



A Forever Superior French Self in its former pré carré africain?

*A post-structuralist foreign policy analysis of Emmanuel
Macron's legitimation discourse around Operation Barkhane in
Mali*

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Abstract

Notwithstanding the promises of an end to the *Françafrique* era, France remains the desired external security actor in francophone Africa. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the discursive legitimation strategies of Emmanuel Macron on France's military activism in Mali, inquiring '***How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?***'. The aim is further to explore the construction of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* in the legitimation discourse, asking '***How did Macron construct a French 'Self' and a Malian 'Other' in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention?***'. By applying an interpretivist, post-structuralist discourse analysis to official statements published between 2017 and 2021, the thesis concludes that Macron's discursive legitimation strategies remain approximately similar, yet the greater emphasis on rhetorical themes of equal *partnership*, *non-interference in internal affairs*, *democracy* and an ever-increasing *multilateralism* have taken place in the face of Paris' damaged legitimacy. Focusing on the construction of the *Self* and the *Other* affirms that Macron constructs the Malian *Other* as significantly different from the French *Self* even though the country is seen as capable of transformation and cooperation, requiring the compliance of Western advice.

Key words: Franco-African relations, Operation Barkhane, Emmanuel Macron, France, Mali, Sahel, post-structuralism, foreign policy analysis, international intervention, legitimacy

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List of Abbreviations

AFD – Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)

AU – African Union

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

DA – Discourse Analysis

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EU – European Union

EUCAP – European Union Capacity Building Mission

EUTM – European Union Training Mission

FPA – Foreign Policy Analysis

IFOP – Institut français d’opinion publique (French Institute of Public Opinion)

IR – International Relations

MINUSMA – Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

PDA – Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis

UN – United Nations

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

U.S. – United States

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1. Introduction

Apart from the abundance of resources and the many still unsaturated markets that stir the blood of investors, Africa's security and the continent's (in)stability have attracted the attention of all major global powers (Erforth, 2019: 3). A relevant instance is the French Republic, which has launched more than 35 military operations in its former sphere of influence, *pré carré* (backyard) *africain*, following the official termination of the French colonial empire in 1962 (Henke, 2017: 308). Notwithstanding the constant declarations made about the end of *Françafrique* (post-colonial French domination) and the phrase '*African solutions to African problems*' by the heads of state, there is a general consensus amongst scholars that the French foreign and security policy-making vis-à-vis its African counterparts has been marked by continuity (see, for instance, Charbonneau, 2008a; Moncrieff, 2012; Chafer, 2014).

The seven-year-long, pan-Sahelian Operation Barkhane – successor of Operation Serval, which was launched by the former Socialist French President François Hollande in 2013 – is the most recent French military operation that has received a great number of academic and public attention. Despite the many years of massive military engagement, France's mission to Mali has been unable to address the underlying, socio-political causes of Mali's multidimensional crisis (see Boeke and Schuurman, 2015: 802; Harmon, 2015: 228). France has therefore failed its stabilization goals as the conditions of security have only deteriorated since 2015 (Powell, 2017: 47; Charbonneau, 2019: 448).

In the wake of so many years of failed military efforts, not only the citizens of Mali but also the wider Sahel region began to grow suspicious of France's reasons for being there (Mules, 2019). The anti-French sentiments and wide-ranging protests started to spark throughout the region from December 2019 onwards (Guichaoua, 2020: 900). Meanwhile, the French support for France's military presence in the Sahel fell from 73 percent to 49 percent between February 2013 and January 2021 (Tih, 2021; IFOP, 2021). Thus, Operation Barkhane suffered a significant alteration of its reputation from two of its legitimacy audiences (Tull, 2021: 1). Against this backdrop, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, announced the end of the years-long operation on 10 June 2021 as an 'external operation in the Sahel', which signifies that France's military engagement will remain outstanding. Rather than an exit strategy from the Sahel region, it is a slow transition of the operation to a wider multilateral effort in the first quarter of 2022 (de Fougères, 2021).

Existing research has indeed focused on the rise of multilateralism in French interventionism, mainly pointing out that multilateralism is utilized to counter accusations of neocolonialism from African audiences, to help to fulfill France's role as a '*puissance d'influence*' (influential power) and to provide legitimacy (Chafer et al., 2020; Erforth, 2020; Recchia, 2020; Tardy, 2020). Other

prominent scholars in the field have paid attention more precisely to the feature of legitimacy (see Chafer, 2016; Wing, 2016; Sabrow, 2017; Recchia, 2020; Tull, 2021). During the past decades, the growing problem of implementing the twin principles of Africanisation and Europeanisation has made it necessary to establish new legitimacy for French Africa policy (Chafer, 2016: 123). Fortunately for the unilateral French mission, the increasing cooperation with the G5 Sahel and the fight against terrorism have provided more legitimacy (ibid: 137; Wing, 2016: 74; Recchia, 2020: 530).

