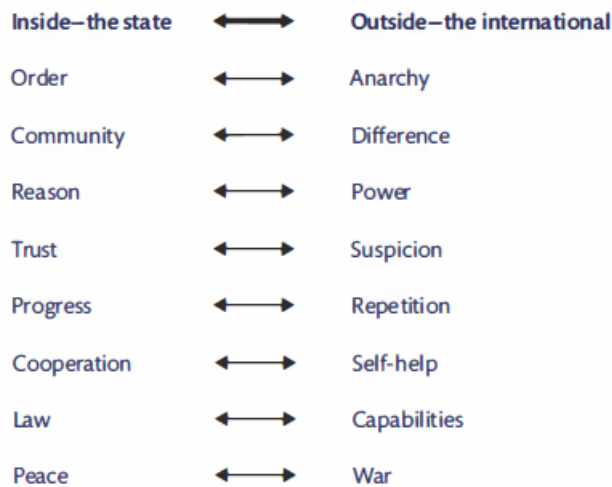
### **3. Binary Opposition**

For poststructuralists, language is one of the most crucial elements for the creation and perpetuation of a dominant discourse. Through language, certain actors, concepts and events are placed in hierarchical pairs, named binary oppositions, whereby one element of the set is favored over the other to create or perpetuate meaning (Mc Morrow, 2018, p.57).

The notion of binary opposition is used by Derrida and his concept of deconstruction, and by Foucault in his Regime of truth.<sup>41</sup> The deconstruction concept already introduces this notion of binary opposition. In the second part of this research, this study is going to verify if those binary opposition can be applied to the soldiers’ testimonies and see what it demonstrates. Nation States define themselves in contrast inside and outside of the nation (Hansen, 2016). Hansen’s figure illustrates this:

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<sup>41</sup>Foucault’s regime of truth is produced by the elites through discourses and language and binary oppositions.



**Figure 2 the Inside-Outside Dichotomy and Its Stabilizing Oppositions (2016, p.177)**

This binary opposition concept raises questions about grieving. Campbell (1992) nuances the position, the others is not only the total opposition of the self, there are different ranks. In the literature review above, due to this hierarchy observed previously, some authors (Pomarède, 2016; Weldes and Rowley, 2015, Wasinski, 2014) outline a distinction between “legitimate and illegitimate lives”. Butler theorizes this notion of grievance by raising questions about the importance and the interest that some deaths can have in time of war, while others pass into oblivion:

*If some living tissues or cells are worthy of protection from destruction, and others not, could this not lead to the conclusion that, under conditions of war, some human lives are worthy of protection while others are not? (2009, p.18).*

This distinction is also going to be found, later, inside of the soldiers’ books. French soldiers make an explicit difference between French lives, the opponents' lives and even the allies’ lives. It is going to be exemplified, later, in the second part.

In the next subsection details the discourse analysis method that help and was used for this research. As French soldiers books are going to be study as discourses.

### C. Discourse Analysis

This research is based on French soldiers' books, describing their experience during the intervention in Mali, in 2013. Their books are going to be studied as discourses. "A discourse, i.e., a system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense, **produces interpretative possibilities** by making it literally **impossible to think outside of it**" (Doty, 1993, p.302), it meets the idea of: "there is nothing outside of the text" this famous quote came from the well-known Jacques Derrida which makes it the main interest of this research.

The discourses analytic method is going to be applied on the theoretical material of this study, because it particularly fits the post-structuralism theory. Milliken (1999) distinguishes three main functions of the discourse: "discourses as systems of signification", "discourse productivity" and "the play of practice" (pp.229-230). The discourses as systems of signification are strongly linked to the construction of reality through binary opposition: "who are the subjects?", "which representation of the self?", "which representation of "others"?", "what is the relation between them?", "is one element is privileged to the other?", "what is the implication of this vision?" The function of this discourse is going to be used to understand the reality created by the soldiers in their books and which perspectives can be revealed.

"Discourse productivity" normalizes certain actions and by doing so excludes other actions. It meets Dittmer's example (2005) of Captain America, in the episode "Ground Zero", qualifying the post-attack situation as a war, without letting any other options possible. It is important to distinguish "who is allowed to speak?", "what are the relations between subjects?", and "who is the authority?" Discourse Productivity can create a particular "regime of truth", that legitimize actions, as an intervention or use of violence.

The author stresses that "there is no single method analysis and abstraction along these lines, but rather a number of ways that scholars can identify key aspect of significate practices and [...] establish a discourse" (Milliken, 1999, p.231). He points out the importance of an "appropriate set of texts" (p.233). For Milliken (1999), the concern must be put on the identification of the object spaces of each text. The research has to examine

the structure of text and find the relational aspect (p.233) and then underline the binary opposition.

The following part focuses on the empirical material. It is divided in five main sections: the first section will be devoted to the presentation of content and use of the material – soldiers’ books. The three following sections will present the core of this research: the axes that we have chosen to analyze the books:

- Axis 1: “Featuring French heroes”;
- Axis 2: “Representation of “others””;
- Axis 3: “Destruction and asymmetric war”.

The last section of this second part will try to confirm (or not) the hypothesis that we have made above given of the empirical content.



# Part II: Through French Soldiers' Books

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## V. Empirical Material

This section details the empirical material of this research and explain the transverse axes selected.

### A. French Soldiers' Books

The set of texts of this study is composed of five books. Those books have been picked in order to cover in the most exhaustively way the French soldiers' literature on the intervention in Mali, in 2013. The focus of this research is on: French soldiers that experienced the intervention in Mali on period of January 2013 to July 2013.<sup>42</sup> Two criteria were taken into account: the book must be written by a French soldier or contain testimonies of French soldiers and secondly, it must be about the war experienced during the “*Opération Serval*”. Based on those two characteristics five have been picked:

- “*Opération Serval : notes de guerre, Mali 2013*” – Bernard Barrera ;
- “*Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval racontent*” – Rémi Scarpa ;
- “*Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali*” – Frédéric Gout ;
- “*ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre- Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali*” - Pierre Verborg ;
- “*Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l’opération Serval*” – Olivier Hanne.

The following paragraphs present a brief introduction to those books by specifying title, date of publication, publishing house, plus a brief presentation of each author and important actors.

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<sup>42</sup> This research does not reject the opinion of Malian soldiers, and in a larger research it could be interesting to do the same work taking the Malian army side.

## **1. Opération Serval, notes de guerre, Mali 2013**

The book “*Opération Serval, notes de guerre, Mali 2013*” was published in 2015, by the publishing house *Le Seuil* and wrote by Bernard Barrera. It is composed of 437 pages, and the whole book was used for this research. According to the publishing house, 8,000 copies of the book were sold. Founded in 1935, *Le Seuil* is one of the leading publishing houses in all publishing areas.

Bernard Barrera was appointed Army General in 2011, which is the highest rank of French General Officers. He commands men and woman in different type of missions’ national- in France or international,<sup>43</sup> at all levels of responsibility. On the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017, he became Major General of the Army and obtained the rank and title of Lieutenant General. It is the second highest position in the French army.

## **2. Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval racontent**

The book “*Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval racontent*”, wrote by Rémi Scarpa, was published in 2015 by the publishing house *Editions Pierre de Taillac* within special collection dedicated to regimental history about French soldiers’ stories. The whole book, 256 pages, was used to achieve this paper. The *Editions Pierre de Taillac* was founded in 2011 and has published 175 books. This book is based on testimonies of combatants – cited anonymously or by name - of the Serval brigade commanded by General Barrera who co-directed this book. The author cites, for example, Sergent Roopea T, Claude Minjoulat-Ray, Captain F, and General Barrera.

Rémi Scarpa is an officer and infantryman. He has operated in Afghanistan, Ivory Coast, Guyana, Mali and Lebanon. During the Mali’s intervention, he was battalion commander. Today, he is a tactic professor at the Forces Staff School, in Saumur and an operations’ chief of the 152<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment, in Colmar, Alsace, France.

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<sup>43</sup> For instance, in: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Chad, Ivory Coast, Mali, Germany, etc.).



### **3. Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali**

The book “*Libérez Tombouctou! Journal de guerre au Mali*” was published in 2015, by the publishing house *Éditions Tallandier* and wrote by Frédéric Gout. The entire book, 253 pages, was used to achieve this paper. The *Éditions Tallandier* publishes over 100 popular and historical books per year.

During the war in Mali, Frédéric Gout was a senior officer and corps commander of the fifth Combat Helicopter Regiment [RHC] - about twenty helicopters. This colonel led the Airmobile Group [GAM]. From August 2014 to 2017, he was special advisor to the chairman of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] Military Committee. Since August 2017, he has been advising the General Staff on strategy and foresight.

### **4. ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre – Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali**

The book “*ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre – Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali*” was published by *Les éditions du Rocher*, in 2015 and wrote by Pierre Verborg. According to the publishing house, 1,800 copies of the book were sold. The publishing house *Les éditions du Rocher* publishes about sixty books per year. Its editorial production is concentrated in three areas: literature, current affairs & documents and welfare & practice. This book contains 228 pages. Only the part concerning Mali, from page 152 to page 210, was used to achieve this thesis. The first part of the book concerns interventions that occurred in Libya and Ivory Coast and has not been included in this work.

Colonel Pierre Verborg is senior officer in the Army Light Aviation [ALAT] and has done over 3,300 flying hours. He has participated in numerous operations in France and abroad as in Kosovo, Ivory Coast, Libya and in Mali. In 2013, during Mali’s intervention, Pierre Verborg was a colonel. He commanded the battalion of maneuver and assault helicopters of the 5th combat helicopter regiment. Since the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2017, he has been the Head of the Operations Division in Land Forces Command.

## 5. Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l'opération Serval

The book "*Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l'opération Serval*" was written by the *SYNOPSIS* group of the *Centre de Recherche des Ecoles de Coëtquidan* under the direction of Oliver Hanne. The *SYNOPSIS* group is composed of interdisciplinary academics and officers. Olivier Hanne is a Doctor of History, associated history's teacher and associate researcher at the University of Aix-Marseille. He is currently a professor at the military schools of Saint Cyr (France) and at the International War College of Yaoundé (Cameroon). The book was published in 2014 by the publishing house *Lavauzelle*, in *Collection Renseignement Histoire et Géopolitique Etudes*. *Lavauzelle* has published 900 titles. The book is composed of 260 pages. However, as the first part of the book is an analysis of the conflict and the intervention in Mali, only the second part, from page 127 to page 238 concerning the testimonies of French soldiers was used for this thesis.

This book is in its second edition whose characteristic was to question various protagonist officers, those used in this thesis are the following:

- General Barrera and Officer Rémi Scarpa presented above;
- Colonel Bruno Bert, he commanded Joint Task Force 2 during Operation Serval. At that time, he was commander of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. He stayed four months in Mali. Since 2015, he has overseen the recruitment and selection group in Ile-de-France and overseas;
- Colonel Arnaud Le Gal, since 5 July 2012, he has been at the head of the 31st Engineer Regiment. The whole regiment, composed of 1050 people, went on mission in Mali for five months and received the military valor cross. In 2014, he resigned to command of the 31st Regiment;
- Colonel Nicolas Rivet is an army officer, chief of corps. He was in Mali for two months as chief of corps of the 28th Transmission Regiment, composed of 250 soldiers;
- General Grégoire de Saint Quentin, during the intervention in Mali, from 24 January 2013 to 11 August 2013, he was commander in Chief of Operation Serval. At that time his rank was Brigadier General. Since 2016, he is a corps general of the French army, very high positioned in the military hierarchy;

- Colonel Paul Gèze, during the Malian conflict, he was at the head of the regiment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Marine Infantry Regiment [RMa];
- Philippe S. is a lieutenant as communications officer with the 2nd Foreign Engineer Regiment in Saint Christol. He was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 as a press officer and, in 2013, in Mali as an imaging officer;
- Tanguy B is a captain. He took part in several operations in Lebanon, Guyana, and Djibouti. He commanded the 3rd combat company of the 6th regiment. In 2013, he was deployed in Mali at the head of his troupe;
- Antoine-Louis de Prénomville is a second lieutenant and holds a doctorate in literature (Hanne, 2014, pp.239-245).

This table sums up all the information regarding the books: title, author, testimonies, publishing house, pages used and copies sold:

<b>Books</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Testimonies</b>	<b>Publishing House</b>	<b>Pages used</b>	<b>Copies sold</b>
<b>“Opération Serval : notes de guerre, Mali 2013”</b>	Barrera	—	Seuil	437	8,000
<b>“Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval ra content”</b>	Scarpa	Sergent Roopea T, Claude Minjoulat-Ray, Captain F, and General Barrera	Editions Pierre de Taillac	256	—
<b>“Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali”</b>	Gout	—	Éditions Tallandier	253	—
<b>“ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre - Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali”</b>	Verborg	—	Les éditions du Rocher	60	1,800
<b>“Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l’opération Serval”</b>	Hanne	General Barrera Officer; Rémi Scarpa ; Colonel Bruno Bert; Colonel Arnaud Le Gal ; Colonel Nicolas Rivet ; Colonel Paul Gèze ; Philippe S ; Tanguy B ; Antoine-louis de Prénomville	Lavauzelle	111	—

*Table 1 summary of empirical material*

We have seen in detail the empirical material of this work – French soldiers' books. The next subsection defines the different axes in which this empirical material is analyzed.

## B. Axes

The following section presents the core of this research: the axes that have been picked to analyze the books:

- Axis 1: “Featuring French Heroes”;
- Axis 2: “Representation of “Others””;
- Axis 3: “Destruction of the Enemy and Asymmetric War”.

These three main axes emerged from reading of these books, some segments were chosen to illustrate the axes and subsections of each the axis.

First, the staging of the French soldier as a hero. Through books, soldiers describe mad crowds acclaiming them as liberators. Their main aim was to liberate the population, which was at the mercy of terrorism. That is how they define themselves: liberators. This will be the theme of the first sub-axis. However, to be a hero, acclamation is not enough. Soldiers testify of the sacrifices they make to free Mali. This is the second sub-axis. It is through the separation from their families, the risk to their bodies - prone to disease and injury and their lives, and the challenge of lack of comfort. This means - including logistics - that soldiers transmit this notion of sacrifice. Furthermore, a hero has undeniable qualities. Thus, the last sub-axis focuses on soldiers’ representation of the self and which qualifiers are used to talk about themselves or their colleagues/brothers-in-arms.

Afterward concentrating on French soldiers, the second axis illustrates French soldiers’ representation of the “other”. In connection with post-structuralism theory exposed above, the "other" is identified as the outside nation- Mali, the allied armies, the enemy and the population. As it was stated previously, the “other” does not systematically represent the opposite of the self. There are some nuances and different ranks. For example, armies are closer to the soldiers than the population and the enemy will be represented as the extreme opposition (of the self).

The last axis goes deeper into the relationship with the enemy. It is composed of two parts. The first one, entitled: “destruction of enemy”, is devoted to the terms used to talk

about confrontation with the adversary. The second one, covers the notion of “asymmetric war”. This notion, used by soldiers, is defined by the different obligations and perceptions of the two sides. The obligations include the obligation to respect the law, even in armed conflict. According to soldiers, terrorists have no rules to follow. Moreover, the two sides have different perspectives, specifically regarding the relationship with death. Soldiers describe the opponent with no attachment to life, therefore willing to risk everything to accomplish their mission. On the other hand, French soldiers do everything to avoid losses in their camps. The third asymmetries lie on the political and media pressure felt by soldiers. They felt that forgiveness would not be allotted while, contrarily, the adversary has all the rights. Thus, those axes were illustrated by soldiers’ experiences share in their books. The following table shows, which books, have been used for each axis and sub-axis.

	Axe 1					Axe 2				Axe 3			
	Liberator	Sacrifices			Self	Land	Population	Allies	Enemy	Destruction	Asymmetric war		
		Family	Body/ life	Logistics & comfort							Military jurisdiction	Relation with death	Media /political pressure
Book 1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Book 2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Book 3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Book 4			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
Book 5	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

**Table 2 books used on axis**

Horizontal : Book 1 : Opération Serval, notes de guerre, Mali 2013 – Bernard Barrera ; Book 2 : Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval racontent – Rémi Scarpa ; Book 3 : Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali – Frédéric Gout ; Book 4 : ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre – Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali - Pierre Verborg ; Book 5 : Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l’opération Serval – Olivier Hanne

Vertical: Axe 1: Featuring French heroes; Axe 2: Representation of the “others”; Axe 3: Destruction of the enemy and asymmetric war.

The next three sections focus on illustrating those axes through the empirical material. The next section is called: “Featuring French Heroes”.



## VI. Featuring French Heroes

This axis is going to be devoted to the staging of French soldiers as heroes and liberators. To demonstrate it, this section is divided into three main points. First, it is on French soldiers as liberators. It shows how French soldiers are describing liberation of cities, such as Timbuktu; the welcome and recognition of population. The second one focuses on the French soldiers sacrificing their family; risking their life or to get injured; and witness about hard life conditions without any comfort.

Berny Sèbe, in his 2009's article : "porte-drapeaux de l'empire : la promotion des héros coloniaux français et britanniques de la conquête de l'Afrique à la Seconde Guerre mondiale", wonders about the colonial heroes. This section is not going to presume that French soldiers are the new colonial heroes. However, there are similarities between Sèbe's definition and what is going to be observed in this part. First, he provides the definition of a "regular" hero: half-god, man of great value, and it is used to refer to military chiefs and has a link with death. Then a hero is someone with high qualities, someone exceptional, who gets the admiration of people around for his actions. For Sèbe, colonial heroes are the result of a promotion from media, rewards, movies and explorers' autobiography. The last point, explorers promote themselves through biographies and books, this research is focusing on this way of promotion. They are telling their stories and their feats. Colonial heroes are presented with high and undisputable qualities: bravery, devotion and strength (Sèbe, 2009, p.88). Those qualities are the same that can be found through books of French soldiers and a subsection is dedicated on how French soldiers describe themselves. In addition, the emphasis is put on how those colonial heroes liberated slaves and how population used to idolize them. Books shared those characteristics and the first subsection of the research is detailing this aspect.

### A. French Soldiers as Liberators

Frédéric Gout in his foreword already describes his mission in Mali as carrying out a "liberation mission":

*We went to fight to **liberate the country**, but we also wanted to avoid that these vast territories, **beyond the control of the Government**, become areas of refuge and training to terrorists. This mission, which was a military success, was only **a battle**.*

*The losses that we have inflicted on our enemy only forced him to fit in with the crowd, **waiting for the departure of our troops**, to get back together soon and resume the fight* (Gout, 2015, p.10).<sup>44</sup>

Frédéric Gout describes the “liberation mission” of Mali in this excerpt, by refusing to let the land to terrorists and refers to the incapacity of Malian Government to control its own territory. Gout also suggests a future intervention because the only obstacle to terrorisms (in northern Mali) is the French troops. It implies that without French troops, peace cannot remind. It expresses in different ways through the books such as the “incapability” to leave a city on its own (so without the French presence) more than three days: “[...] letting Gao or East of the Adar deprived [of French troops] three days, **is not an option**, now that we are in contact” (Barrera, 2015, p.209);<sup>45</sup> or by the fact that people were scared of the enemy taking the control of their cities and were reassured by French soldiers’ presence: “Before our coming **she was afraid to pass under the control of jihadists**, whom she feared abuses” (Gout, 2015, P.52).<sup>46</sup> Gout refers to the ex-miss Mali who agreed to let the soldiers settle in her workspace, at the airport, this scene demonstrated also that there was a lack of means. When the soldiers arrived at the airport of Timbuktu no space was provided for them. Barrera similarly reports the comeback of the population after the French arrival: “Tessalit is a small cosmopolitan town that has come back to life in the last two months. The inhabitants had fled into the desert and they return, reassured by the French presence” (2015, p.314).<sup>47</sup>

Barrera states, while he’s describing his view from a helicopter, that French soldiers represent freedom and the end of the oppression for the Malian population:

*Helicopters fly swooping down the arm of the River Niger, swamps, and herds, the Malians who greet shepherds, children, and us. They see us rush to the North to Timbuktu. For them **we are freedom, the end of oppression by terror*** (2015, p.97).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Translation. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous sommes allés combattre pour libérer le pays, mais nous voulions aussi éviter que ces vastes territoires, échappant au contrôle du gouvernement, deviennent des zones de refuge et d’entraînement pour les terroristes. Cette mission, qui fut une réussite militaire, n’a été en réalité qu’une bataille. Les pertes que nous avons infligées à notre ennemi l’ont seulement contraint à se fondre dans la masse, attendant le départ de nos troupes, pour se reformer bientôt et reprendre le combat.”

<sup>45</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “[...] laisser Gao ou l’est de l’Adar démunis pendant trois jours, est une option inenvisageable maintenant que nous sommes au contact.”

<sup>46</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Avant notre arrivée, elle redoutait de devoir passer sous la coupe des djihadistes, dont elle craignait les exactions.”

<sup>47</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Tessalit est une petite bourgade cosmopolite qui reprend vie depuis deux mois. Les habitants avaient fui dans le désert et ils reviennent, rassurés par la présence française.”

<sup>48</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les hélicoptères survolent en rase-mottes les bras du fleuve du Niger, les marécages, les troupeaux, les Maliens qui nous saluent, les bergers, les enfants. Ils nous voient foncer, vers le nord, vers Tombouctou. Pour eux nous sommes la liberté, la fin d’une oppression par la terreur.”



From this excerpt, it can also be noticed that Malian population are presented as a part of the landscape. It witnesses the Malian population's support, and French soldiers present it as the greatest reward:

*From **South to North**, for our progress, we have passed men, women and children. For months, they have been subject to the law of terrorists and have suffered **ruthless domination** of the few. Despite this, they have always had **trust and welcomed us as liberators**. Meeting them was the **greatest reward**. From the general to the soldier, all our actions have helped make their freedom. It is the sense of **our sacrifices** and our commitment (Gout, 2015, p.10).<sup>49</sup>*

Here, Gout expresses that the all- “North to South” Malian population perceive French soldiers as “liberators”. He describes the population as victim of merciless terrorists. Gout introduces the notion of sacrifices and engagements. As it will be detailed, in the books this notion is often expressed through the sacrifice of their family, comfort and even life.

The gratitude of the population is one of the aspects that reflect the most this notion of “hero” and it is mentioned repeatedly in the books. Those passages contribute to spotlight the staging of the grateful and thankful population to their “heroes”. The General Barrera stresses it:

*It is for them [children], for their freedom, their joy of living that we are fighting since January. My soldiers know that. They have travelled through Mali, **applauded by hundreds of thousands of Malians** adults, women, children, and old people, along the roads. They are side by side with them every day and **fully measure the recognition of this liberated population** (2015, p.363).<sup>50</sup>*

And then he compares it with the intervention in Afghanistan:

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<sup>49</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Du sud au nord, pendant notre progression, nous avons croisé des hommes, des femmes et des enfants. Pendant des mois, ils ont été soumis à la loi des terroristes et ont subi la domination impitoyable de quelques-uns. Malgré cela, ils ont toujours eu confiance et nous ont accueillis en libérateurs. Les rencontrer a été la plus belle des récompenses. Du général au soldat, toutes nos actions ont contribué à leur rendre la liberté. C’est le sens de nos sacrifices et de notre engagement.”

<sup>50</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “C’est pour eux [les enfants]; pour leur liberté, leur joie de vivre que nous nous battons depuis janvier. Mes soldats le savent. Ils ont traversé le Mali, applaudis par des centaines de milliers de Maliens adultes, femmes, enfants, vieillards, le long des routes. Ils les côtoient tous les jours, mesurent pleinement la reconnaissance de cette population libérée.”

*They especially appreciate this support as many "did the Afghanistan" under quite different conditions, fearing mines, firing **without support of a population**, at the best silent, at worst hostile to foreigner (ibid).<sup>51</sup>*

These are two opposite situations, in both cases it emphasizes that French soldiers are risking their lives but in Afghanistan soldiers were not supported by the population or did not feel it.<sup>52</sup> Barrera describes a strong gratitude from Malian's population and the importance of it for the soldiers. Once again, the fact that what is driving soldiers fighting for the people is highlighted.

Lieutenant Philippe S. compares the welcome of the population with the Second World War's one: "the **crowd is jubilant**, as everywhere, it's like the **liberation of Paris in 1944**" (Hanne, 2014, p.188).<sup>53</sup> Lieutenant de Prémonville does the same, but he brings a nuance to soldiers' popularity:

*During the convoy, the French soldiers were greeted as **liberators**. Some situations reminded these films about the Second World War where Allies were cheered by a jubilant population. It's extremely rewarding, and it gives moral force. But, the more the convoy headed North, the **less the population was enthusiastic** (Hanne, 2014, p.177).<sup>54</sup>*

Gout, 2015, does a similar comment: "the convoy goes through villages where it is **welcomed as a liberator** with incredible scenes of jubilation, with the exception of the region of San where **a real mistrust** is observed" (2015, p.91).<sup>55</sup> It implies that in some part of Mali the support was not as unanimous as the other books seem to show. This assumed recognition goes further than the Malian population is also perceived from the local authorities to international ones: "brought by the Malians, the Deputy Mayor [...] came to **thank me**. The neighborhood committees **awaiting the arrival of the French to**

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<sup>51</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Ils apprécient d'autant plus ce soutien que beaucoup ont « fait l'Afghanistan » dans des conditions tout à fait différentes, craignant les mines, les tirs sans l'appui d'une population, au mieux silencieux, au pire hostile aux étrangers."

<sup>52</sup> It is important to notice that the political context is not the same, as the French intervention was directly asked by Mali and the western perception is not the same in the two countries."

<sup>53</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "La foule est en liesse, comme partout, on se croirait à la libération de Paris 1944."

<sup>54</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Durant le convoi, les soldats français étaient accueillis en libérateurs. Certaines situations rappelaient ces films de la seconde guerre mondiale où les Alliés étaient acclamés par la population en liesse. C'est extrêmement valorisant et cela redonne de la force morale. Mais plus le convoi se dirigeait vers le nord, moins la population était enthousiaste."

<sup>55</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Le convoi traverse des villages où il est accueilli comme un libérateur par des scènes de liesse populaire incroyables, à l'exception de la région de San où une réelle méfiance est observée."

ensure safety and reassure the population” (Barrera, 2015, p.102),<sup>56</sup> this took place after the arrival of the French at Timbuktu. It is interesting to see that General Barrera highlights that the security as the feeling of safety depends on the French soldiers’ arrival.

Moreover, the General tells about the moment when he receives a gift from the population, as a gesture of thanks by one of his officers:

*One of the officers back from Timbuktu, stops me [...]: “[...] I brought you this gift of freed Malians”: a rectangle of black cloth lined with a colourful border. At the center in large embroidery, the inscription: “Timbuktu is free. Thanks to the general Barrera” (2015, p.125).<sup>57</sup>*

The officer conspicuously mentioned “freed” while is talking about the Malian population. Far beyond this recognition, it is here about the enthusiasm and the delight of the crowd which welcomes the troops after the “liberation” of cities, as colonel Bert illustrates: “this [liberation of the city of Bourem] mission took place in a **festive atmosphere**, with **standing ovations**. Demonstrations of enthusiasm of the population are absolutely unforgettable” (Hanne, 2014, p.152).<sup>58</sup> The captain Tanguy B., who describes those scenes of joy and celebration, gives another example:

*Everywhere our passage is welcomed in a triumphal way: **women** are singing and **drumming on larger silver dishes and launching powerful ululation** in response to our signs of hands. **Kids are dancing** around waving **our colors** and shouting: “vive la France”, “vive papa Holland”. **Men, in traditional outfits, are riding horses** to celebrate our coming up and galloping our columns. The recognition of the population is huge to us who have the impression of having done **so little**, what **pride** to be French and a soldier, to be among **those who make history!** (Hanne, 2014, p.182).<sup>59</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Amenés par les Maliens, l’adjoint du Maire [...] vient me remercier. Les comités de quartier attendent l’arrivée des Français pour assurer la sécurité et rassurer la population.”

<sup>57</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un des officiers, de retour de Tombouctou, m’arrête [...] : “[...] je vous ai rapporté ce cadeau des Maliens libérés”: un rectangle de tissu noir bordé d’un liseré coloré tricolore. Au centre en grosse broderie, l’inscription : “Tombouctou est libre. Merci au général Barrera.”

<sup>58</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Cette mission [libération de la ville de Bourem] s’est déroulée dans une ambiance festive extraordinaire, sous des ovations et des démonstrations d’enthousiasme de la population absolument inoubliables.”

<sup>59</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Partout notre passage est accueilli de manière triomphale : les femmes chantent et tambourinent sur de grands plats argentés lançant des youyous puissants en réponses à nos signes de mains. Les enfants dansent en agitant partout nos couleurs en criant : “ vive la France ”, “ vive papa Hollande”. Des hommes en tenues traditionnelles à cheval fêtent notre venue en remontant au galop nos colonnes. La reconnaissance de la population est immense envers nous qui avons l’impression d’avoir fait si peu, quelle grande fierté d’être Français et soldat, d’être de ceux qui font l’histoire !”

The celebration includes the whole population – women, kids and men and provides certain types of African clichés – music, dance, animals and outfits. Captain Tanguy seems to contradict himself while saying, “having done so little” and being part of the ones who are making history.

This staging is also produced by photos shared by the soldiers via their books. A lot of those pictures represent the population freed from rebels and terrorists. It is an important aspect to take into account. In Rémi Scarpa’s book, relevant photos are published such as one, spread on two pages with the legend: “the recognition of a liberated and happy city” (2014, p.59),<sup>60</sup> showing the French soldiers arrival in the city, with all the population around holding **French flags** and on the top of the picture the gift that the General Barrera received can be seen (see Annex 1) or Malians holding boards where it is written : “Thanks to France, Thanks to Hollande, Thank you, Thank you, Thank you, Thanks to Dioncouda Traore” (see Annex 2) (Scarpa, 2015, pp.58-59).<sup>61</sup> Another significant picture from Scarpa’s book is the one depicting Malian’s population in front of Timbuktu library (see Annex 3) with the legend: “crowd in front of the library of Timbuktu. The entire population found the free joy of life, **away from the grip of terrorists**” (Scarpa, 2015, pp.64-65).<sup>62</sup>

General Barrera also shares such pictures as one with the legend: “28 January, Timbuktu. Triumphant welcome from the population. **Joy floods the streets**. Within hours, Tricolor flags are made to honor the **liberators**” (Barrera, 2015).<sup>63</sup> A man cheers holding a French flag, surrounded by the crowd (see Annex 4). Hanne also reproduces this idea of the French liberator of people such as on the first picture<sup>64</sup> of his book : it is showing two girls walking on the street, at the foreground there is a large sign where it is written in French and in Arabic : “imam malek that Allah forgave said: this community will succeed only when it follows the same path as the companions of the message”,<sup>65</sup> an additional sign in the second plan noticing the population says : “the city of Timbuktu

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<sup>60</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La reconnaissance d’une ville libérée et heureuse.”

<sup>61</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Merci à la France, Merci à la Hollande, Merci, Merci, Merci, Merci, Merci, Merci à Dioncouda Traoré.”

<sup>62</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “foule amassée devant la bibliothèque de Tombouctou. Toute la population retrouve la joie de vivre libre, loin de l’emprise terroriste.”

<sup>63</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “28 janvier, Tombouctou. Accueil triomphal de la population. La joie inonde les rues. En quelques heures, des drapeaux tricolores sont fabriqués pour honorer les libérateurs.”

<sup>64</sup> Author of the picture: Philippe Schupp.

<sup>65</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original: “Imam Malek qu’Allah lui pardonne a dit: cette communauté ne réussira que lorsqu’elle suivra le même chemin que les compagnons du message.”

was founded on Islam and it only will be **judged by the Islamic law** (Sharia)".<sup>66</sup> The legend of this photo is also very significant: "at the entrance of Timbuktu girls can again walk **without fearing the Islamic propaganda**" (see Annex 5) (Hanne, 2014).<sup>67</sup> The girls walking freely can be viewed as a great symbol: thanks to French soldiers and France, kids can walk around without fear. This idea of Islamic propaganda is also important to notice, because it indicates that without the presence of the French the girls would be coerced into undergoing Islamic propaganda. It reminds the Cold War time when western countries were fighting against the communist ones.

## B. Sacrifices – Family, Comfort, Life and Body

### 1. Family

In their books, soldiers write about the separation from their families. To achieve their duties and fight for Mali, French soldiers leave their home and family. This aspect can be found in almost all books in different forms. Gout describes the difficulty he had to tell his wife that he was going to Mali; and that was emphasized by the death of Damien Boiteux. The separation is seen as a struggle to face as there is a possibility of not coming back:

*I take the opportunity of the trip to **finally announce** to my wife my next departure. [...] It's **hard to hear**, we just left a woman who **lost her husband** in the territory that I will join. I'm conscious to impose her another **struggle**, but I know that she will have the strength to face it (Gout, 2015, p.37).<sup>68</sup>*

It implies that the separation is going to be harder for the one staying – wife and kids. Gout describes the day before leaving:

*My last family evening takes place faster than what everyone would have liked to... Children are whispering around me, each one asking for the attention they will be deprived for several months. Each kid has prepared a **small mail** that I have to read only tomorrow! [...] **A personal calendar** is already attached to the kitchen's wall,*

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<sup>66</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original: "La ville de Tombouctou est fondée sur l'islam et elle ne sera jugée que par la législation islamique (charia)."

<sup>67</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "A l'entrée de Tombouctou, les jeunes filles peuvent à nouveau sortir sans crainte de la propagande islamique."

<sup>68</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Je profite du trajet pour enfin annoncer à mon épouse mon départ prochain. Elle s'y attendait sans doute, mais c'est difficile à entendre, nous venons de quitter une femme qui vient de perdre son conjoint sur le territoire que je vais rejoindre. Je suis conscient de lui infliger une épreuve de plus, mais sais qu'elle aura la force de l'affronter."

*so kids get to cross the days with color pencils. It's a fun process widely experienced at home which helps realize **my absence and to wait** [...] until the long-awaited return (2015, p.40).*<sup>69</sup>

The focus is put on the kids and the tips implemented by the family to make the separation easier. Barrera hits that it is not rare to miss big family events in a soldier's life as birthday, birth of child or the loss of a relative. In this excerpt, Barrera is glad to know that a documentary is going to be broadcasted on TV that evening because it is his wife's birthday: "they will see me [on the television report]. They **will know** that we did it and my wife will remember that I had a **good reason [liberation of Timbuktu] for missing her birthday**" (Barrera, 2015, p.113).<sup>70</sup>

Barrera, while going to Timbuktu made this remark: "one week ago, I was pushing my kids 'sled'" (2015, p.97).<sup>71</sup> It marks nostalgia and the contrast between being home – in France, with his kids, snowing and being at war- in Mali, with the army, high harsh temperature. Scarpa outlines family reunion in Mali with a picture showing two soldiers -father and son together (see Annex 6): "Father and son find a few moments, **pride** in serving as a family" (2014, p.169).<sup>72</sup>

## 2. Logistic and Comfort

The hard-living conditions are repeatedly expressed in all the books such as the lack of means or the harshness of the climate and the difficult access to land. Captain Tanguy describes: "the offensive will last over three weeks, the living and fighting conditions are **extremely rustic and precarious**" (Hanne, 2014, p.182).<sup>73</sup> A lack of means concerns several points as the sanitary facilities including toilets, showers and basic furniture such as bed was missing:

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<sup>69</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Ma dernière soirée familiale se déroule plus vite que ce que chacun ne le souhaiterait... Les enfants chuchotent autour de moi. Chacun réclame l'attention dont ils seront privés pendant plusieurs mois. Chacun a préparé un petit courrier que je ne dois lire que demain ! [...] Un calendrier personnel est déjà fixé au mur de la cuisine et les enfants barreront les jours avec les crayons de couleur. C'est un procédé ludique largement expérimenté à la maison qui les aide à concrétiser mon absence, à patienter avec force et sagesse, jusqu'au retour tant attendu."

<sup>70</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Ce soir ils me verront. Ils sauront qu'on a réussi et ma femme retiendra que j'avais une bonne raison pour ne pas être à son anniversaire."

<sup>71</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Il y a une semaine, je poussais les luges de mes gamins. Aujourd'hui je fonce sur Tombouctou."

<sup>72</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Père et fils se retrouvent quelques instants, fierté de servir en famille."

<sup>73</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "L'offensive va s'étaler sur trois semaines, les conditions de vie et de combat sont extrêmement rustiques et précaires."

*The comfort of the soldier was reduced to its **simplest expression**. It was **rustic** There wasn't a bed for everyone, some slept on the floor, on a cardboard box. We managed to gather three liters of water every two-three day to be able to provide a **minimal service of shower** (Barrera see Scarpa, 2015, p.175).<sup>74</sup>*

Scarpa adds to Barrera's interview some pictures on how soldiers were living (see Annex 7). Lieutenant Phillip S. describes similar living condition:

*We are installed in the conditions of **extreme hardiness** [...]. There is no running water. We only eat rations morning, noon and evening. There is no electricity except for those having a generator. We will soon know even much worse [...]* (Hanne, 2014, p.186).<sup>75</sup>

Also, Gout talks about the same conditions: no bed for everyone, one ration per person etc. He gave encouragements to his men on the first night in Mali:

*I gathered my men before bedtime and I explain to them that living an uncommon adventure requires to go through this step. I specify that they will be **proud** to tell in a few months "**the war and its extreme conditions**", and it is necessary to **assume the reality** (Gout, 2015, p.51).<sup>76</sup>*

Gout motivates his troops by emphasizing the pride to live and speak about those conditions.

There is also a lack of logistical services such as weapons, tools, etc. The soldier A-L de Prénomville witnesses about this lack of means: "our advantage was that until February 19<sup>th</sup> the consumption of ammunition was reduced. We had neither the **stocks on-the-spot** nor the vectors **for refueling**" (Hanne, 2014, p.176).<sup>77</sup> As does, Claude Minjoulat-Ray, chief of staff: "[the ground forces were] immediately confronted with a

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<sup>74</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Le confort du soldat était réduit à sa plus simple expression. C'était très rustique. Tous n'avaient pas de lit picot et dormaient par terre, sur un carton. Nous avons réussi à mettre en place trois litres d'eau tous les deux-trois jours, pour pouvoir faire une douche minimale."

<sup>75</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Nous sommes installés dans les conditions d'une rusticité extrême [...]. Il n'y a pas d'eau courante. Nous ne mangeons que les rations matin, midi et soir. Il n'y a pas d'électricité, sauf pour ceux qui ont un générateur. Nous connaissons bientôt bien pire [...]"

<sup>76</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Je rassemble mes hommes avant le coucher et je leur explique que vivre une aventure hors norme nécessite de passer par cette étape. Je précise qu'ils seront fiers de raconter dans quelques mois "la guerre et ses conditions extrêmes", et qu'il faut assumer la réalité."

<sup>77</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "L'avantage que l'on a eu., c'est que jusqu'au 19 février les consommations de munitions étaient réduites. Sinon, nous aurions eu des problèmes. Nous n'avions ni les stocks sur place, ni les vecteurs pour ravitailler."

shortage of command resources (the container that should have arrived with the personnel was not delivered until three weeks later)” (Scarpa, 2015, p.41).<sup>78</sup>

The harshness of the climate is one of the toughest aspects for logistic problems as demonstrated in Barrera’s legend (see Annex 8): “Adrar. The **Rangers' glue does not resist the heat** (40°) and how hard the ground is” (Barrera, 2015, pp.224-225).<sup>79</sup> The high temperature makes the journey more difficult. So, does the weight of soldiers’ equipment as Scarpa emphasises with a picture (see Annex 9) and a comment: “Under the **weight of their equipment**, men suffer from **the extreme heats** in which they fight” (Scarpa, 2015, p.133).<sup>80</sup>

The difficult access to land is a major point: “the existing track is difficult to find, and the topography and the ground become difficult [...]. The track is lost and remains **untraceable**. The maps they use **no longer correspond to the reality of the field**” (Hanne, 2014, p.143).<sup>81</sup>

For the helicopter, flying conditions are tough as Verborg’s picture and legend reflected (see Annex 10): “After the water of Harmattan, the sand of Serval, flying conditions are **terribly difficult** for men and equipment” (Verborg, 2015, pp.116-117).<sup>82</sup>

Besides, Verborg links the warm and hard living conditions (high temperature during the day, and “fresh” during the night, missing sleep) and getting sick:

*Physically, the **effort is demanding** [...]. Between temperatures that exceed fifty degrees Celsius during the day and fall barely below forty degrees at night, the absence of sleep for forty-eight hours puts the bodies to a strain. My chief of operations is **out of the game**. Hit with dehydration* (Verborg, 2015, p.190).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ [Les forces terrestres ont] d'emblée été confrontées à une pénurie en moyens de commandement (le container qui aurait dû arriver avec le personnel n'a été acheminé que trois semaines plus tard).”

<sup>79</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Adrar. La colle des rangers ne résiste pas à la chaleur (40°) et à la dureté du sol, une logistique tendue à l'extrême.”

<sup>80</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Sous le poids de leurs équipements, les hommes souffrent des chaleurs extrêmes dans lesquelles ils combattent.”

<sup>81</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La piste existante est difficile à trouver et la topographie comme le terrain deviennent difficiles [...] La piste se perd, et demeure introuvable. Les cartes utilisées ne correspondent plus à la réalité du terrain.”

<sup>82</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Après l'eau d'Harmattan, le sable de Serval. Les conditions de vol sont terriblement éprouvantes pour les hommes et le matériel.”

<sup>83</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Physiquement, l'effort est exigeant [...]. Entre les températures qui dépassent les cinquante degrés Celsius la journée et descendent à peine sous quarante degrés la nuit,



Baberra stresses that this lack of comfort can cause an epidemic among soldiers: “The bivouac areas are **unsanitary**, showers, hygiene, **more than summary**, and he [doctor] fears the **epidemic**” (Barrera, 2015, p.252).<sup>84</sup>

### 3. Body and Life

The sacrifice of their health is frequently mentioned; many soldiers got sick and some of them had a medical evacuation as exemplified by Scarpa’s photo (see Annex 13). Moreover, soldiers are ready to take risks of getting injured to properly achieve their mission:

*[...] each Serval’s soldier, regardless of the regiment, regardless of the specialty, gave his best, often until getting **injured or exhausted**, to **participate** at their level in this **magnificent military victory** of arms of France (Colonel Bert see Hanne, 2014, p.169).<sup>85</sup>*

Colonel Bert states that soldiers would have pursued any avenue in attempt to be part of this victory. And, put themselves at risk to pick up the dead body of one of the soldiers:

*During these battles, Corporal Cédric Charenton was mortally touched. A sergeant, group leader, **put himself at risk to recover the body** of our comrade. His men as well as the nurse and pioneers show a remarkable **courage** to bring him back to the back lines of the company (Captain F see Scarpa, 2015, p.147).<sup>86</sup>*

Beyond risking their own life, this demonstrates that soldiers are courageous and self-sacrificing. That brings to the next part that will be detailed: what is the image that soldiers give of themselves. Sacrifice of life is referring to French soldiers that lost their life during this intervention; the most common expression used is “mort pour la France”<sup>87</sup> as evidenced by Scarpa’s photograph (see Annex 11) and by Barrera’s one as he explained

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l’absence de sommeil depuis quarante-huit heures met les corps à rude épreuve. Mon chef opérations est même hors-jeu. Frappé de déshydratation.”

<sup>84</sup>Trans. V. Mattered, original : “Les zones de bivouac sont insalubres, les douches, l’hygiène, plus que sommaires, et il [le docteur] craint l’épidémie.”

<sup>85</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “ Chacun des soldats de Serval, quelle que soit le régiment, quelle que soit la spécialité, ont donné le maximum, souvent jusqu’à la blessure ou à l’épuisement, pour participer à leur niveau a cette magnifique victoire militaire des armes de la France.”

<sup>86</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “Durant ces combats, le caporal Cédric Charenton est mortellement touché. Un sergent-chef, chef de groupe, s’expose alors personnellement afin de récupérer le corps sans vie de notre camarade. Ses hommes ainsi que l’infirmier et le groupe de Sapeurs feront alors preuve d’un courage remarquable afin de le ramener jusqu’aux lignes arrière de la compagnie.”

<sup>87</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original: “died for France.”

in the legend accompanying the photo: “March 3, Tessalit. Honors to the remains of lance corporal Cédric Charenton to the 1st RCP, **in Remembrance**” (see Annex 12) (Barrera, 2015, pp.224-225).<sup>88</sup>

*The brigade has just lost its first soldier to fire. **It won't be the last.** [...] It [the loss of a soldier] corresponds to the collective awareness of death. It is the moment when each of us realizes that he can really **be affected**, when **death has a face**, the face of a comrade [...]. Our units will assume our losses without giving into **the cowardice of a disproportionate violence** (Barrera, 2015, p. 158).<sup>89</sup>*

Barrera describes how the first loss has affected the soldiers' perception of death. He points out that this loss will not be the last. Death is part of reality and part of the job. He assures that soldiers will not over react.

Pierre Verborg talks about the fear to die: “the fear of death is more personal. Everyone can deal with his or her own means. If we **consider this fear as a risk**, never as fate, we can avoid its negative effects” (Verborg, 2015, p.122).<sup>90</sup> Then, Verborg adds: “[if one of them die] we would **go back to fight** like any soldier, because death **is part of the job**. In this perception, the notion of total commitment is the basis of our risk acceptance” (Verborg, 2015, p.123).<sup>91</sup> Thus, even if the fear of death is there, it is a risk that soldiers accept and know because it is their job to go fight and maybe die.

Barrera stresses the responsibility that a leader holds: “I'll face him [soldier in the coffin] for a few moments, fully measuring the weight of responsibilities and the **unique nature of being a soldier: killing and being killed**, so many reasons to be cautious before sending men to battle” (Barrera, 2015, p. 159).<sup>92</sup> He is the one who decides who is going

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<sup>88</sup>Trans. V. Mattered, original : “3 mars, Tessalit. Honneurs rendus à la dépouille du caporal Cédric Charenton du 1er RCP, mort pour la France en donnant l'assaut. Les combats continuent.”

<sup>89</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “La brigade vient de perdre son premier soldat au feu. Il ne sera pas le dernier. [...] Elle [la perte d'un soldat] correspond à la prise de conscience collective de la mort, le moment où chacun prend conscience qu'il peut réellement être touché, l'instant où la mort a un visage, celui d'un camarade [...]. Nos unités encaisseront les pertes sans céder à la lâcheté d'une violence disproportionnée.”

<sup>90</sup>Trans. V. Mattered, original : “La peur de mourir est plus personnelle. Chacun peut y faire face avec ses propres moyens. Si on considère cette peur comme un risque, jamais comme une fatalité, on peut en maîtriser les effets négatifs.”

<sup>91</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “Nous serions repartis nous battre comme n'importe quel soldat, car la mort fait partie des risques du métier. Dans cette perception, la notion d'engagement total a été la base de cette acceptation du risque.”

<sup>92</sup>Trans. V. Mattered, original : “Je vais rester quelques instants face à lui, mesurant pleinement le poids des responsabilités, le caractère unique du métier de soldat, tuer et être tué, autant de raisons d'être précautionneux avant d'engager ses hommes au combat.”

to fight. Being a soldier implicates: taking lives and risking one's own life. This scene underlines the importance given to the grief.

Death as a symbol is another relevant aspect:

*Our soldiers who died in the line of **duty** and their wounded brothers in arms have not paid for nothing this heavy tribute. On the contrary, they incarnate the **symbol of our country's commitment to fight fanatics, terrorists, who spread evil wherever they go** (Gout, 2015, p.228).<sup>93</sup>*

Thus, as said, they did not die for nothing but for a right purpose. Opponents are the incarnation of evil and it is worth dying to fight them. Another way to icon the soldiers who lost their life during the intervention is through medals and national/international recognition. Gout illustrated it with numerous tributes to honor Damien Boiteux<sup>94</sup> such as giving his name to newborns or streets:

*It is with great care that the frame and the **medal** are sent to Valerie. I know that Mali will later show her **many gestures of recognition**. Associations and individuals, who want to show the importance of the sacrifice of his spouse for the country, will contact her. Many Malian children, born in 2013, bear Damien's name, and several squares or public places will bear the Commander's name (2015, p.72).<sup>95</sup>*

### C. Representation of the Self

The French soldier qualifies himself and his comrades with different terms. There are lots of examples in this section. Gout lists some of them while talking about the experience, courage and professionalism of his subordinates:

*They had an **impressive experience**, acquired in Ivory Coast, Afghanistan or Libya. The younger ones were supervised by experienced soldiers. I could count on them, no matter what the circumstances. Day after day, they impressed me. They*

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<sup>93</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Nos soldats morts au champ d'honneur et leurs frères d'armes blessés n'auront pas payé pour rien ce lourd tribut. Au contraire, ils incarneront le symbole de l'engagement de notre pays pour combattre les fanatiques, les terroristes qui répandent le mal partout où ils passent."

<sup>94</sup> Damien Boiteux was killed during the first phase of the Serval Operation, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "C'est avec beaucoup de précaution que le cadre et la médaille sont envoyés à Valérie. Je sais que le Mali lui montrera plus tard de nombreux gestes de reconnaissance. Elle sera contactée par des associations et des particuliers, qui souhaitent lui témoigner de l'importance du sacrifice de son conjoint pour le pays. De nombreux enfants maliens, nés en 2013, portent le prénom Damien, et plusieurs places ou lieux publics porteront le nom du commandant."

*demonstrated their professionalism, immense courage and constant motivation.* (Gout, 2015, p.11).<sup>96</sup>

Barrera uses nearly always the same adjectives to talk about his team: “they are experimented, motivated, united and courageous” (2015, p.13).<sup>97</sup> The one adjective that remains, through books, is courageous. The report of the lieutenant-colonel Loic G., in the book “*Mali, une paix à gagner*” is one of the numerous examples given inside the books. The following excerpt is at the end of the description of a tough trip: “**Whatever**, we're here, mission accomplished, after a final continuous effort of **29 hours and 570 kilometres** in the middle of **nowhere**” (Scarpa, 2015, p.79).<sup>98</sup> He underlines the difficulty of the trip.

Soldiers are precise and effective, as Scarpa mentions when he reports the Matsoukis’ (soldiers) reactions to a surprise attack: “their response, **accurate and fast**, knocked out several enemies, shot by snipers and rockets” (Scarpa, 2015, p.89).<sup>99</sup> Verborg explains a story about how they gave to Malian the kerosene that they had to give up for technical reason:

*Mechanics are familiar with Africa and offer Malian gendarmes to collect all this kerosene in plastic bottles. For them it's **Christmas after the hour**. This gift from heaven guarantees six months of operation for their two wheels or will be sold on the black market, providing them unexpected income* (Verborg, 2015, pp.181-182).<sup>100</sup>

By telling this story, the will is to demonstrate that French soldiers are “familiar” and have knowledge about Africa and that they show generosity to the Malian. It can be understood as a kind of patronizing. Soldiers claim to make history: “for this page of history, they can be proud to be part of the Serval brigade” (Barrera, 2015, p.320)<sup>101</sup> and

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<sup>96</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Ils avaient une expérience impressionnante, acquise en Côte d’Ivoire, en Afghanistan ou en Libye. Les plus jeunes étaient encadrés par les soldats expérimentés. J’ai pu compter sur eux, quelles que soient les circonstances. Jour après jour, ils m’ont impressionné. Ils ont démontré leur professionnalisme, un immense courage et une motivation constante.”

<sup>97</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Ils sont aguerris ; motivés, solidaires et courageux.”

<sup>98</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Peu importe, nous sommes là, mission accomplie, après un dernier effort continu de vingt-neuf heures et 570 kilomètres au milieu de nulle part.”

<sup>99</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Leur riposte, précise et rapide, entraîne la mise hors de combat de plusieurs ennemis, abattus par les tireurs de précision et par des tirs de roquettes.”

<sup>100</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les mécaniciens connaissent bien l’Afrique et proposent alors aux gendarmes maliens de venir récupérer tout ce kérosène dans des bidons en plastique. Pour eux, c’est Noël après l’heure. Ce don du ciel garantit six mois de fonctionnement pour leurs deux roues ou sera revendu au marché noir, leur assurant un revenu inespéré.”

<sup>101</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Pour cette page d’histoire, ils peuvent être fiers d’appartenir à la brigade Serval.”

the one of their weapons: “together they carved a new **glorious page** of their weapon’s history” (Colonel Bert see Hanne, 2014, p.169).<sup>102</sup>

Moral strength is another quality regularly used: “we never ever felt the power of **moral strength**, the need of **cohesion** and **body spirit so much**”, (Barrera, 2015, pp.224-225),<sup>103</sup> this quote came from the legend of one of Barrera’s photo that shows him talking to a soldier in front of a map, a day before a fight (see Annex 14). Barrera points out the cohesion of the team.

Attention is brought on how resourceful soldiers are and on their “great” capacity to adapt. The latter is exemplified by Hanne’s comment on Schupp’s picture (see Annex 15): “In northern Mali, the French forces leave the Sahel to sink into the Saharan desert, which compels Serval **to adapt to the difficult natural conditions**” (Hanne, 2014, pp.124-125).<sup>104</sup> Scarpa also illustrated one of his pictures (see Annex 16) of a group of soldiers on a pickup with a note: “You must have seen those fighters of the Ametettaï... What a show, what a **professional determination**. What **resourcefulness**, from Legionnaire to the driver, all were the artisans of victory” (Scarpa, 2015, p.129).<sup>105</sup>

Besides, Verborg calls engineers “miracle hands” due to their good work in hard conditions, he dedicates in his book numerous of lines to thank them and illustrates their works on photos (see Annex 17). He qualifies his own team, in a legend of a photo (see Annex 18) as rapid, powerful and above all effective: “Speed, elongation, firepower. The helicopters are everywhere and all the shots” (Verborg, 2015, pp116-117).<sup>106</sup> To sum up: “in adversity, the French is good at **being the best**” (Barrera, 2015, p.29).<sup>107</sup>

Some stories are a reminder of the colonial time, presenting the French as philanthropic, goodwill benefactors providing education while the opponent destroys it.

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<sup>102</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Ils ont gravé ensemble une nouvelle page de gloire de l’histoire de leur arme.”

<sup>103</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Jamais nous n’avons autant senti la puissance des forces morales, la nécessité de la cohésion et de l’esprit de corps.”

<sup>104</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Au nord du Mali, les forces françaises quittent le Sahel pour s’enfoncer dans le désert saharien, ce qui oblige Serval à s’adapter aux conditions naturelles difficiles.”

<sup>105</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Il faut les avoir vus ces combattants de l’Ametettaï... Quel spectacle, quelle détermination professionnelle. Quelle débrouillardise, du Légionnaire au conducteur, tous furent les artisans de la Victoire.”

<sup>106</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Vitesse, élongations, puissance de feu. Les hélicoptères sont partout et de tous les coups.”

<sup>107</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Dans l’adversité, le Français se fait fort d’être le meilleur.”

During his visit of the city of Tessalit, Barrera observes that in a primary school there are:

*No teacher, books abandoned, it is **desperately sad** [...]. In a small classroom, we discover **schoolbooks from French associations**, most of them still bear the names of former students from the region of Paris [...]. All of this must seem **far away in northern Mali**, but what a beautiful symbol of solidarity and humanity (2015, pp. 314-315).<sup>108</sup>*

Barrera expresses explicitly a kind of nostalgia about the colonialism:

*The action of the state was long-term one. Teachers, engineers, technicians, administrators followed the columns and brought a certain idea of **European civilization**. Even if people have **legitimately gained freedom**, they keep in mind the landmarks and memories of an **authority** that has often **disappeared** and was synonymous **with security** (2015, p.349).<sup>109</sup>*

Here the French soldiers are presented as protectors, an authority without which they barely exist. Also, the idea of the European civilization is mentioned.

This representation of the “self” leads to the representation of “others”. The last subsection has detail on the way soldiers represented themselves. In the next one is focusing on soldiers represent themselves the “others”.

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<sup>108</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “Plus d’instituteurs, des livres abandonnés, c’est désespérément triste [...]. Dans une petite salle, nous découvrons des tas de livres scolaires offerts par des associations françaises, la plupart porte encore le nom d’anciens élèves de la région Parisienne [...]. Tout cela doit leur paraître bien loin dans le nord Mali, mais quel beau symbole de solidarité et d’humanité.”

<sup>109</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : “L’action de l’Etat s’inscrivait dans la durée. Les instituteurs, les ingénieurs, les techniciens, les administrateurs suivaient les colonnes et apportaient une certaine idée de la civilisation européenne. [...] Même si les peuples ont légitimement accédé à la liberté, ils gardent en mémoire les repères et les souvenirs d’une autorité souvent disparue, synonyme de sécurité.”

## VII. Representation of “Others”

This axis is going to be devoted to the French soldiers’ representation of the “others”. Four main “others” have been identified: Mali (land), allies, population and enemy. These are going to be the main subsections. Land, in contrast with western cities, is under developed and often represented as empty or in bad conditions. A strong differentiation is made between the cities occupied by the opponent and the ones that are not. Allies refer in most of the time to African armies such as Chadian and Malian’ ones and sometimes to western ones such as the Belgian’s one. Allies are often described in a patronizing way, brave but inefficient, waiting for the French to save them. Population is less mentioned by the soldiers and the examples are thus limited. They are usually qualified as modest and simple, idolizing French soldiers, eager to help and give information. The opponent is representing the total opposite of the self. This part shows how French soldiers are defining “others” and distancing themselves from them, except for the Belgian allies. Through books, it can be observed that some lives matter and others do not or are wanted (the one of the enemies). This clear differentiation between “self” and “others” explains and even justifies this difference of grief.

### A. Land

“This is Africa, nothing is rational” (Barrera, 2015, p.98).<sup>110</sup>

Mali is a country composed of diverse types of landscapes from green area (see Annex 19-20), rocky plateau (see Annex 21) to the sand of the “ruthless desert” (see Annex 22) (Verborg, 2015, p.173).<sup>111</sup>

*To the right are the buttresses of Andrar, both majestic and terrifying, an area of valleys, hides, ridges, cliffs [...]. On the left, it is opposite. The landscape is flat, sometimes barely hilly, Timetrine desert, the South of the Sahara* (Barrera, 2015, p.135).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “C’est l’Afrique ici, rien n’est rationnel.”

<sup>111</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Désert impitoyable.”

<sup>112</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “A droite, s’élèvent les contreforts d’Andrar, à la fois majestueux et terrifiants, une zone de vallées, de caches, de crêtes, de falaises [...]. A gauche, à l’inverse, le paysage est plat, parfois à peine vallonné, le désert du Timétrine, le sud du Sahara.”

Barrera even compares it to the planet Mars: “everything is black and peeled. The ground movements are like the infinity. We are on **Mars**” (2015, p.298).<sup>113</sup> As mentioned in many books, Mali is “a country **twice as big as France, with harsh natural conditions**” (general de Saint-Quentin see Hanne, 2014, p.127).<sup>114</sup> The Country’s size and the distance between cities is stressed: “there are 900 km between Bamako and Timbuktu, 1 200 between Bamako and Gao” (colonel Rivet see Hanne, 2014, p.170).<sup>115</sup> It is a dry area as Verborg mentions after a heavy rain “it had not rained for 10 years” (2015, p.183).<sup>116</sup>

In addition, there is a lack of transportation and bad conditions of the roads from which adversaries could benefit (see Annex 24): “the dented tracks are ideal for an ambush [...]. The track is in **poor condition** and if the vehicle overturns it will end up in the water” (Verborg, 2015, p.177).<sup>117</sup> Scarpa agrees on the last part: “it is a question of crossing, without recognition, an unknown zone particularly **convenient to the ambushes of the rebels**” (2015, p.74).<sup>118</sup> Roads are like battlefields: “the road is obstructed by tanks destroyed” (Barrera, 2015, p.91)<sup>119</sup> and transport is not easy in Mali, with roads covered by sand: the progression is transformed into **a real hell of sands**. The heaviest machines [...] are repeatedly silted up (Scarpa, 2015, p.54).<sup>120</sup>

The harsh natural conditions are one of the elements most exemplified. Hanne shares the picture of two soldiers in the middle of the desert next to their pickup, camels are seen at the back, with the following legend: “in northern Mali, French forces leave the Sahel to **sink into the Saharan desert**, forcing Serval to adapt to the **harsh natural conditions**” (Schupp see Hanne, 2014, between pp.124-125).<sup>121</sup> The shape of the country and its lands is a “paradise to hide”, implying that is in favor of the opponent (Verborg,

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<sup>113</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Tout est noir et pelé. Les mouvements de terrain se ressemblent à l’infini. Nous sommes sur Mars.”

<sup>114</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un pays deux fois et demi comme la France, à la nature hostile. ”

<sup>115</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Il y ainsi plus de 900 km entre Bamako et Tombouctou, 1 200 km entre Bamako et Gao.”

<sup>116</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Il n’avait pas plu depuis 30 ans.”

<sup>117</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La piste cabossée est idéale pour une embuscade [...]. La piste est en mauvais état et si le véhicule se renverse il finira dans l’eau.”

<sup>118</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original: “Il s’agit de parcourir, sans reconnaissance, une zone inconnue particulièrement propice aux embuscades des rebelles.”

<sup>119</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La piste est obstruée par des chars détruits.”

<sup>120</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La progression se transforme en un véritable enfer des sables. Les engins les plus lourds du terrain [...] s’ensablent à répétition.”

<sup>121</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Au nord du Mali, les forces françaises quittent le Sahel pour s’enfoncer dans le désert saharien, ce qui oblige Serval à s’adapter aux conditions naturelles difficiles.”



2015, 9.199).<sup>122</sup> Gout does not share this point of view: “the topography is **not favorable to jihadists** who **have no way to hide**, I have sometimes hard time to believe in their presence in these desert areas. Where are they?” (2015, p.86).<sup>123</sup>

On one hand, Mali is described as full of empty places, where there is nothing. It is composed by tiny villages such as Ametaï “it is in reality a hamlet of about ten houses” (Scarpa, 2015, p.157).<sup>124</sup> It gives an image of a northern Mali not developed deprived of basic means. Most of the places are qualified as far from everything: “we are in **the middle of nowhere**, without nearby cities” (Gout, 2015, p.109).<sup>125</sup> There is this representation of destroyed and empty cities that were occupied by jihadists:

*Each time, they hope to refuel in the few villages that we go through. The problem is there is **nothing working**, the day before leaving or a few hours early, jihadists have **destroyed** the little that they did not take (lieutenant Phillip S. see Hanne, 2014, pp.187-188).<sup>126</sup>*

Besides, giving an idea on how cities look like, gives a specific representation of the enemy. The opponent is considered as careless, it has destroyed everything or has taken it. Barrera sets again a before/after jihadists arrived in the city. From a flourishing city to a ghost one without shops, trade, tourists and where Sharia is applied. Timbuktu is described by Barrera as (see Annex 23):

*Constituted by low houses, large arteries and narrow streets. Time has stopped in this city. At the entrance of the city, we meet **calcined tanks**, probably destroyed by the aviation or helicopters, a large sign at the border: “Timbuktu’s city is founded on Islam and would **only be judged by the Islamic legislation [Sharia]**”. A lot of small restaurants and cafes are **closed [...]**. Some years before, **tourists** arrived by charters and kept the **city alive [...]**. This prosperity, trade exchanges, this aperture belong to the past (Barrera, 2015, pp.110-111).<sup>127</sup>*

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<sup>122</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un paradis pour se dissimuler.”

<sup>123</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La topographie n’est pas favorable à des djihadistes qui n’ont aucune solution pour se cacher, j’ai parfois du mal à croire leur présence dans ces étendues désertiques. Ou sont-ils ?”

<sup>124</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Il s’agit en réalité d’un hameau d’une dizaine d’habitations.”

<sup>125</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous sommes vraiment au milieu de nulle part, sans ville avoisinante.”

<sup>126</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “A chaque fois, ils espèrent pouvoir se ravitailler et faire le plein dans le peu de villages que nous traversons. Le souci est qu’il n’y a plus rien en état, avant de partir la veille ou quelques heures plus tôt, les djihadistes ont détruit le peu qu’ils n’ont pas emporté.”

<sup>127</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Constituée de maisons basses, d’artères larges et de rues étroites [...]. Le temps s’est arrêté dans cette ville. A l’entrée, nous croisons des blindés calcinés, probablement détruits par l’aviation ou les hélicoptères, un grand panneau se dresse sur le bord : « la ville de Tombouctou est fondée sur l’Islam et elle ne sera jugée que par la législation islamique [charia] ». De nombreux petits restaurants et cafés sont fermés [...]. Quelques années auparavant, les touristes arrivaient par charters et faisaient vivre la ville [...]. Cette prospérité, ces échanges commerciaux, cette ouverture appartiennent au passé.”

There is also a strong notion of the past: cities are like a vestige from the past. Talking about Timbuktu, Gout declares that he had the feeling of going back in time:

*Coming in is unbelievable. Like suspended in a surreal past, we feel that we **are free of time**. The alleys and the houses are beautiful, the atmosphere is light. **Nothing has changed for centuries** (2015, p.114).<sup>128</sup>*

It implies that there was no development in the city through the years and even centuries. However, it gives a positive vision of Timbuktu as an eternal and beautiful city, contrary to Barrera's description that represented it as a battlefield.

On the other hand, in the South and in liberated cities, Mali is described as full of life: "we cross the city [Bamako] by car and I discover an African capital **carefree and full of life**, with its **traffic jams and markets**" (Barrera, 2015, p.88).<sup>129</sup> Also, the contrast can be seen with the "liberated" cities for example Tessalit, situated in the North-East: "Tessalit is a small cosmopolitan village that has been revived for two months" (Barrera, 2015, p.314).<sup>130</sup> Gout reports Bamako as:

*A **peaceful** city much **less developed** than Abidjan or Dakar [...]. The activity is still quite dense and the traffic rather quiet and organized. The French and Malian's flags are present everywhere (2015, p.71).<sup>131</sup>*

And he compares the level of development of Bamako to Senegal and Ivory Coast's capitals. He stresses the presence of flags to show that the population is implicitly in favor of the Malian government and the French intervention.

## **B. Allies**

The main idea that is shared through books is the friendship, often illustrated by photos, that links allies' armies- mostly Malian and Chadian but also Belgian, Danish or Russian:

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<sup>128</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Y pénétrer est incroyable. Comme suspendus dans un passé surréaliste, nous avons l'impression de nous affranchir du temps. Les ruelles et les maisons sont magnifiques, l'ambiance est légère. Rien n'a changé depuis des siècles."

<sup>129</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Nous traversons la ville [Bamako] en voiture et je découvre une capitale africaine insouciant et pleine de vie, avec ses embouteillages et ses marchés."

<sup>130</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Tessalit est une petite bourgade cosmopolite qui reprend vie depuis deux mois. Les habitants avaient fui dans le désert et ils reviennent, rassurés par la présence française."

<sup>131</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Une ville paisible, beaucoup moins développée qu'Abidjan ou Dakar [...]. L'activité est tout de même assez dense et la circulation plutôt tranquille et organisée. Les drapeaux français et maliens sont présents partout."

“throughout the mandate, the brigade will benefit from the support of our **Belgian and Danish allies**” (Scarpa, 2015, p.34).<sup>132</sup> When Gout meets a Belgian commander, he tells that they “examine together the collaboration of our means and envisage a close collaboration” (2015, p.58).<sup>133</sup>

When French soldiers talk about Malian soldiers, “friend”, “comrade” or “brother” are words that usually precede ally armies. For example, on the picture illustrating the meeting of the two leaders of the French army (General Barrera) and Malian army (Colonel major Dakao) the legend says, “brother of weapon and indispensable partner of the liberation of the country” (see Annex 25) (Barrera, 2015, pp.225-226).<sup>134</sup> Scarpa states that: “this exhilarating and tragic experience [...] has also made it possible to **forge lasting friendships with the Malian military** operating under the orders of Colonel Major Dacko” (2015, p.165).<sup>135</sup> He described the commander Dacko as:

*Commander of the Malian forces. This officer with a **martial appearance**, with a frank face, approaches a mustache end that gives him almost a **British look**. **Very experienced**, he has already **proven his combativeness** during the fighting in Konna against the insurrection* (2015, p.48).<sup>136</sup>

Barrera regrets in his book, that he did not have time to meet Dacko:

*I have often thought of this leader who fought for the freedom of his country, to **save his skin** and the one of his men. I only have one regret, not having met him to shake his hand and **congratulate him**. This man was a **hero** and we **did not leave him alone**. In these conditions **the brotherhood of arms** takes all its meaning* (Barrera, 2015, p.140).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Tout au long du mandat, la brigade bénéficiera de l'appui de nos alliés belges et danois.”

<sup>133</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous examinons ensemble la collaboration de nos moyens et envisageons une collaboration étroite.”

<sup>134</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Frère d’arme et partenaire incontournable de la libération du pays.”

<sup>135</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Cette expérience exaltante et tragique [...] a permis aussi de nouer des liens d’amitiés indéfectibles avec les militaires maliens opérant sous les ordres du colonel-major Dacko.”

<sup>136</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le colonel-major Dacko, commandant de théâtre des forces maliennes. Cet officier à l’allure martiale, au visage franc aborde une fine moustache qui lui donne presque un air british. Très expérimenté, il a déjà fait les preuves de sa combativité lors des combats de Konna face à l’insurrection.”

<sup>137</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “J’ai souvent pensé à ce chef qui luttait pour la liberté de son pays, pour sauver sa peau et celle de ses hommes. Je n’ai qu’un regret, ne pas l’avoir rencontré pour lui serrer la main et le féliciter. Cet homme était un héros et nous ne l’avons pas laissé seul. Dans ces conditions la fraternité d’armes prend tout son sens.”

The achievement and the bravery of this chief is nuanced by the fact that he had to “save his own skin” and by the role of France. Barrera’s tone is patronizing to the Malian leader by saying that he would have wanted to “congratulate him”.

What is accentuated is that the two armies know each other: “at the earlier stage of the Serval operation, the good mutual acquaintance between French and Malian officials was noticeable” (see Annex 26) (quote from Schupp’s photo seen in Hanne, 2014, pp.124-125).<sup>138</sup> Their skills are complementary: “The **complementarity** between Malian and French armies has been **perfect**: Malians brought to French their **knowledge of the field**, whereas French support them with their **fire force**”<sup>139</sup> and it is illustrated in Hanne’s book by a picture of two soldiers (French and Malian one) in a ditch (see Annex 27). Some characteristics remain to talk about Malian and Chadian soldiers as such “bravery”. Scarpa reports: “the Chadians of the FATIM have demonstrated first-rate **warrior qualities**: they fought side by side with French soldiers in the Adrar and Ifoghas and their **contribution, costly in human lives**, will never be forgotten” (2015, p.199).<sup>140</sup> In description of the Malian and Chadian army, the staging of French soldiers as heroes appears regularly:

*Courageous and offensive, our Chadians attacked the entrance to the valley. [...] The Chadians have shown an endurance that forces **the admiration of the French**. Not one is complaining, not one cries. They know that their **brothers-in-arms** are doing their utmost to save them. They bear and **wait** silently, as heroes (Barrera, 2015, p.172).*<sup>141</sup>

Here, there is a patronizing attitude from Barrera, he qualified Chadians as courageous and heroes expecting from the French to be saved. In a way, this excerpt is valorizing the French soldiers more than the Malian. This notion of ally armies waiting for the French to save them is present in the picture: “Malian army soldiers grappling with

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<sup>138</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Dès le début, la bonne connaissance mutuelle des officiers français et maliens était perceptible. ”

<sup>139</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La complémentarité entre l’armée malienne et l’armée française a été parfaite : les Maliens apportaient aux Français leur connaissance du terrain, tandis que l’armée française les appuyait par sa puissance de feu.”

<sup>140</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les Tchadiens des FATIM ont fait preuve de qualités guerrières de premier ordre : ils ont combattu au coude à coude avec les soldats français dans l’Adrar et des Ifoghas et leur contribution, coûteuse en vies humaines, ne sera jamais oubliée.”

<sup>141</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Courageux et offensifs, nos Tchadiens ont attaqué l’entrée de la vallée. [...] les Tchadiens font preuve d’une endurance qui force l’admiration des Français. Pas un ne se plaint, pas un ne crie. Ils savent que leurs frères d’armes font le maximum pour les sauver. Ils encaissent et attendent silencieusement, en héros.”

jihadists in the roads of Gao, before the arrival of French reinforcements” (see Annex 28) (Barrera, 2015, pp.225-226).<sup>142</sup>

Another characteristic is the lack of efficiency from the part of the Malian army and their responsibility to towards the jihadists’ progress:

*The Malian Armed forces (FAM) suffered heavy **casualties and concede** a lot of equipment and weapons to the jihadists. For the most of them, they have **a weak operational capability** and their commandment does not ignore it. But their soldiers are **proud and courageous and indispensable** to win back the country (Gout, 2015, p.47).*<sup>143</sup>

### C. Enemy

The enemy does not have a face or a name, it is always called “the enemy” or “terrorists”. It is barely never specifying which rebel groups soldiers are talking about. Authors question: “who are those men that have the ambition to control whole **Mali** What is their motivation? How is their equipment? What is their level of preparation?” (Gout, 2015, p.104).<sup>144</sup>

For Barrera, jihadists impose:

*Its traffics on entire regions, it destroys without building, imposes the return to the **Middle Ages** to powerless people [...]. It maintains poverty; bans trade, education and tourism. It pushes the youth to emigration **or hatred against Westerners**, it feeds itself on political disorders and **lack of governance** (2015, p.317).*<sup>145</sup>

Jihadists are presented as the root of all evil, taking advantage of defenseless people and of the weakness of the State. They spread hatred, poverty and banish all the good such as education or trade. Gout describes them as: “true **brigands** of the great paths,

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<sup>142</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Soldats de l’armée malienne aux prises avec des djihadistes dans les rues de Gao, avant l’arrivée des renforts français.”

<sup>143</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les forces armées maliennes (FAM) ont subi de lourdes pertes et ont cédé beaucoup de matériel et d’armement aux djihadistes. Elles ont pour la plupart une capacité opérationnelle réduite et leur commandement ne l’ignore pas. “Mais leurs soldats sont fiers et courageux et indispensables pour reconquérir le pays.”

<sup>144</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Qui sont ces hommes dont l’ambition est de contrôler tout le Mali ? Quelle est leur motivation ? Comment sont-ils équipés ? Quel est leur niveau de préparation ?”

<sup>145</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ Ses trafics sur des régions entières, il détruit sans construire, impose le retour au Moyen Age à des peuples impuissants [...]. Il entretient la pauvreté, interdit le commerce, l’éducation et le tourisme. Il pousse la jeunesse à l’émigration ou à la haine contre les Occidentaux, se nourrissent des désordres politiques et de l’absence de gouvernance.”

**not respecting anything**, nor anyone, and especially not Islam, which fundamental principles they do not follow and which they use to justify their abuses” (Gout, 2015, p.9).<sup>146</sup> “Not respecting anything” is a strong element of the enemy definition, no respect for people, religion, monuments, ... Barrera relays: “for weeks, we have witnessed the spectacle of the **destruction of heritage**, testimonies of **cut members**, the savage application of Sharia” (2015, p.55).<sup>147</sup> Gout distances the jihad from Islam and supports that “Sharia has served to dominate **inhabitants without defense** for months” (2015, p.114).<sup>148</sup> “They are determined to conquer whole **Mali**” (Gout, 2015, p.38),<sup>149</sup> that is one main purpose of the mission: to stop them before reaching the South.

Colonel Bert qualified the enemy as “tenacious and combative, when he is exposed” and as “fighting hard” (Hanne, 2014, p.154).<sup>150,151</sup> Opponents are viewed as kind of brave and determined to achieve their goal, but this “courage” is explained by the use of drugs: “jihadists [...] whom are often using **drugs** to give them courage” (Gout, 2015, p.78).<sup>152</sup>

Their methods to terrorize people are reported report in the book such as kidnapping: “the terrorists have **kidnapped** the smuggler’s **family** and they have **forced him** to cross the river with their pickups” (Barrera, 2015, p.138)<sup>153</sup> or as violence against children, narrated by that kind of stories:

*The old man is approaching. He introduces us to his grandson, five or six years old. “I don't show us his back. The jihadists **whipped him because he was wearing a bracelet** around his wrist. Thank you. Thanks” (Barrera, 2015, p .111).<sup>154</sup>*

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<sup>146</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Djihadistes, véritables brigands des grands chemins, ne respectant rien, ni personne, et surtout pas l’islam, dont ils ne suivent pas les principes fondamentaux et qui pourtant justifie leurs exactions.”

<sup>147</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Depuis des semaines, nous assistons au spectacle des destructions de patrimoine, des témoignages de membres coupés, de l’application sauvage de la charia.”

<sup>148</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La charia a servi à dominer des habitants sans défense pendant des mois.”

<sup>149</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Déterminés à conquérir l’ensemble du Mali.”

<sup>150</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un ennemi accrocheur et combattif, dès qu’il était découvert.”

<sup>151</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “[Il] s’est battu avec acharnement.”

<sup>152</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les djihadistes [...] qui se droguent souvent pour se donner du courage.”

<sup>153</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les terroristes ont enlevé la famille du passeur et ils l’obligent à traverser le fleuve avec leurs pickups.”

<sup>154</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le vieil homme s’approche. Il nous présente son petit-fils, de 5 ou 6 ans. « Je ne vous montre pas son dos. Les djihadistes l’ont fouetté parce qu’il portait un bracelet autour du poignet. Merci. Merci.”

Jihadists are merciless, even with young kids. They are qualified as “uneducated” (Barrera, 2015, p.315).<sup>155</sup> Sometimes, the enemy has a name, Gout mentions AQMI while he is describing how they [AQMI] were using Islam against the people and it witnesses about their [AQMI] use of violence with impunity:

*We understand that living conditions have been harsh during the presence of the jihadists from AQIM. The only law, far from the one taught and practiced by Islam, was the one of jihadists. **Everything was permitted to them:** looting, raping, kidnapping, murdering ...* (Gout, 2015, pp.114-115).<sup>156</sup>

The enemy’s cowardice is regularly noticed by authors: “this enemy has been constantly shirking for two weeks” (Gout, 2015, p.121).<sup>157</sup> Moreover, because he targets defenseless civilians “their methods **target directly civilians** to make a larger number of victims” (Scarpa, 2015, p.116).<sup>158</sup>

The enemy is a few times qualified as spiteful by Verborg: “we know that the enemy will not make the same mistake twice. He is probably preparing his revenge!” (Verborg, 2015, 206).<sup>159</sup>

Verborg, after explaining a story about a pickup that was armed with a woman and kids on board, is impressed by the cold tactic of the enemy: “the enemy shows us his perfect mastery of the art of war. It **takes cold blood** to move at night with a gun and unveil **his family at the last moment** when we know that one is **being hunted**” (Verborg, 2015, p.193).<sup>160</sup> Here, the enemy is cold and ready to risk women and kids to defy French soldiers to shoot. As it was detailed before, this is in contradiction with how French soldiers consider family. Barrera compares the enemy as the one he had to face in other

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<sup>155</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Ces terroristes incultes.”

<sup>156</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous comprenons que les conditions de vie ont été rudes pendant toute la période de présence des djihadistes se relevant d’AQMI. La seule loi, éloignée de celle enseignée et pratiquée par l’islam, était celle des djihadistes. Tout leur était permis : pillage, viol, séquestration, assassinat, ...”

<sup>157</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Cet ennemi qui se dérobe en permanence depuis deux semaines.”

<sup>158</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Leurs méthodes qui visent directement les civils afin de faire un grand nombre de victimes.”

<sup>159</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous savons que l’ennemi ne fera pas deux fois la même erreur. Il prépare probablement sa revanche !”

<sup>160</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ [Il nous montre sa parfaite maîtrise de l’art de la guerre. Il en faut du sang-froid pour, de nuit, se déplacer avec une arme et dévoiler sa famille au dernier moment quand on sait que l’on est traqué.”

parts of the world: “This enemy is the **same** as the one that operates in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia or Yemen” (2015, p.168).<sup>161</sup> Scarpa also makes the comparison:

*The enemy is boatswain, tenacious, unpredictable. Its modes of action are closer to those of fundamentalist terrorists encountered in **Iraq or Afghanistan** than those of **classical rebels of West Africa** (2015, p.196).<sup>162</sup>*

They are presented as cowards, using violence, ready to do anything to achieve their goals. They would rather die than submit, they need drugs and use Islam to validate their crimes etc. This representation of the others justifies the use of violence against them. They are seen as the “evil”, the root of all evil that decriminalizes their use of violence against their opponents.

#### **D. Population**

Gout defines the population as: “**peaceful** and more likely to live in peace. They aspire to return to their **modest, but nice and quiet life**” (Gout, 2015, p.91).<sup>163</sup> The use of the word “modest life” can be seen as patronizing. Then, he adds “the inhabitants seem very **distant from our consumer society**: fishermen’s boats are not motorized, the vehicles are scarce...” (2015, p.100).<sup>164</sup> He gives an image of Malian’s life as simple and far from the western one. It represents a Mali less developed and where people are happy. He emphasizes this by comparing it to the French population: even if the Malian population does not have much, they do not complain and seem happier: “I often meet poor but happy inhabitants or at least happier than most of my compatriots. They never complain” (2015, p.120).<sup>165</sup>

Another important element stressed in books is the help and information provided by the population: “the civilian population once again, informs the Franco-Malian forces”

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<sup>161</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Cet ennemi est identique à celui qui opère en Afghanistan, en Irak, en Somalie ou au Yémen.”

<sup>162</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “L’ennemi est manœuvrier, tenace, imprévisible. Ses modes d’actions sont plus proches de ceux des terroristes fondamentalistes rencontrés en Irak ou en Afghanistan que ceux des rebelles classiques d’Afrique occidentale.”

<sup>163</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les Maliens sont pacifiques et vivent le plus souvent en paix. Ils n’aspirent qu’à retrouver leur vie modeste, mais agréable et paisible.”

<sup>164</sup> <sup>164</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les habitants semblent très éloignés de notre société de consommation : les embarcations des pêcheurs ne sont pas motorisées, les véhicules sont rares...”

<sup>165</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “J’ai souvent rencontré des habitants démunis mais heureux, ou au moins plus heureux que beaucoup de mes compatriotes. Ils ne se plaignent jamais.”



(Scarpa, 2015, p.198).<sup>166</sup> This help is seen in all the books and similar way: soldiers always informed the lector that they got their information from the population.

Not being able to distinguish a Malian civilian from a terrorist is one of the main preoccupation of the soldiers. “The risk of friendly fire incidents is real” (Scarpa see Hanne, 2014, p.150).<sup>167</sup> Enemies and civilians are not easy to discern “the ability to **discern** in a thermal imager a nomadic civilian enemy, when both are in a pickup, is not given to everyone” (Verborg, 2015, p.19).<sup>168</sup> A Malian guide gave advice to General Barrera to recognize a civilian from an opponent: “the first [a native] look the stranger **in the eye and his feet are damaged**, unlike the terrorist with **neat feet** who tries to flee the area on a motorcycle or camel back **avoiding contact**” (2015, p.176),<sup>169</sup> here also gives elements of how the population in comparison with the adversary as “their damage feet”, signed of poverty next to “neat feet” for terrorists. The local population trustful and the opponent trying to get away.

As demonstrated before, in the first axis, the population is often described as worshipping the French soldiers. In addition, they are mostly present as victims of the opponent who: “imposes the return to the Middle Ages to **powerless people [...]**” (Barrera, 2015, p. 317)<sup>170</sup> and “dominates **inhabitants without defense** for months” (Gout, 2015, p.38).<sup>171</sup>

It was distinguished a difference between the description of “self” and “others”. The next section focused on how soldiers describe the different ways to kill the enemy and how they illustrate the so-called asymmetric warfare.

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<sup>166</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La population civile, une fois de plus, renseigne les forces franco-maliennes.”

<sup>167</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le risque de tirs fratricides est réel.”

<sup>168</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La capacité de discerner dans une caméra thermique un ennemi en civil nomade, quand tous les deux sont dans un pick-up, n'est pas donnée à tout le monde.”

<sup>169</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le premier [un autochtone] regarde l'étranger dans les yeux et ses pieds sont abîmés, à l'inverse du terroriste aux pieds soignés qui cherche à fuir la zone sur une moto ou à dos de dromadaire en évitant le contact.”

<sup>170</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Impose le retour au Moyen Age à des peuples impuissants.”

<sup>171</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “A dominer des habitants sans défense pendant des mois.”



## VIII. Destruction of the Enemy and Asymmetric War

This axis is devoted to the destruction of the enemy and the notion of asymmetric war. Thus, this section is divided into two main points. First, the destruction of the enemy, through books, the different terms that are used to refer to killing the opponent. French firepower and the use of a specific term and verbs as for result a dehumanization of adversaries. Second, French soldiers' notion of asymmetric war. It focuses on military jurisdiction binding the soldiers that obstruct their freedom of actions, the death relation's differentiation and the political and media pressure and the feeling that no mistake will be forgiven.

### A. Destruction of the Enemy

“Destruction” is the word most used by the soldiers to talk about fighting the enemy: “The will is clear and assumed: fetch the enemy in its sanctuary and **destroy** it” (Barrera, 2015, p.112).<sup>172</sup> He goes further: “we fear a **half-victory**: liberation **without destruction**” (2015, p.149).<sup>173</sup> For Lieutenant Michel A.: “the mission is clear: contact and destroy the enemy” (Scarpa, 2015, p.113).<sup>174</sup>

Through books (all of them), there are many descriptions of those “destructions”, such as Scarpa giving the record of the number of jihadists killed: “the section will have **destroyed** that day, on a large area like half a football field, **9 jihadists** [...]” (Scarpa see Hanne, 2014, p.151)<sup>175</sup> or Gout listing the destructions done during an operation:

*A series of **destructions** take place on the observers to the ground, a bivouac is **destroyed**, as well as a Pick up [...] Several objectives are **treated** until the ammunition depletion of the patrol (Gout, 2015, p.190).<sup>176</sup>*

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<sup>172</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La volonté est claire et assumée, aller chercher l’ennemi dans son sanctuaire et le détruire.”

<sup>173</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous craignons la demi-victoire : la libération sans la destruction.”

<sup>174</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La mission est claire : prendre contact puis détruire l’ennemi.”

<sup>175</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La section aura détruit ce jour-là, sur une zone grande comme un demi-terrain de football, 9 djihadistes, récupéré leur armement et saisi d’importantes quantités de vivres et munitions.”

<sup>176</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Une série de destructions s’opère sur des observateurs au sol” un bivouac est détruit, ainsi qu’un Pick up [...] plusieurs objectifs sont traités jusqu’à l’épuisement des munitions de la patrouille.”

The verb “treat” is regularly used to talk about the destruction of a car or the shooting of someone. “Treat” is a verb more commonly used to clean dust or getting rid of bugs. Here, in this situation, the use of this verb is relevant of the way the enemy is considered- not really as a human being. Another example is the use of verbs such as “crush”: “the new materials [...] have allowed to **crush** a determined enemy” (Barrera, 2015, p.260)<sup>177</sup> or “smash”: “The vehicles are **smashed** in a deluge of flames” (Barrera, 2015, p.275)<sup>178</sup> and “clean”: “Gao has been **cleaned**” (Barrera, 2015 p.319)<sup>179</sup> or as a legend to one of Scarpa’s photo: “REP **clean** the last resistance of Amettaï” (see Annex 29) (2015, p.156).<sup>180</sup> Clean usually is used in the sense of taking all the enemy’s weapons, ammunitions, food reserves etc. This is emphasized by the way in which they label them as “**pests** that destroy but never build” (Barrera, 2015, p.404).<sup>181</sup> Another word that regularly appears is “**neutralize**”, instead of saying that the opponent has been killed: “perfect shot, 4 jihadists **neutralized**” (Sergent Roopea T. see Scarpa, 2015, p.131).<sup>182</sup>

“Kill box” is another term used to refer to some zones where they can open fire, Verborg defines it as: “[The general staff gave us permission to open fire because the area is considered as a kill box.] In legal terms, everything inside it is enemy and **must be destroyed**. This is our **hunting zone**” (Verborg, 2015, pp.190-191).<sup>183</sup> As “Hunting zone”, many terms used by soldiers to talk about fighting and killing the enemy, come from the vocabulary of hunting. Hunting zone is usually used to refer to the place where to enemy can be found. The use of the word “hunt” expresses a similar image: “**stalking** operations were dense” (Prémonville see Hanne, 2014, p.175)<sup>184</sup> or to express that soldiers obtained the authorization to go in a zone where assumed terrorists were: “the **hunt** is asked and obtained” (Scarpa, 2015, p.125).<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, Scarpa comments one of his pictures representing three armed soldiers, in a village by “after violent combats of the

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<sup>177</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les nouveaux matériels [...] ont permis d’écraser un ennemi décidé.”

<sup>178</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les véhicules sont pulvérisés dans un déluge de flammes.”

<sup>179</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Gao a été nettoyé.”

<sup>180</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le REP nettoie les dernières poches de résistance d’Amettai.”

<sup>181</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Des nuisibles qui détruisent et ne construisent rien.”

<sup>182</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Tir parfaitement en place, 4 djihadistes neutralisés. ”

<sup>183</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ [L’état-major nous a donné l’autorisation d’ouvrir le feu car la zone est considérée comme une *kill box*.] En termes juridiques, tout ce qui est à l’intérieur est ennemi et doit être détruit. C’est notre zone de chasse”.

<sup>184</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les opérations de traque étaient denses.”

<sup>185</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La chasse est demandée et obtenue.”

last weeks in the region, legionnaires **track** jihadists within villages” (see Annex 30) (2015, pp.200-201).<sup>186</sup>

Gout explains the helicopters’ modus operandi, which appears to look like a chase, and the physiological effect that it produces on jihadists:

*Beyond the actual effects on the jihadists, the interventions of the helicopters have **physiological effects on them**. Most of the time, they do not see our machines and suffer great violence of firing, without being **able to anticipate*** (2015, p.189).<sup>187</sup>

Those expressions such as “treat”, “clean”, “destroy”- that usually apply for objects and not for people, are a way to avoid the reality of killing people. As the enemy does not have a name nor a face, it is a way to avoid that once in front of it, this enemy is a person. It is a way to decriminalize their actions. However, Scarpa stresses on the soldiers’ precision, during air raids, which impresses the villagers: “in the center of the village, soldiers can see the stigmata of the destruction carried out during the air strikes and realize **their accuracy has bluffed the population**” (2015, p.35).<sup>188</sup>

This research of legitimization is present in the pictures inside of the books such as Schupp’s one, from Hanne’s book, showing a sign where it is written “Timbuktu, the gate of Sharia’s application, welcomes you” (see Annex 31)<sup>189</sup> and as a legend from the author under this photo: “violent fighting was necessary to liberate the towns and villages from the fury of Islamism” (2014, pp.124-125).<sup>190</sup>

Another important aspect is the “techno-fetishism”, exemplified in Pomarède’s article (2016) can also be reported in French soldiers’ books. There are many technical descriptions of weapons or helicopters:

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<sup>186</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Après les violents combats des semaines passées dans la région, les Légionnaires traquent les djihadistes dans les villages.”

<sup>187</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ [Au-delà des effets réels sur les djihadistes, les interventions des hélicoptères ont des effets physiologiques sur eux. La plupart du temps, ils ne voient pas nos machines et subissent les feux d’une grande violence, sans pouvoir anticiper.”

<sup>188</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Dans le centre du village, les soldats peuvent constater les stigmates des destructions opérées lors des frappes aériennes et se rendre compte de leur précision qui a bluffé la population.”

<sup>189</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Tombouctou, la porte de l’application de la charia vous souhaite la bienvenue.”

<sup>190</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Des combats violents ont été nécessaires pour libérer les villes et villages de la fureur de l’islamisme.”

*A saturation shot is the opposite of precise shots [...]. The idea consists in **pouring a flood of shells on the zone**. For that we have the **Puma Pirate**. A mythical weapon in the ALAT,<sup>191</sup> well known in Africa for having **calmed some bellicose ardours** on many occasions with its gun of twenty millimetres and its **eight hundred incendiary explosive shells** (Verborg, 2015, p.200).<sup>192</sup>*

Verborg distinguishes two types of shots: saturation and precise ones. He also gives details on the Puma Pirate, a weapon that has “calmed some bellicose ardours”. Gout describes one of the helicopters and qualified it as: “the Tiger is a helicopter of combat, manufactured to resist the hazards of the battlefield, it demonstrated its **remarkable reliability** in degraded conditions” (2015, p.167).<sup>193</sup> Scarpa also gave great descriptions of trucks: “the truck equipped with an artillery system (Caesar) [...] it delivers an accurate fire up to 40 kilometres, at the impressive rate of **6 shots per minute**” (2015, p.145);<sup>194</sup> **helicopters**: “the gazelle is a light, versatile helicopter [...] it can reach a **speed** of 240 km/h.” (2015, p.106)<sup>195</sup> and **tanks** : “infantry vehicles are commonly armed with a 12.7 m/m NATO calibre machine gun, other models with a 7.62 m/m NATO calibre circular on the roof” (2015, p.88).<sup>196</sup> In Hanne’s interviews, soldiers describe their weapons as “a MILAN anti-tank missile north of the cut and [its] 81mm mortars on the Niger River bank” (Colonel Gèze see Hanne, 20114, p.147).<sup>197</sup>

## **B. Asymmetric War**

“The fighting will take an asymmetrical turn against **opponents ready for the worst ends**” (Scarpa, 2015, p.86).<sup>198</sup> Asymmetric war is a term used by soldiers through their books to describe that French soldiers and the “enemy” are not bind by the same rules, beliefs or morale values. This can be seen by the use of violence, the relation with death,

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<sup>191</sup> Aviation légère de l'Armée de terre.

<sup>192</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un tir de saturation, c'est l'inverse des tirs précis [...]. L'idée consiste à déverser un déluge d'obus sur la zone. Pour cela nous disposons du Puma Pirate. Une arme mythique dans l'ALAT, bien connue en Afrique pour avoir calmé quelques ardeurs belliqueuses en de nombreuses occasions avec son canon de vingt millimètres et ses huit cents obus explosifs incendiaires.”

<sup>193</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le Tigre est un hélicoptère de combat, fabriqué pour résister aux aléas du champ de bataille, il a démontré sa remarquable fiabilité dans des conditions dégradées.”

<sup>194</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le camion équipé d'un système d'artillerie (Caesar) [...] il délivre un feu précis jusqu'à 40 kilomètres, à la cadence impressionnante de 6 coups par minutes. ”

<sup>195</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La gazelle est un hélicoptère léger, polyvalent [...] elle peut atteindre une vitesse de 240 km/h.”

<sup>196</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les véhicules d'infanterie sont couramment armés d'une mitrailleuse de calibre 12,7 m/m OTAN, les autres modèles d'un calibre 7,62 m/m OTAN en circulaire sur le toit.”

<sup>197</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Un missiles anti-char MILAN au nord de la coupure et [ses] mortiers de 81mm sur la rive au fleuve du Niger.”

<sup>198</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les combats vont prendre un tour asymétrique face à des adversaires prêts aux pires extrémités.”

or decision-making. French soldiers must take into account the law, political decisions and media reports. General De Saint-Quentin recapitulates this definition:

*[Being] against an asymmetrical adversary who does not share our **human values**, or the consequent legal **referential**, complicates the use of force. However, any mistake in this area, in addition to human consequences, has an immediate impact on the **legitimacy** of the action [...]* (Hanne, 2014, p.132).<sup>199</sup>

For Barrera it is a cowards' war': "this asymmetric war made up of ambush kamikazes, low blows, it is a **war of cowards**" (2015, p.48).<sup>200</sup>

## 1. Military Jurisdiction

Military jurisdiction is an important aspect of this asymmetric war. Verborg is the one who expresses most on this topic. It is one of his book's main points, so this part will mostly be illustrated from his book. French soldiers must respect military jurisdiction, they are not allowed to do whatever they want on the field. As it is going to be detailed in this section, some soldiers find it constraining and unbalancing the fight. In the books, soldiers notice that this jurisdiction is not binding for the opponent who, knowing this, uses this advantage against them:

*Jihadists frequently **use women and children** in vehicles to get around. They know that a **Western soldier refrains from opening fire** on people who do not present an immediate danger to their lives.* (Gout, 2015, p.200).<sup>201</sup>

Barrera outlines that "tactical orders will always be drafted with the constant concern of their compliance with the law" (2015, p.168).<sup>202</sup> Verborg explains how he felt about the change of the war jurisdiction in France:

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<sup>199</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Maitriser la force [...] contre un adversaire asymétrique ne partageant pas nos valeurs humaines, ni le référentiel légal qui en découle, complique l'emploi de la force. Or toute erreur dans ce domaine, outre ses conséquences humaines, a un impact immédiat sur la légitimité de l'action fragilisant les efforts entrepris par ailleurs pour résoudre une crise."

<sup>200</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Cette guerre asymétrique faite de kamikazes, d'embuscades, de mauvais coups, est une guerre de lâches."

<sup>201</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Les djihadistes utilisent fréquemment femmes et enfants dans les véhicules pour se déplacer. Ils savent qu'un soldat occidental s'interdit d'ouvrir le feu sur des personnes qui ne présentent pas un danger immédiat pour leur vie."

<sup>202</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Les ordres tactiques seront toujours rédigés avec le souci constant de leur conformité au droit."

*French soldiers now fall within civil and international justice... **This is not the case for all countries...** This change, I felt it as a passage from the "responsible presumed innocent" to the "**responsible necessarily guilty**" (Verborg, 2015, pp.186-187)<sup>203</sup>*

Verborg here already shows his disagreement with this change that applies for France but not for all. It makes him feel guilty each time a responsibility must be taken. He demonstrates it even more his disagreement in the following:

*Our generation can testify that war has **its realities that the law ignores**. It sometimes puts us in front of immediate decisions on which depend our men's life and death... The specter of war has realities that do not have a law. We kill and die there... it's a fact not a law (Verborg, 2015, p.187).<sup>204</sup>*

The law does not consider the reality of war. Verborg repetitively stresses that the enemy uses its knowledge of democratic rules against them [French soldiers]: "[the enemy] knows perfectly democratic armies' rules of engagement and adapt itself to it" (Verborg, 2015, p.188).<sup>205</sup> According to those rules, soldiers can only open fire if the enemy is identified with weapons and without any civilians. For Verborg this implies that:

*You don't shoot a man that is **hands up**, even if you saw him use his weapons a few seconds ago against you, **among civilians**, even less. It is the law that imposes that to us, even if your comrade has fallen by your side! (Verbord, 2015, p.192).<sup>206</sup>*

Verborg explicitly affirms being against this law and has regrets to have no liberty to shoot whenever he wants- on unarmed persons or risking civilians' lives- and he expresses a feeling of injustice. Because of this law, "great opportunities" are missed:

*We see a pickup with seventeen people on board, the details of the outfits show us that they are not local people. [...] We saw at the last moment a **woman and two children** unveiling at the back of the vehicle... There is **no apparent weaponry** and we could not shoot. The crews are bitter and consider that we have missed a **great opportunity**. [...] We will have to undergo the comments of those who, of course,*

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<sup>203</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Le soldat français relève aujourd'hui d'une justice civile et internationale [...] ce n'est pas le cas pour tous les pays [...]. Ce changement de portage, je l'ai ressenti comme un passage du « responsable présumé innocent » au « responsable forcément coupable »."

<sup>204</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Notre génération peut témoigner que la guerre a ses réalités que la loi ignore. Elle nous met parfois devant des décisions immédiates dont dépendent la vie et la mort de nos hommes [...] Le spectre de la guerre a des réalités qui n'ont pas de loi. On y tue et on y meurt ... c'est un fait pas une loi."

<sup>205</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Il connaît parfaitement les règles d'engagement des armées "démocratiques" et s'adapte."

<sup>206</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "On ne tire pas sur un homme les mains en l'air, même si vous l'avez vu employer son arme quelques secondes plus tôt contre vous, et encore moins quand il est au milieu de civils. C'est la loi qui nous l'impose, même si votre camarade est tombé à vos côtés !"



would **not hesitate** for a second. And the facts seem to make them right. (Verborg, 2015, p.197).<sup>207</sup>

This excerpt is another example of what was explained before. They might have let a group of terrorists go, that is the great missed opportunity. Through those excerpts it can be identified that the only goal of Verborg is to “destroy” the enemy, no matter what. This quote “others would not have hesitated” shows that he considers himself as one of the soldiers who contain themselves, and it also shows that other soldiers share his feelings and thoughts about the law. The fact that it was a really great opportunity can be questioned, as for the presence of civilian and unarmed persons. He does not always respect the law, he relates that sometimes he must take the risk even if there is a chance that the law does not apply and be in trouble: “I order to **shoot willy-nilly** in a vast area that perhaps **hosts villagers** [...] But the gamble is paying off, there are too **many lives at stake on the ground**” (Verborg, 2015, pp.200-201).<sup>208</sup> He legitimizes his actions by the purpose of saving lives, but it is contradictory with the fact that there might be civilians in this area. There is a clear difference of grief between a French life lost and a civilian life lost. Gout nuances this position, he also explains that they are not allowed to open fire “on a vehicle or a person, if they **are not certain to face a threat**” (2015, p.68)<sup>209</sup> and that is not an easy task. However, Gout affirms that they rather:

*Deliberately let go possible jihadists if we are not sure they represent a threat. It is being sure to **avoid collateral damage**, which effects would be disastrous for us, for the whole force and of course **at political level** (2015, p.68).<sup>210</sup>*

Gout does not complain about the rule even if the political pressure that they felt is strong. He adds that: “It is **clear** that **no destruction** can be decided without the certainty that we are involved in a target that opposes our forces” (2015, p.148).<sup>211</sup> For Gout, there

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<sup>207</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous voyons un pick-up avec dix-sept personnes à bord, le détail des tenues nous montre que ce ne sont pas des locaux. [...] Nous avons vu au dernier moment une femme et deux enfants se dévoiler à l’arrière du véhicule [...] Il n’y a pas d’armement apparent et nous n’avons pas pu tirer. Les équipages sont amers et considèrent que nous avons laissé passer une belle occasion. [...] Il va falloir subir les commentaires de ceux qui, évidemment, n’auraient pas hésité une seconde. Et les faits semblent leur donner raison.”

<sup>208</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “J’ordonne de tirer à l’aveugle dans une vaste zone où s’abritent peut-être des villageois [...] mais le jeu en vaut la chandelle, trop de vies sont en jeu au sol.”

<sup>209</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous ne pourrions pas ouvrir le feu sur un véhicule ou sur une personne sans être certains d’être face à une menace armée.”

<sup>210</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Laisser partir délibérément d’éventuels djihadistes si nous ne sommes pas assurés de la menace qu’ils représentent. C’est la certitude d’éviter des dommages collatéraux, dont les effets seraient désastreux pour nous, pour l’ensemble de la force et bien entendu au niveau politique.”

<sup>211</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Il est évident qu’aucune destruction ne peut être décidée sans la certitude que nous intervenons sur une cible qui s’oppose à nos forces.”

is no question about the rule, it is obvious and clear not to attempt any “destruction” if there is no certainty about who is in front/ who the target is.

International rules are an obstacle for logistics: “regarding ammunition, particular **international rules** require **particular constraints** in terms of supply times. Requests must be made at least 8 weeks in advance [...]” (Prénomville see Hanne, 2014, p.178).<sup>212</sup>

## 2. Relation with Death

This asymmetric war is also felt by soldiers as far as the relation to death is concerned. For them, jihadists are not scared to die and are even looking forward to dying as martyrs. The difference of relation with death is perceived by the soldiers as dangerous, as the enemy would “rather die than submit” (Scarpa see Hanne, 2014, p.149).<sup>213</sup> Gout explains this difference of perception:

*We must not forget that we do not have the same relationship to death as our enemies. The jihadists are persuaded **to die as martyrs**, while my men fulfill a mission where they must **avoid death** [...] (2015, p.143).<sup>214</sup>*

Barrera accentuates: “they are jihadists and **life doesn’t matter** to them” (2015, p.168).<sup>215</sup> Affirming this, it is a way to decriminalize soldiers’ action against their opponents. It causes uncertainty, fear and prudence to approach them: “At any moment, they can cause losses in our ranks, it is impossible to approach them without risking triggering **explosive charges**” (Gout, 2015, p.170).<sup>216</sup> Actually “suicide bombs” are frequently used by jihadists as Colonel A. Le Gal specifies that some enemies fight with explosives on them and use it at the very last moment:

*One of the characteristics of the fighting in Mali is the massive presence of terrorists among the fighters [...] equipped with a **belt of explosives**.... [They] are not used only as “suicide bombers” [...] **but they fight like their comrades** [...] and in fine,*

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<sup>212</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Concernant les munitions, des règles internationales particulières supposent des contraintes particulières en termes de délais d’approvisionnement. Les demandes doivent être faites au moins 8 semaines à l’avance [...]”

<sup>213</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Préférant mourir sur place plutôt que de se rendre.”

<sup>214</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Nous ne devons pas oublier que nous n’avons pas le même rapport à la mort que nos ennemis. Les djihadistes sont persuadés de mourir en martyrs, mes hommes eux remplissent une mission où ils doivent éviter la mort, sans jamais lâcher le moindre espace à l’adversaire.”

<sup>215</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Ce sont des djihadistes et la vie ne compte pas pour eux.”

<sup>216</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “A tout instant, ils peuvent provoquer des pertes dans nos rangs, il est impossible de les approcher sans risquer le déclenchement de charges explosives.”

*in the face of a goal of **opportunity or not to fall into the hands** of their opponents, they try to use those explosives and sacrifice themselves to cause maximum losses (Hanne, 2014, p.161).<sup>217</sup>*

Soldiers cannot identify which ones have explosives on them. Barrera argues that it is due to their relation to death and nuances by claiming that most of suicide bombers are forced to do so:

*Equipped with explosive charges, they [terrorists] were trying to blow themselves up in the middle of our lines... These modes of action are those of the Islamist terrorists who **promise paradise to the sacrificed and often forced combatants** (Barrera, 2015, p.296).<sup>218</sup>*

### 3. Political and Media Pressures

Political and media pressures are also seen as part of the asymmetric war for the soldiers. If they do a mistake, it can quickly be spread by the media and delegitimize the intervention:

*In a hyper-mediatized society, information is at the **heart of any politico-military action**. Operational communication has become an **indispensable actor** for military success. A tactical victory can **be spoilt by a media defeat** (Scarpa, 2015, p.52).<sup>219</sup>*

Political pressure is very strong too, Paris expects the soldiers to be fast and to prevent any damage to France's image.

*In a few days we receive the visit of the Minister of Defense, Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, and the President of the National Assembly, Mr. Claude Bartolone. [...] These visits are not looking good if we have a **record with civilian casualties** that the **press will not miss to report** (Verborg, 2015, p.192).<sup>220</sup>*

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<sup>217</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : "Il faut noter qu'une des caractéristiques des combats au Mali est la présence massive parmi les combattants terroristes à pied lors des attaques de localités de personnels équipés de ceinture d'explosifs [...]. Ils ne sont pas d'emblée uniquement comme « suicide bombers » [...] mais ils combattent comme leurs camarades les armes à la main et in fine, face à un objectif d'opportunité ou pour ne pas tomber entre les mains de leurs adversaires, ils essaient d'utiliser ces explosifs en se sacrifiant pour causer un maximum de pertes."

<sup>218</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : "Equipés de charges explosives, ils [les terroristes] cherchaient à se faire exploser au milieu de nos lignes [...]. Ces modes d'actions sont ceux des terroristes islamistes qui promettent le paradis aux combattants sacrifiés et souvent contraints."

<sup>219</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : "Dans une société hypermédiatisée, l'information est au cœur de toute action politico-militaire. La communication opérationnelle est devenue un acteur absolument indispensable à la réussite militaire. Une victoire tactique peut être gâchée par une défaite médiatique."

<sup>220</sup> Trans. V. Mattered, original : "Dans quelques jours nous recevrons la visite du ministre de la Défense, monsieur Jean-Yves Le Drian, puis celle du président de l'Assemblée nationale, monsieur Claude Bartolone. [...] Ces visites s'annoncent sous les pires auspices si nous revenons avec un bilan comportant des pertes civiles, ce qui ne manquera pas d'être relaté par la presse."

The media pressure is always there, every error can end up on the News. For example, when a mechanic issue happens, soldiers are scared that enemies take action at that moment and fear not being able to react. The media could spread the information, and it would damage the French soldiers' image: "[...] with this puncture, we're not far from the catastrophe. Each take-off or landing is a delicate phase that could allow our enemy **to lead an action** with a very **strong media impact**" (Gout, 2015, p.147).<sup>221</sup> During the take-off and landing mechanical problems are more likely to happen. Scarpa calls it "media war": "Hands cut, violence against women and children, **media destruction** of the emblematic mausoleums of Timbuktu... Media warfare started in Mali" (Scarpa, 2015, p.17),<sup>222</sup> media is used by the enemy and have a great impact. Barrera stresses the fact that the enemy can do whatever they want, but French soldiers must have a remarkable behavior because no mistake will be forgiven:

*We must remain exemplary in the treatment of prisoners and injured, and we will be. The terrorists can do anything, but on the **contrary**, we know that **nothing will be forgiven to us**, as to our Malian comrades* (Barrera, 2015, p.168).<sup>223</sup>

Here, it stresses the asymmetric treatment of the two armies; one can make war without any rule next to other that is bind by national and international ones. Through books, soldiers talk about another type of pressure such as attacking a specific city or finishing the intervention fast. To exemplify Scarpa witnesses that President Hollande wanted to strike hard so French troops had to take two cities at the same time: "But, since the president decides to **strike a great blow**, it will no longer be one, but **two simultaneous objectives**: Gao and Timbuktu" (2015, p.42).<sup>224</sup> Barrera reported: "the exchanges with Paris and Bamako make us understand that **political pressure is very strong to attack** and resume fighting in the valley of the Amettaï".<sup>225</sup> The latter can be illustrated by Verborg: "The progression is **not fast enough** for Paris, which is impatient"

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<sup>221</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "[...] Avec cette crevaisson, nous ne sommes pas loin de la catastrophe. Chaque décollage ou atterrissage est une phase délicate qui pourrait permettre à notre ennemi de mener une action à l'impact médiatique très fort."

<sup>222</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Mains tranchées, violence envers des femmes et des enfants, destructions médiatisées des emblématiques mausolées de Tombouctou... La guerre médiatique a débuté au Mali."

<sup>223</sup>Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Il faut rester exemplaires dans le traitement des prisonniers et des blessés et nous le serons. Les terroristes se permettent tout, mais a contrario, nous savons que rien ne nous sera pardonné, à nous comme à nos camarades maliens."

<sup>224</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Mais, puisque le président décide de frapper un grand coup, ce ne sera plus un, mais deux objectifs simultanés : Gao et Tombouctou."

<sup>225</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Les échanges entre Paris et Bamako nous font comprendre que la pression politique est très forte pour attaquer et reprendre les combats dans la vallée de l'Atettaï."

(2015, p.174).<sup>226</sup> A successful intervention is a rapid one and being rapid implies less risks of damaging France's image. A window of opportunity is open, and Paris knows that it will not last: "The pressure is strong because the media and political window closes in a month. **Paris is particularly impatient**: a quick assessment is wanted." (Verborg, 2015, p.196).<sup>227</sup> Moreover, Gout says that he and his soldiers are starting to get used to this pressure: "At every call, Paris shows itself more and more pressing. It will be so until the capture of Timbuktu and we'll soon admit it by demonstrating **less and less surprise**" (2015, p.66).<sup>228</sup>

In those three sections, it was seen how the soldiers present themselves as heroes, how they describe others, their weapons, the different ways to eliminate the enemy and the asymmetrical war. The last section of this part will try review the hypotheses that we have raise above given of empirical content.

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<sup>226</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "Le rythme de progression n'est pas assez rapide pour Paris, qui s'impatiente."

<sup>227</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "La pression est forte car la fenêtre médiatique et politique se referme dans un mois. Paris s'impatience particulièrement : il faut un bilan vite."

<sup>228</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : "A chaque appel, Paris se montre de plus en plus pressant. Il en sera ainsi jusqu'à la prise de Tombouctou et nous l'admettrons bientôt en manifestant de moins en moins de surprise."



## **IX. Hypotheses Review**

The aim of this section is to elaborate on the hypothesis raised in the first part of the thesis and whether or not it has been confirmed by the empirical material provided by the books. The three hypotheses are: the legitimization of the intervention, the reinforcement of the North/South cliché and the justification and legitimization of French violence.

### **A. Legitimization of the Intervention**

As it was observed in the literature review, popular culture is a tool to legitimize actions of the State, including foreign interventions (Weldes, 1999; Weldes and Rowley 2015, Pomarède, 2016). This qualitative analysis of French soldiers' books leads to a confirmation of this assumption. Two main aspects stand out to legitimize the intervention.

On one hand, the intervention is justified through the population's will. This is illustrated by a few elements. First, the population welcomes the French soldiers as liberators (Axe 1, section A). This is exemplified by celebrations of their arrival, scenes of a cheering crowd, dancing, waving French flags, calling babies by the name of French soldiers, giving them gifts, thanking them and many other examples that are illustrated above (Axe 1, section A). Second, the help and information about jihadists provided by villagers (Axe 2, section D). It implicitly demonstrates that the local population does not agree with jihadists and that they want them out of their cities. Third, the population's fear of jihadism expansion in Mali and the feelings of security provided (Axe 1, section A). Fourth, the population's representation as powerless (Axe 2, section D) and the victim of the violence of merciless jihadists. (Axe 2, section C).

On the other hand, this intervention is presented by the soldiers as necessary. First, through the representation of the country as destroyed by jihadists: cities are empty, there is no more trade, no tourists, schools are closed, and roads look like battlefields (Axe 2, section A). Second, the idea that no one can handle this situation except the French: the government is not controlling the country (Axe 1, section A), the Malian army is inefficient and seems to rely on "the fire power" of the French army (Axe 2, section B) and the French soldiers qualify themselves as the best army and as the only authority figure (Axe 1, section C). Besides, without the French presence, terrorism is more likely

to come back (Axe 1, section A). Third, the imposition of Islam within the country (Axe 1, section A; Axe 2 section A & B).

## **B. Reinforcing North/South Cliché**

Throughout the books, as it was observed in the axes, the soldiers gave a certain representation of Mali, as well as its armies and its population. To verify our second hypothesis, we will look at the characteristics given by the soldiers and compare with those given by Hansen (2016) and Doty (1993). Hansen demonstrates that States are defined by contrasting the differences between what is inside and outside of the State. For example, the “outside” is defined by anarchy, differences, power, suspicion, repetition, capabilities and war. While, the “inside” is defined by order, common, reason, trust, progress, law and peace (Figure 2). These join the North/South’s characteristics given by Doty (1993): the level of order, development, modernity, economy, military aptitude. To confirm this hypothesis, we are going to see if the Third World’s clichés correspond with the French representation of Mali, its army and its population.

First, the war/peace opposition is, by the nature of the situation, present and exemplified in many statements of books and within the axes.

Secondly, developing/developed differentiation is illustrated by the description of the country: bad road conditions, “nothing works” properly, no logistic, next to the other African capital cities Bamako is under developed. (Axis 2, section A). It is linked to the order/disorder ‘s opposition: soldiers represent Mali as chaotic, i.e., tanks in the middle of roads (Axis 2, section A) and the country is beyond the control of the government (Axis 1, section A and Axis 2, section A, B & C).

Thirdly, the contrast between progress and repetition, illustrated perfectly with Gout’s description of Timbuktu, qualifying the city as stuck in the past and that “nothing has changed for centuries” (Gout, 2015, p.114), (Axis 2, section A). In addition, the Malian society is represented as traditional (Axis 1 section A, Axis 2 section A & D): the population is represented as simple, willing a modest life (Axis 2, section D), wearing traditional and colorful clothes, riding horses, the use of plates to make music ... (Axis 1, section A).



The last point is on aptitudes, and more particularly the aptitude of soldiers. While, the French army is described as the best army (Axis 1, section C), the Malian army is ineffective, it has not succeeded in repelling the terrorist invasion (Axis 2, section B). The Malian armed forces [FAM] are courageous, but they need the support of the French.

### **C. Violence's legitimization and Justification**

The French soldiers' use of violence against the enemy is the last assumption of this research. Some elements distinguishes through the axes confirm this assumption.

First, the "Good/Evil" opposition. Good is represented by French soldiers: brave, taking care of children, reassuring the population... (Axis 1, section A & C). They are also good fathers and husbands (Axis 1, section B.1). While, the enemy is violent, merciless, without any attachment to life, using children and woman to protect itself (Axis 2, section C). The opponent is represented as the incarnation of evil, and it seems to justify that "good" tries to stop it.

Second, in the representation of the enemy (Axis 2, section C), usually the adversary does not have a face or a name. Sometimes, it is just a number. The words used to kill the opponent are also very relevant (Axe 3, section A). As Pomarède (2016) also observes, the enemy is no longer a human being, but a target. Taking away their humanity allows for an override of moral ethics that is linked to the death of an individual (Olsson, 2013). A similar phenomena happens with weapon descriptions, it depoliticizes violence and makes is so that "firepower" seems more technical and without the potential to kill (Axis 3, Axe A).

Third, the relation with death is important. As Buttler (2009) demonstrated in her work about grievance, a difference in grief can be observed between the French soldiers (Axis 1, section B.3) and the enemy (Axis 3, section A and section B.2). The death of a French soldier provokes strong emotion, long descriptions, ceremonies and testimonies (Axis 1, section B.3). The death of the enemy is desired, its life is not legitimate (Axis 3, section A). Another important point is that the enemy is presented as not bringing any

importance to life, whether it be to its own, its allies, or to its own family. It legitimizes the use of violence against the enemy.

The last point, it is that French soldiers use lawful violence, even if sometimes it is a constraint. While, opponents seem to have no obligations and no rules to follow (Axis 3, section B.1).

This section concludes the second part of this research. It has verified the hypotheses raised by this thesis. The next and last part of this research is devoted on bringing this research further by highlighting the limits and making some recommendations. This last part ends with the conclusion of our research and take up the important points that have been demonstrated in this work.

# PART III: Recommendations and Conclusion

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## X. A larger Research

As already mentioned above, this research could be part of a larger one. More axes could have been detailed, other sources could have been taken into account or a comparison could have been made with other soldiers' writings.

### A. Axes

This thesis focuses on three main axes, however it is not an exhaustive list of the many aspects which could have been interesting to study. For example, the desire to go on a mission is strongly felt in books as “for a soldier, beyond the risk incurred, a departure is a **professional achievement**, the purpose of the profession” (Barrera, 2015 p.25),<sup>229</sup> and there is even a kind of “happiness” expressed:

*I announce straight away that Lieutenant-Colonel Pierre Verborg will be my deputy. He shows a **radiant face**, while his comrades are **disappointed** [...] any soldier hopes to live this type of mission (Gout, 2015, p.28);<sup>230</sup>*

The beneficial impact of the intervention such as new political election:

*On 11 August 2013, seven months after the day the Serval operation started, Malians elected a new **President of the Republic under conditions of participation and organisation** that were **particularly satisfactory** in the opinion of all observers (General de Saint-Quentin, see Hanne, 2014, p.127).<sup>231</sup>*

The promotion of military ranks and structures:

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<sup>229</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Pour un militaire, au-delà du risque encouru, un départ est un accomplissement professionnel, la finalité du métier. ”

<sup>230</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “ J'annonce d'entrée que le lieutenant-colonel Pierre Verborg sera mon adjoint. Il affiche un visage radieux, alors que ses camarades sont déçus [...] tout soldat espère vivre ce type de mission.”

<sup>231</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le 11 août 2013, soit sept mois jour pour jour après le déclenchement de l'opération serval, les Maliens élisaient un nouveau président de la République dans des conditions de participation et d'organisation particulièrement satisfaisantes de l'avis de tous les observateurs.”

*The selection is strict, annual ratings. A strong characteristic of our military profession, you must climb all levels to reach higher responsibilities. Like any other brigadiers in the land forces, I alternated **troop time, school training and staff responsibility time** before commanding; or references to past interventions* (Barrera, 2015, p.23).<sup>232</sup>

The reference to past interventions: “the sand of Gao is the opposite of the snows of Germany, the jihadists are light years away from the armoured divisions of the Warsaw Pact [...]” (Barrera, 2015, p.316),<sup>233</sup> however the most significant example is in Verborg’s book as it describes not only Mali’s intervention but also the one in Libya and on Ivory Coast.

In addition, Sèbe (2009) states one of promoting campaign is the rewards received by the explorer, such as René Caillié, colonial heroes received numerous rewards by government, organizations, official communication etc. French soldiers in some similar ways received medals, military honours and they were part of the 14 July military parade. An axis could have been dedicated only on those rewards but that is not the case of this research. For instance, Scarpa’s epilogue is dedicated to “honours and memory” and he mentions at the end of his book all “units [...] that were cited with the award of the Military Valour Cross for their actions within the Serval Brigade” (2015, p.241).<sup>234</sup>

## **B. Sources**

Our research is focused on soldiers’ books and on how those books are staging French soldiers as heroes, which representation of the “others” it gives and how the concept of asymmetric war is defined by the soldiers. However, this thesis could have taken many other sources.

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<sup>232</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “La sélection est sévère, les notations annuelles. Particularité forte de notre métier militaire, il faut avoir gravi tous les échelons pour accéder aux responsabilités supérieures. Comme tous les autres brigadiers des forces terrestres, j’ai alterné temps de troupe, formations en écoles et un temps de responsabilité état-major avant de commander.”

<sup>233</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Le sable de Gao est à l’opposé des neiges d’Allemagne, les djihadistes à des années-lumière des divisions blindées du pacte de Varsovie [...]”

<sup>234</sup> Trans. V. Matteredne, original : “Les unités suivantes ont été citées avec attribution de la croix de la Valeur militaire au titre de leurs actions au sein de la Brigade Serval.”

It was decided to only focus on Soldiers' books for the sake of efficiency. As said above, Sèbe (2009) considers three other sources of promotion: rewards, autobiography, media, and movies. Rewards, as it detailed previously, could have been an axis on its own.

Second, autobiography, this research concentrates its attention only on French soldiers' commercial books on the 2013's Mali intervention. Thus, it gives their point of views and their representation. In a larger or further research, a same kind of work could be done for the Malian soldiers (through books if there are or interviews).

Third, media, in a larger research going more in details on how media feature soldiers and their intervention, is relevant and interesting a lot of documentaries, newspapers' articles and radio and TV programs were dedicated to the French intervention in Mali, in 2013. During and after the intervention period many newspapers' articles were devoted to describing, nearly day by day the intervention. A quick research on the website Le Monde, a famous French newspaper, with the key words "operation Serval", as a filter the period between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 to 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013,<sup>235</sup> gives 11 pages of answers, thus, over 110 press articles (Le Monde, 2018). A similar research could have been made for radio programs. For example, one year after the intervention, FranceInter has published series of radio podcast about the intervention (Sauzeau, 2014).<sup>236</sup> Documentaries, such as "Opération Serval, une brigade au combat",<sup>237</sup> "Serval, quand l'armée filme la guerre"<sup>238</sup> or "Mali: les secrets d'une guerre",<sup>239</sup> are another relevant sources, that could have been a preview of the way Mali is presented through visual and language.

Fourth, movies play a role in this promotion and it could be part of this research including movies such as 'Timbuktu' by Abderrahmane Sissako, a Mauritanian filmmaker and producer (Timbuktu, 2014). The movie could integrate this research because it gives a specific vision of Mali. Even though, the action takes place between the summer of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, before the French intervention. It shows how Salafist groups

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<sup>235</sup> To access to the result of this research: [https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?keywords=serval&page\\_num=1&operator=and&exclude\\_keywords=&qt=recherche\\_texte\\_titre&author=&period=custom\\_date&start\\_day=01&start\\_month=01&start\\_year=2013&end\\_day=20&end\\_month=04&end\\_year=2013&sort=desc](https://www.lemonde.fr/recherche/?keywords=serval&page_num=1&operator=and&exclude_keywords=&qt=recherche_texte_titre&author=&period=custom_date&start_day=01&start_month=01&start_year=2013&end_day=20&end_month=04&end_year=2013&sort=desc)

<sup>236</sup> To access to the podcast: <https://www.franceinter.fr/monde/operation-serval-au-mali-un-apres>

<sup>237</sup> Produced by Defense Communication and Production Establishment (ECPAD), this production looks back at the first four months of operations in Mali in January 2013.

<sup>238</sup> Produced by Kuiv Company, broadcast on the program "Envoyé special" and executed by Martin Blanchard.

<sup>239</sup> Produced by Brainstock, broadcast on the program "cellule de crise".

are controlling Timbuktu: imposing the Sharia by using violence (stoning to death, whipping or cutting members), forbidding any leisure activities such as soccer or music, forcing woman to cover their hair and hands... It gives a certain type of representation that could fit in the axes. For the second axis: “representation of others”, the movie gives many examples. Jihadists are extremely violent, merciless, not respecting Islam – imam recalls to them Islam's values... The population is represented as combative, rebellious against the jihadists: woman refusing to wear gloves, kids playing soccer without ball or youths listening to music. The film is shot in Oualata, Mauritania and not in Timbuktu, Mali.

### **C. Going Further: Comparison with (Other) Soldiers' Narratives**

Soldiers around the world have written books on military interventions. Comparing what those books expose with this research could be a way to bring this research further. As presented in the literature review, in the first part, Christophe Wasinski (2015) has done a similar work and studied the British soldiers' books about their intervention in Afghanistan. Some characteristics found are the same in both empirical materials while others distance themselves. Unlike British soldiers, French soldiers never question the purpose of the intervention and do not show any doubt. They always stress the importance and the necessity of their mission. The two study cases share the relationship with the “others” and point out the same categories, except that this research has added an extra “other”: Mali. In the similarities we could mention the population, playing a peripheral role; allies, characterize in some analogous ways about their competences even if French Soldiers seem to give a more positive description of the local allies; and enemy, sometimes dehumanized, using drugs etc. Moreover, the reference to past experiences, not analysed in this research and the stress on the use of violence, lack of ethic (about killing individuals), description of destructive weapons and celebration of violence is found in both British and French testimonies.

Julien Pomarède (2016) writes in his study about Chris Kyle's representation and glorification of violence through the technical description of weapons, enemies and family. Those three transverse axes are reported in this research.

Christian Olsson (2013) works on US military perceptions of the “insurgent enemy” in Iraq. As in this study, he shows that soldiers share a certain representation of the “other” and the “self”. The “other”, which is defined as an insurgent enemy in Olsson's search, is presented as an “apolitical”<sup>240</sup> enemy. In addition, other features are similar such as a strong distinction between opponents and population or the enemy qualified as “asymmetric”.

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<sup>240</sup> According to him, “speeches often seem to **minimize the role of the opponent's political motivations** that means his beliefs about the conditions and organization of community life” (Olsson, 2013, p.69).





## **XI. Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to discover how the writings of French soldiers contributed to produce a certain kind of reality. The first intention of this study was to focus on a recent issue: the French intervention in Mali, in 2013. The main works on this intervention focus on actor States, the official and un-official legitimizations of the Serval operation. It is for this reason that this research has tried to find another angle. Thus, to bring a new glance, we took the point of view of the actors of the grounds, which were chosen as principal object of research. French soldiers' books, describing in details their war experienced, in Mali, during Operation Serval, were the heart of this work. Through their writings, they described: living conditions, missions, private lives, weapons, their subordinates and superiors, the encounters with the population, the confrontation with the enemy, the pressure felt by the politicians and the media, the fears they had, the injustices they felt but also the anger, the mourning, the lack of family contact and the harsh natural conditions. All these passages and descriptions contribute to form a representation. They share not only their vision of the war and this intervention, but also an image of Mali, a representation themselves and of ones identified as the "others".

The literature review allowed us to conclude that popular culture is a tool for legitimization and representation of foreign policies. This research has aimed to situate itself in this field of studies-popular culture in international relations. The authors mobilized in the state of the art, study the impact that popular culture can have on international relations. Popular culture is often underestimated. It reaches a wide audience and the reality it conveys through films, media, comics and books. It is sometimes the only reality that the public acknowledge.

It is through the poststructuralist posture that we have conducted our research. It helped us to highlight the importance of language, to identify binary oppositions and to reveal which representations discourses carried. If it was "inconceivable" to take a realist posture for this work, constructivism could have been applied. However, post-structuralism is the most chosen theoretical framework by academics conducting their research on popular culture in international relations. We decided to follow their examples. We believe that the choice of theory was well suited to our research and empirical material.

Our research object being the soldiers' writings, the chosen method - discourse analysis - seems difficult to interchange, unless we change object. We could eventually have envisaged an analysis of narratives; whose method is like the one we used. We have decided to understand discourses in its function as creator of meaning and as producer of reality. As our goal was to obtain the vision of field actors, interviews could have been integrated into this research which would have involved another methodology.

Through the soldiers' writings, we have tried to reveal: which representation of reality is shaped through French soldiers' writings, on the 2013's Mali intervention. We have made three main assumptions; the soldiers' books contribute to:

- Legitimize the French intervention in Mali,
- reinforce the North/South cliché,
- legitimize and justify their use of violence against the enemy.

We can say that through this work we have confirmed our hypotheses.

First, the concept of legitimization is central to our first hypothesis: legitimize the French intervention in Mali. According to this research, the soldiers justified their presence in Mali through the will of the population to have them there. We have observed that through the descriptions of a population reassured by them, cheering for their arrival, offering them gifts and thanking them constantly, it is in fact an approval of their presence on Malian territory that the soldiers describe. Unlike official discourse, which legitimizes intervention through law and policy, the population and necessity of the intervention socially legitimize it. The need to intervene, it is strongly felt in books, intervention appears to be the only solution to overcome terrorists. It is due to the Malian army being unable to solve this problem, the government not controlling its territory, the enemy being violent and merciless. The soldier presents himself as the authority that is necessary to repel the enemy.

Moreover, this thesis highlighted the different representations given by soldiers: the representation of the self, followed by the representation of “others”. This research has tried to stress the involvement of its representations.

It confirms the second hypothesis: the reinforcement of North/South clichés by the valorization of the heroic self-soldier and the depreciation of the “others”. Mali is represented by the disorder, in development, stuck in its past and not progressing. The Malian army is in need of assistance. The Malian soldiers are courageous but ineffective. The population is powerless, modest and only desire to return to their “simple” lives.

Which brings us to the representation of the enemy, allowing us to confirm our third hypothesis: legitimize and justify their use of violence against the enemy. Our analysis showed that the soldiers, in their books, remove enemy’s humanity. The opponent is defined only through the violence of his or her actions, without attachment to life and those around. They are considered as a target and not as human being. It goes by a detailed description of the means of destruction, the use of a hunting vocabulary and the quantification of enemies killed. The enemy leaves no choice but its destruction. It has little attachment to life, and then, being ready to do anything to defeat. French Soldiers’ books almost make us forget that the opponent is an individual. Moreover, soldiers, by respecting military jurisdiction, are “entitled” to kill.

After the Serval operation, a new operation in Sahel: “*Opération Barkhane*” was set up, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2014. It is currently taking place in Mali. We have decided not to include this current event in this study. Because, we have decided to focus our research on the Serval operation and the vision that soldiers give of it. We have chosen to only analyze on the content of the books, without going any further. Therefore, we do not seek to know which implications this new operation has on the Serval operation. However, we think that it would be interesting to follow the documentaries of Barkhane operation, the press articles and perhaps the future books that will appear on it. A comparative work could be carried out with our research.

This searcher was aiming to challenge of vision of soldiers and study their contribution to the Internationals Relations field.



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## H. Movie

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# Appendix

Through Soldiers' Writing

Appendix

ANNEX 1 : “La reconnaissance d’une ville libérée“ (Scarpa, 2014, pp. 58-59)



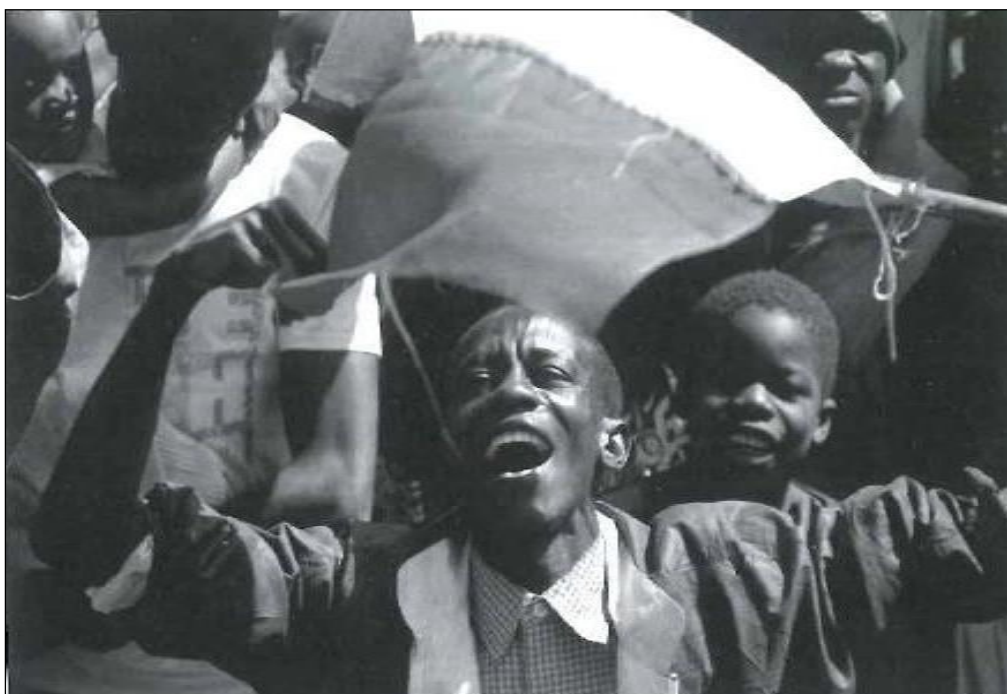
ANNEX 2 : “La reconnaissance d’une ville libérée“ (Scarpa, 2014, p. 58)



**ANNEX 3 :** “Foule amassée devant la bibliothèque de Tombouctou. Toute une population retrouve la joie de vivre libre, loin de l’emprise des terroristes” (Scarpa, 2014, pp. 64-65)



**ANNEX 4 :** “28 janvier, Tombouctou. Accueil triomphal de la population. La joie inonde les rues. En quelques heures des drapeaux tricolores sont fabriqués pour honorer les libérateurs” (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 224-225)



**ANNEX 5 :** “A l’entrée de Tombouctou, les jeunes filles peuvent à nouveau sortir sans craindre la propagande islamique” (Hanne, 2014, between pp. 124-125)

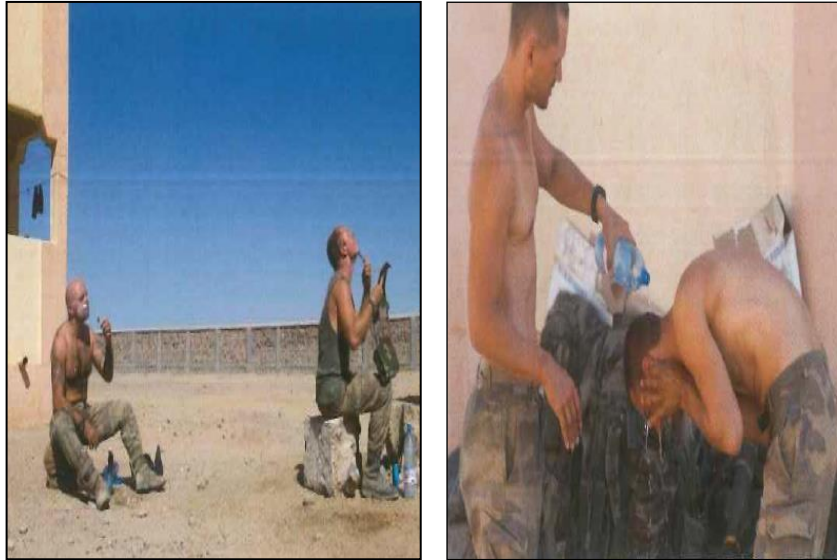


**ANNEX 6 :** “Père et fils se retrouvent quelques instants, fierté de servir en famille” (Scarpa 2014, p. 169)



Appendix

**ANNEX 7:** (Scarpa, 2014, p. 174)

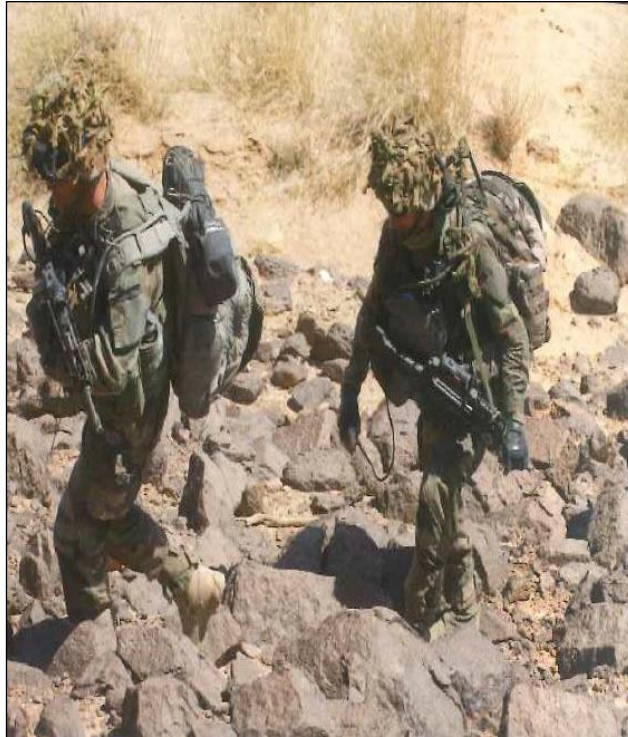


**ANNEX 8 :** “Adrar. La colle des rangers ne résiste pas à la chaleur (40°) et à la dureté du sol, une logistique tendue à l’extrême” (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 224-225)



## Appendix

**ANNEX 9 :** “sous le poids de leurs équipements, les hommes souffrent des chaleurs extrêmes dans lesquelles ils combattent” (Scarpa, 2014, p. 133)

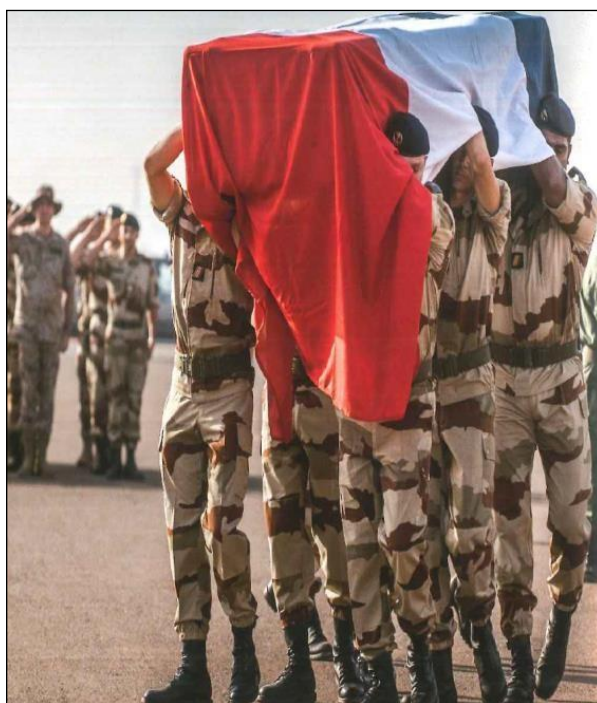


**ANNEX 10 :** “Après l’eau d’Harmattan, le sable de Serval. Les conditions de vol sont Terriblement éprouvantes pour hommes et matériel ” (Verbord, 2015, between pp. 116-117)





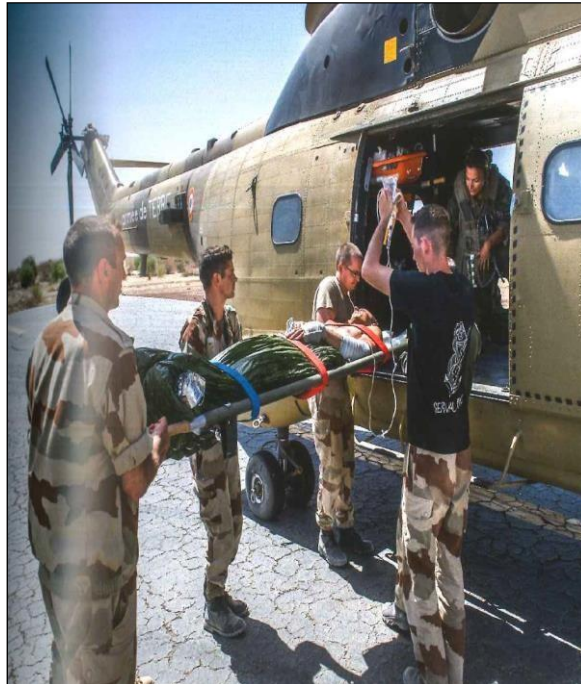
**ANNEX 11** : (Scarpa, 2014, p. 244)



**ANNEX 12** : “3 mars, Tessalit. Honneurs rendus à la dépouille du caporal Cédric Charenton du 1<sup>er</sup> RCP, mort pour la France en donnant l’assaut. Les combats continuent” (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 224-225)



**ANNEX 13** : “Evacuation sanitaire par le GAM” (Scarpa, 2014, p. 123)

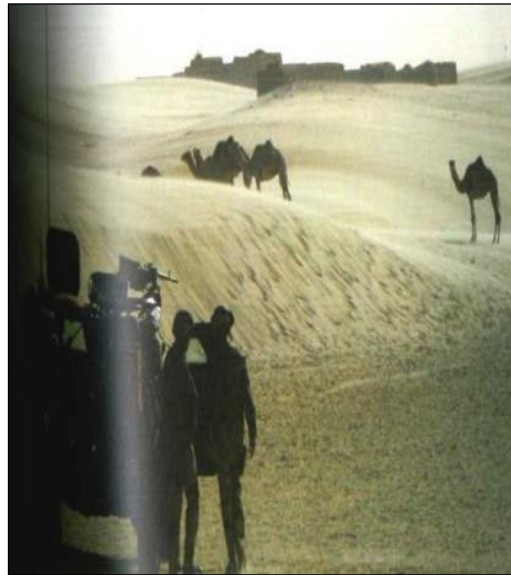


**ANNEX 14** : “25 février. PC du GTIA 3-1<sup>er</sup>RIMa, à l’entrée de la vallée, la veille de l’attaque. Jour des préparations : « Jamais nous n’avons autant senti la puissance des forces morales, la nécessité de la cohésion et de l’esprit de corps » ”, (Barrera, 2015 between pp. 224-225)



Appendix

**ANNEX 15** : (Hanne, 2014, between pp. 124-125)



**ANNEX 16** : “Il faut les avoir vus ces combattants de l’Ametettai ... Quel spectacle, quelle détermination professionnelle. Quelle débrouillardise, du Légionnaire au conducteur, tous furent les artisans de la Victoire.” (Scarpa, 2014, p. 129)



## Appendix

**ANNEX 17** : “Les « mains miracles » sont à l’œuvre sous un soleil de plomb et 50°C. ”  
(Verborg, 2015, between, pp. 116-117)



**ANNEX 18** : “Vitesse, élongations, puissance de feu. Les hélicoptères sont partout et de tous les coups” (Verborg, 2015, between pp. 116-117)



Appendix

**ANNEX 19** : (Scarpa, 2014, p. 110)

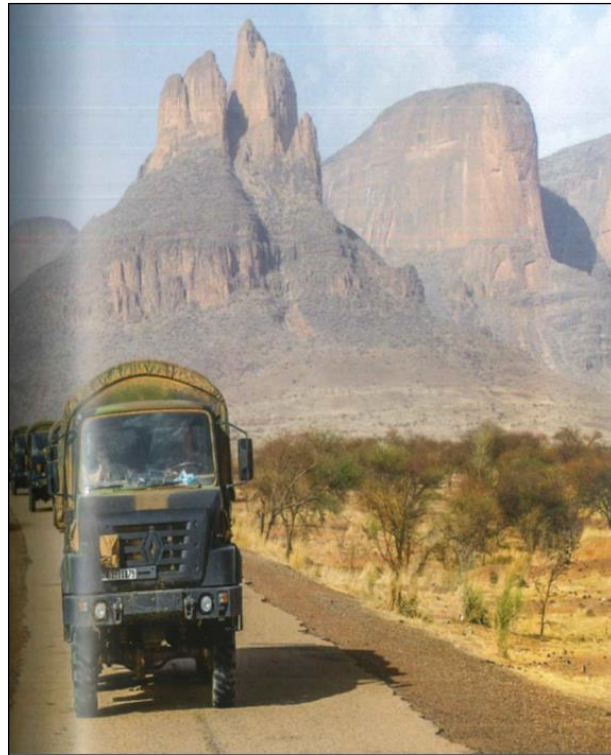


**ANNEX 20** : (Scarpa, 2014, p. 224)

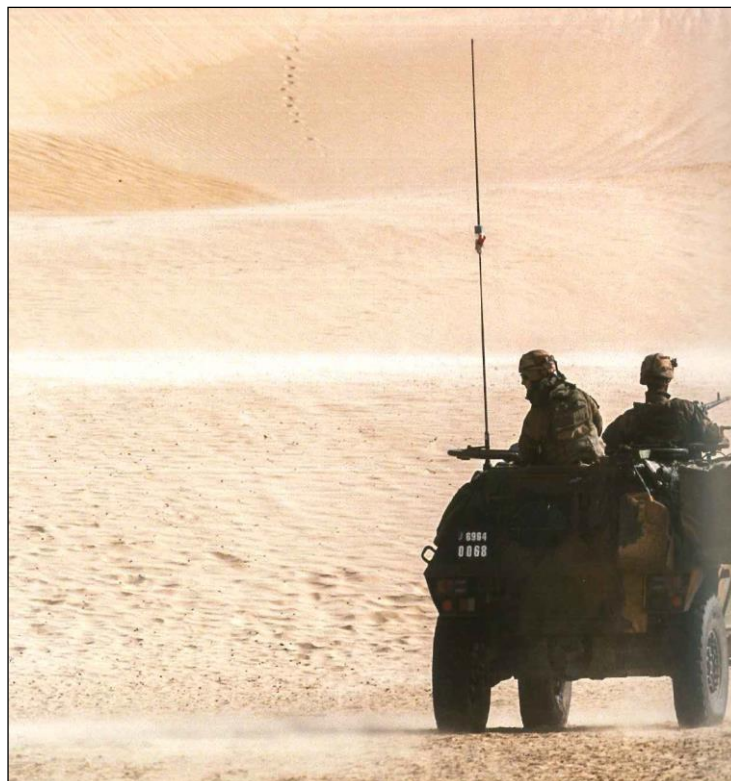


Appendix

**ANNEX 21** : (Scarpa, 2014, p. 71)

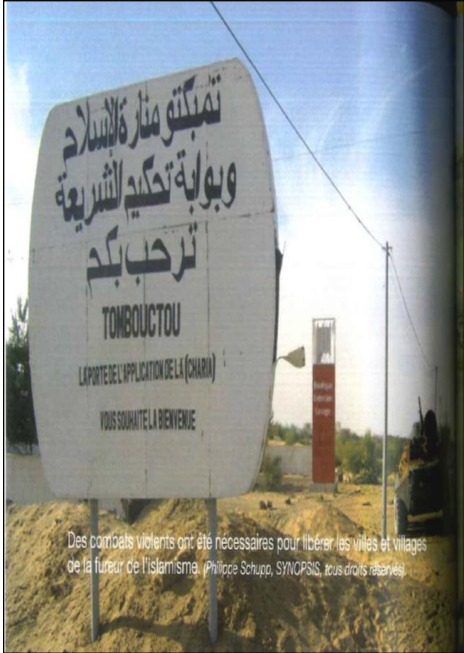


**ANNEX 22** : ( Scarpa, 2014, p. 231)

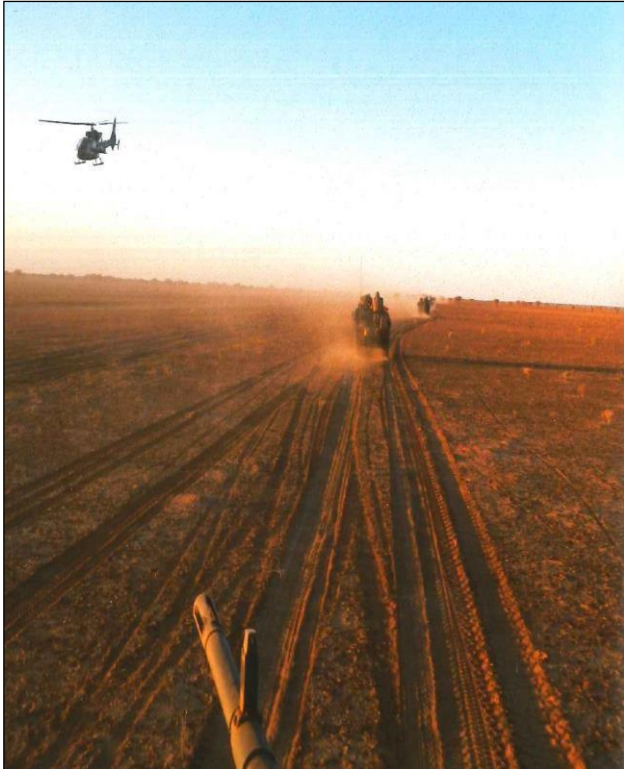


Appendix

ANNEX 23: (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 224-225)

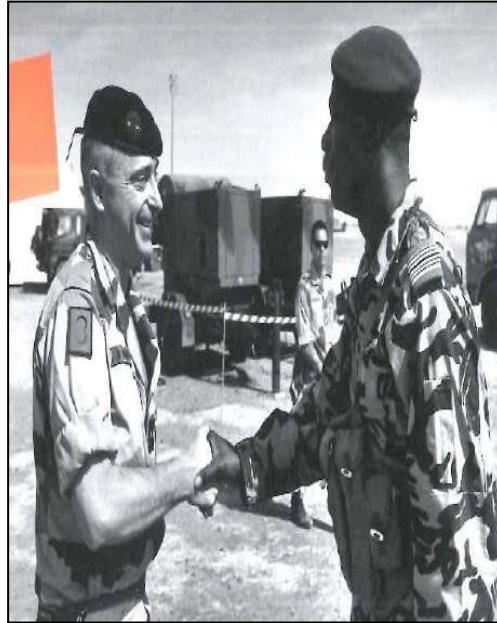


ANNEX 24: (Scarpa, 2014, p. 50)



Appendix

**ANNEX 25** : “Frère d’arme et partenaire incontournable de la libération du pays” (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 225-226)

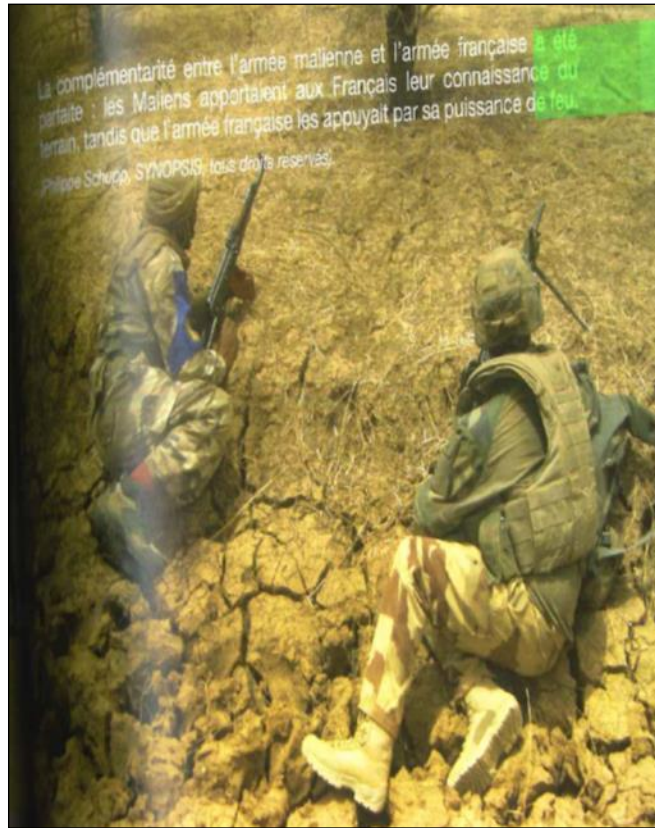


**ANNEX 26** : “Dès le début, la bonne connaissance mutuelle des officiers français et maliens était perceptible. ” (Schupp see Hanne, 2014, between pp.124-125)

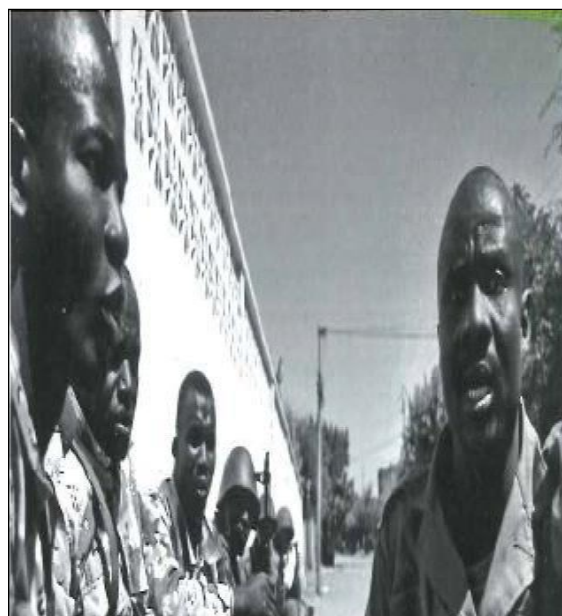




**ANNEX 27** : “La complémentarité entre l’armée malienne et l’armée française a été parfaite: les Maliens apportaient aux Français leur connaissance du terrain, tandis que l’armée française les appuyait par sa puissance de feu.” (Schupp see Hanne, 2014, between pp.124-125)



**ANNEX 28** : “Soldats de l’armée malienne aux prises avec des djihadistes dans les rues de Gao, avant l’arrivée des renforts français” (Barrera, 2015, between pp. 225-226)



**ANNEX 29** : “Le REP nettoie les dernières poches de résistance d’Amettai” (Scarpa, 2014, p. 156)



**ANNEX 30** : “Après les violents combats des semaines passées dans la région, les Légionnaires traquent les djihadistes dans les villages” (Scarpa, 2014, p. 200)



**ANNEX 31** : “Des combats violents ont été nécessaires pour libérer les villes et villages de la fureur de l’islamisme” (Schupp see Hanne, 2014, pp. 124-125)





# Summary

Through Soldiers' Writing

Summary

## I. 2013 French Intervention in Mali, the Soldiers' Narration

In 2013, after an official request from Dioncouda Traoré, the Malian's acting President, a French intervention occurs in Mali, mostly in the North, to stop the rebels from advancing south. Mali is a former French colony and took its independence in 1960. After their comeback to France, some soldiers wrote about this intervention and their war experiences. Our aim through this research is to sink into these books and try to identify which reality the soldiers share.

Five books have been selected for this study: "*Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l'opération Serval.*" from Olivier Hanne, in 2014; "*Offensive éclair au Mali*", from the Battalion Commander Rémi Scarpa, in 2015; "*Envoyez les hélicos!*" from the Colonel Pierre Verborg, in 2015; "*Opération Serval.: Notes de guerre, Mali 2013*" from the General Bernard Barrera, in 2015 and "*Libérez Tombouctou! Journal de guerre au Mali*" from the Colonel Frédéric Gout, in 2015. Those five books represent the empirical material of this research, which amounts to over one thousand pages.

This study is included in the work of researchers working on popular culture and its impact in International Relations. This made it possible to situate this research within an academic framework and justify it by the empirical material found in the books. This research aims to focus on questions of representation, rather than material questions; the reason for which we have rejected realism, and we have chosen the post-structuralism approach. It gives to discourse, language and words an importance that other theories refuse to acknowledge.

The research question that this thesis will address: **Which representation of reality is shaped through the French soldiers' writings about the 2013 Mali intervention?**

Three hypotheses are made here: First, the soldiers' narrative contributes to legitimize their actions in Mali. Second, books reinforce the North /South cliché. Third, it justifies and then legitimizes the use of violence against the enemy.

## II. Popular culture in International Relations

As said above, the main aim of this paper is to study the impact of the French soldiers' memoirs on the representation of the 2013 Malian's conflict; this literature is part of the so-called popular culture.

Popular culture is a significant actor and tool of International Relations. Through movies, media, books, television or radio podcasts, foreign policies and dominant discourses are produced; identities are shaped; and actions, policies or ideologies are legitimated. In addition, popular culture can be used to disseminate propaganda or as soft power and integration mechanisms. Mass culture is reproducing and popularizing foreign policy discourses and actions of states (Weldes, 1999). Popular culture is a "background-meaning" that gives a representation of the foreign policies (*ibid*). One of the most important tools of popular culture, it is that it provides a definition of the **self/others**. In addition, popular culture is used by States for propaganda,<sup>241</sup> in time of war, and as a soft power in peace time" (Weldes and Rowley, 2015). Popular culture plays a key role of the representation for the world politics. It has a political impact. Media attention has an influence on their audience as it gives a subjective representation of the reality (*ibid*).

Military memoirs can challenge representations. Soldiers are empowered to speak about wars and they are legitimate sources as they have been in the combat zone (Pomarède, 2016). Soldier's war experiences shape the representation of wars and can be a source of legitimization of western wars, production of identities, the trivialization of violence and neutralization of critical judgment. Identities are created by distancing "self" from "others" as the "self" represents civilized western and "others" the barbaric terrorist (Welds, 1999, Dittmer 2005; Pomarède, 2016) and "this differentiation is crucial in politics as it works to secure a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lives" (Pomarède, 2016, p.4).<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> For instance, with posters defining the nation and the enemies, movies about war world two with the aim to legitimize it.

<sup>242</sup> It exists many examples to illustrate this, Brown and Lutz (2007, p. 325), give a particularly relevant one: "To roughly diagnose the potential for post-traumatic stress disorder, Army test designers asked the following questions: Did you ever feel your life endangered, did you use your gun, and have you seen any casualties? The third question asked for clarification: Was the casualty "Friendly, Enemy, [and/or] civilian"? The assumption is that it matters deeply which of the three categories the dead bod-ies belonged to—fellow U.S. soldier, enemy soldier, or civil-ian".



### III. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical position that has been chosen for this paper is the poststructuralist position because its main concern is the construction of meaning. This position already appears in the literature review. Identities of others and us are one of the main elements of how poststructuralists conceive foreign policies. Foreign policies involve a certain identity, that is not fixed, and a representation of the self and of the other. Hansen adds that identity is established in the language (Hansen, 2016).

Post structuralism identifies five key concepts: discourse, deconstruction, genealogy, intertextuality and binary opposition (Hansen, 2016).

- **Discourse:** is an essential element for poststructuralists. Without the collective codes that society shares, the world would be incomprehensible. A neutral use of a word does not exist, the choice of a term has a (political) impact. The main claim is that language produces meaning, and the discourse that is chosen shapes our vision of the world. It argues that within the discourse practice, elites impose a reality (Doty, 1996).
- **Deconstruction:** Language is understood as "a set of words/signs" (Hansen, 2016, p.172) and each sign is defined inside a collective set, language creates meaning through a hierarchy of signs. Terms are understood by defining what they are not, for example civilized goes with uncivilized, developed with under developed, rational with irrational and so on. The different signs do not have the same weight and valorization. Deconstructionists have two moves to proceed: the first one is to overthrow the hierarchy and the second one is to undo the pairing.
- **Genealogy:** The notion of "genealogy" refers to the study of the "history of the present", meaning tracing the past of current issues such as climate change. The objective is to identify which options have been marginalized and driven away from the discussion and to recognize which actors are not allowed to speak and who occupies the public space.
- **Intertextuality:** It acknowledges that any text relates to previous texts which forms an inter-text, a text cannot be read as an isolated element. There are two categories of inter-text: the "self-evident", when the connection between texts is obvious, such as texts from international organizations and the less obvious ones, when the connection is "more abstract".

- **Binary Opposition:** For poststructuralists, language is one of the most crucial elements for the creation and perpetuation of a dominant discourse. Through language, certain actors, concepts and events are placed in hierarchical pairs, named binary oppositions, whereby one element of the set is favored over the other to create or perpetuate meaning (Mc Morrow, 2018). Campbell (1992) nuances the position, the others is not only the total opposition of the self, and there are different ranks. This binary opposition concept raises questions about grieving. Butler theorizes this notion of grievance by raising questions about the importance and the interest that some deaths can have in time of war, while others pass into oblivion.

## **IV. Discourse Analysis**

This research is based on French soldiers' books, describing their experience during the intervention in Mali, in 2013. Their books are going to be studied as discourses.

The discourses analytic method is going to be applied on the theoretical material of this study, because it particularly fits the post-structuralism theory. Milliken (1999) distinguishes three main functions of the discourse: "discourses as systems of signification", "discourse productivity" and "the play of practice" (pp.229-230). The discourses as systems of signification are strongly linked to the construction of reality through binary opposition: "who are the subjects?", "which representation of the self?", "which representation of "others"?", "what is the relation between them?", "is one element more privileged than the other?", "What is the implication of this vision?" The function of this discourse is going to be used to understand the reality created by the soldiers in their books and which perspectives can be revealed.

"Discourse productivity" makes some solutions and way of being natural and by doing so excludes other options. It is important to distinguish "who is allowed to speak?", "what are the relations between subjects?", and "who is the authority?" Discourse Productivity can create a particular "regime of truth", that legitimize actions, as an intervention or use of violence.

The author stresses that "there is no single method analysis and abstraction along these lines, but rather a number of ways that scholars can identify key aspect of significant practices and [...] establish a discourse" (Milliken, 1999, p.231). He points out the importance of an "appropriate set of texts" (p.233).

## V. Empirical Material

The set of texts of this study is five books. Those books have been picked to cover in the most exhaustive way the French soldiers' literature on the intervention in Mali, in 2013. The focus of this research is on French<sup>243</sup> soldiers that experienced the intervention in Mali from the period of January 2013 to July 2013. Two criteria were taken into account: the book must be written by a French soldier or contain testimonies of French soldiers and secondly, it must be about the war experience during the “*opération Serval*”. Based on those two characteristics five have been picked:

- “*Opération Serval : notes de guerre, Mali 2013*” – Bernard Barrera ;
- “*Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval racontent*” – Rémi Scarpa ;
- *Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali*” – Frédéric Gout ;
- “*ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre- Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali*” - Pierre Verborg ;
- “*Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l’opération Serval*” – Olivier Hanne.

This table sum up all information about books: books by specifying title, authors, testimonies, publishing house, pages used and copies sold. (This sentence is a little off – maybe say “This table sums up all the information regarding the books: title, author, testimonies, publishing house, pages used and copies sold.”

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<sup>243</sup> This research does not reject the opinion of Malian soldiers, and in a larger research it could be interesting to do the same work taking the Malian army side.

<b>Books</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Testimonies</b>	<b>Publishing House</b>	<b>Pages used</b>	<b>Copies sold</b>
<b>“Opération Serval : notes de guerre, Mali 2013”</b>	Barrera	—	Seuil	437	8,000
<b>“Offensive éclair au Mali, ceux de la brigade Serval ra content”</b>	Scarpa	Sergent Roopea T, Claude Minjoulat-Ray, Captain F, and General Barrera	Editions Pierre de Taillac	256	—
<b>“Libérez Tombouctou ! Journal de guerre au Mali”</b>	Gout	—	Éditions Tallandier	253	—
<b>“ENVOYEZ LES HÉLICOS ! Carnets de guerre - Côte d’Ivoire – Lybie – Mali”</b>	Verborg	—	Les éditions du Rocher	60	1,800
<b>“Mali, une paix à gagner. Analyses et témoignages sur l’opération Serval”</b>	Hanne	General Barrera Officer; Rémi Scarpa ; Colonel Bruno Bert; Colonel Arnaud Le Gal ; Colonel Nicolas Rivet ; Colonel Paul Gèze ; Philippe S ; Tanguy B ; Antoine-louis de Prénomville	Lavauzelle	111	—

**Table 2 summary of empirical material**

## **VI. Hypotheses Review**

The aim of this section is to elaborate on the hypothesis raised in the first part of the thesis and whether or not it has been confirmed by the empirical material provided by the books.

The three hypotheses are the legitimization of the intervention, the reinforcement of the North/South cliché and the justification and legitimation of French violence.

### **A. Legitimation of the Intervention**

As it was observed in the literature review, pop culture is a tool to legitimize actions of the State, including foreign interventions (Weldes, 1999; Weldes and Rowley 2015, Pomarède, 2016). This qualitative analysis of French soldiers' books leads to a confirmation of this assumption. Two main aspects stand out to legitimize the intervention.

On one hand, the intervention is justified through the population's will. This is illustrated by a few elements. First, the population welcomes the French soldiers as liberators. This is staged by celebrations of their arrival, scenes of a cheering crowd, dancing, waving French flags, calling babies by the name of French soldiers, giving them gifts and thanking them. Second, the help and information about jihadists provided by villagers. It implicitly demonstrates that the local population does not agree with jihadists and they want them out of their cities. Third, the population's fear of jihadism expansion in Mali and the feelings of security provided by the French. Fourth, the population's representation as powerless and the victim of the violence of merciless jihadists.

On the other hand, the soldiers present this intervention as necessary. First, through the representation of the country as destroyed by jihadists: cities are empty, there is no more trade, no tourist, schools are closed, roads look like battlefields. Second, the idea that no one can handle this situation except the French: government is not controlling the country, the Malian army is inefficient and seems to rely on "the fire power" of the French army and the French soldiers qualify themselves as the best army and as the only authority figure. Besides, without the French presence, terrorism is more likely to come back. Third, the imposition of Islam within the country.

## **B. Reinforcing North/South Cliché**

Throughout the books the soldiers gave a certain representation of Mali, as well as its armies and its population. To verify our second hypothesis, we will look at the characteristics given by the soldiers and compare with those given by Hansen (2016) and Doty (1993). Hansen demonstrates that States are defined by contrasting the differences between what is inside and outside of the State. For example, the “outside” is defined by anarchy, differences, power, suspicion, repetition, capabilities and war. While, the “inside” is defined by order, common, reason, trust, progress, law and peace. These join the north/south’s characteristics given by Doty (1993): the level of order, development, modernity, economy, military aptitude. To confirm this hypothesis, we are going to see if the Third World’s clichés correspond with the French representation of Mali, its army and its population.

First, the war/peace opposition is, by the nature of the situation, present and exemplified in many statements of books and within the axis.

Secondly, developing/developed differentiation is illustrated by the description of the country: bad road conditions, “nothing works” properly, no logistics, next to the other African capital Bamako is under developed. It is linked to the order/disorder’s opposition: soldiers represent Mali as chaotic, i.e., tanks in the middle of roads and the country is beyond the control of the government.

Thirdly, the contrast between Progress and Repetition, illustrated perfectly with Gout’s description of Timbuktu, qualifying the city as stuck in the past and that “nothing has changed for centuries”. In addition, the Malian society is represented as traditional: the population is represented as simple, willing a modest life, wearing traditional and colorful clothes, riding horses, the use of plates to make music ...

The last point is on “aptitudes”, and more particularly the aptitude of soldiers... While, the French army is described as the best army, the Malian army is ineffective, it has not succeeded in repelling the terrorist invasion. The Malian armed forces [FAM] are courageous, but they need the support of the French.

### **C. Violence's Legitimation and Justification**

The French soldiers' use of violence against the enemy is the last assumption of this research. Some elements distinguish through the axes confirm this assumption.

First, the "Good/Evil" opposition. Good is represented by French soldiers: brave, taking care of children, reassuring the population... They are also good fathers and husbands. While, the enemy is violent, merciless, without any attachment to life, using children and woman to protect himself. The opponent is represented as the incarnation of evil, and it seems to justify that "good" tries to stop it.

Second, in the representation of the enemy (Axis 2, section C), usually the adversary does not have a face or a name. Sometimes, it is just a number. The words used to kill the opponent are also very relevant (Axe 3, section A). As Pomarède (20016) also observes, the enemy is no longer a human being, but a target. Taking away their humanity allows for an override of moral ethics that is linked to the death of an individual (Olsson, 2013). A similar phenomena happens with weapon descriptions, it depoliticizes violence and makes is so that "firepower" seems more technical and without the potential to kill."

Third, the relation with death is important. As Butler (2009) demonstrated in her work about grievance, a difference in grief can be observed between the French soldiers and the enemy. The death of a French soldier provokes strong emotion, long description, ceremonies and testimonies. The death of the enemy is desired, it's life is not legitimate. Another important point is that the enemy is presented as not brining any importance to life, whether it be to its own, its allies, or to its own family. It legitimizes the use of violence against the enemy.

The last point is that French soldiers use lawful violence; even it is something of a constraint While, opponents seem to have no obligation and no rule to follow.



## VII. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to discover how the writings of French soldiers contributed to produce a certain kind of reality. The first intention of this study was to focus on a topical issue: the French intervention in Mali, in 2013. The main works on this intervention focus on actor States, the official and un-official legitimations of the Serval operation. It is for this reason that this research has tried to find another angle.

The literature review allowed us to conclude that popular culture is a tool for legitimation and representation of foreign policies. This research aims to situate itself in this field of studies-popular culture in international relations. The authors mobilized in the state of the art study the impact that popular culture can have on international relations. Popular culture is often underestimated. It reaches a wide audience and the reality it conveys through films, media, comics and books. It is sometimes the only reality that the public acknowledge. It is through the poststructuralist posture that we have conducted our research. It helps us to highlight the importance of language, to identify binary oppositions and to reveal which representations discourses carried.

Through the soldiers' writings, we have tried to reveal which representation of reality is shaped through French soldiers' writings, on the 2013's Mali intervention. We have made three main assumptions; the soldiers' books contribute to legitimize the French intervention in Mali, reinforce the north/south cliché, legitimize, and justify their use of violence against the enemy. We can say that through this work we have confirmed our hypothesis.

First, the concept of legitimation is central to our first hypothesis: legitimize the French intervention in Mali. According to this research, the soldiers justified their presence in Mali through the will of the population to have them there. We have observed that through the descriptions of a population reassured by them, cheering for their arrival, offering them gifts and thanking them constantly, it is in fact an approval of their presence on Malian territory that the soldiers describe. Unlike official discourse, which legitimizes intervention through law and policy, the population and necessity of the intervention socially legitimize it. The need to intervene, it is strongly felt in books; intervention appears to be the only solution to overcome terrorists. It is due to the Malian army being

unable to solve this problem, the government not controlling its territory, the enemy being violent and merciless. The soldier presents himself as the authority that is necessary to repel the enemy.

Moreover, this thesis highlights the different representations given by soldiers: the representation of the self, followed by the representation of “others”. This research has tried to stress the involvement of its representations.

It confirms the second hypothesis: the reinforcement of North/South clichés by the valorization of the heroic self-soldier and the depreciation of the “others”. Mali is represented by the disorder, in development, stuck in its past and not progressing. The Malian army is in the need of assistance. The Malian soldiers are courageous but ineffective. The population is powerless, modest and only desire to return to their “simple” lives.

Which brings us to the representation of the enemy, allowing us to confirm our third hypothesis: legitimize and justify their use of violence against the enemy. Our analysis showed that the soldiers, in their books, remove the enemy’s humanity. The opponent is defined only through the violence of his or her actions, without attachment to life. They are considered as a target and not as a human being. It goes by a detailed description of the means of destruction, the use of a hunting vocabulary and the quantification of enemies killed. The enemy leaves no choice but its destruction. It has little attachment to life, and then, being ready to do anything to defeat. The French Soldiers’ books almost make us forget that the opponent is an individual. Moreover, soldiers, by respecting military jurisdiction, are “entitled” to kill.