1.1 Research Aim and Questions

When it comes to the existing inquiries with respect to French interventionism, the process of discursive legitimation of French military presence remains *hitherto* unexplored in a theoretical manner, let alone the discursive and rhetorical strategies that are employed within the political discourse. French decision-makers must constantly legitimize their external military presence in France's former territories along with availing themselves of different discursive legitimation and rhetorical strategies to obtain legitimacy from three different legitimacy audiences (see 2.4).

Despite the ending of Operation Barkhane in the first quarter of 2022, the remaining French military presence in francophone Africa points at the necessity to inquire how France has legitimized its military actions discursively through distinct strategies to avert it from being accused of gratifying its neo-colonial appetite (Erforth, 2015: 103). Hence, the intent of this research is to examine *how* the former colonial power, the French Republic, has *discursively* legitimized its military intervention in Mali and whether the discursive legitimation strategies have changed in light of the increased legitimacy deficit.

To examine how France has discursively justified its military agenda in Mali through the lens of post-structuralist foreign policy analysis (hereinafter referred to as 'FPA'), this thesis is guided by the following research question: **(1) *How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?*** Focusing on Macron's official discourse further provides a broader understanding of the French strategy in the Sahel and offers a well-fitting continuation to the academic literature on French President's Africa policies (see 2.2).

Besides providing an in-depth examination of the discursive legitimation strategies of French military presence in its former colony, the aspiration is to investigate the constant construction of a French *Self* and a Malian *Other*, which underlie the legitimation discourse of Operation Barkhane. Thus, it is equivalently necessary to explore the subsequent sub-question: **(2) *How did Macron***

construct a French ‘Self’ and a Malian ‘Other’ in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention? These representations of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* are discovered by examining the same primary data as for the main research question.

This thesis further argues that the French President’s discursive legitimation strategies remain relatively similar, as Macron predominantly employs *altruistic* and *emotive* legitimation strategies. Prior to the confrontation of the heightened legitimacy shortfall, nevertheless, the emphasis is put on the safety and protection of the French citizens through Operation Barkhane.

By investigating several rhetorical themes, it becomes apparent that the focus shifts to accentuated equal *partnership*, *non-interference in internal affairs*, *democracy*, and an ever-increasing *multilateralism* in 2020 and 2021. These themes emerge in conjunction with the increased prominence of ‘*African solutions to African problems*’ and the fight against terrorism, in the hope of underlining that the French military activism is not determined in the name of national interests.

The analysis affirms additionally that the Malian *Other* is constructed in a great difference from the developed, French *Self*. France still sees the *Other* as a potential for transformation and progressing towards the *Self*, but it is achievable only by means of the advice from the superior *Self* and Europe. The aspiration is thus to ensure this transformation and progress through the creation of the multilateral coalitions and initiatives, in which the French power is embedded.

1.2 IR Relevance

This research touches upon various aspects of International Relations (IR) scholarship. Although sovereignty has provided the organizing principle of IR for over 360 years, states have accepted intervention by invitation for decades (Haass, 2009; Kenny and Butler, 2019: 137). Despite the legality of the military interventions that are occurring, such as Operation Barkhane, they always violate the international legal norm of sovereignty and self-determination (Wing, 2016: 72; Finnemore, 2003: 6). This thesis explores the French Operation Barkhane, which is employed on Malian soil until the first quarter of 2022 and may be considered as relevant to the social scientific field of IR and its sub-fields of *Security Studies* and *Strategic Studies*.

By relying on discursive data, this research further captures how the legitimation of external military presence is facilitated to the sovereign state of Mali through various discursive strategies and construction of the *Self* and the *Other* in the legitimation discourse. With the aim of doing so, the study locates to the post-structuralist understanding of IR and, more precisely, to its sub-field of FPA. In particular, Lene Hansen’s (2006) model for post-structuralist discourse analysis (hereafter ‘PDA’) is going to be operationalized and adjusted to incorporate the investigation of legitimation discourse

(see 3.1). The objective is hence to subsume a discursive legitimation strategy framework to the post-structuralist FPA as it has not been accomplished yet.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

Following the introduction, the thesis is structured as follows. The second chapter, the literature review, is divided into four broader themes of research. Starting by presenting post-structuralism in relation to FPA, the literature review carries on with inquiries investigating French foreign and security policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa before directing attention to French interventionism in Mali and the Sahel region. The focus shifts subsequently to the issue of legitimacy in international interventions, and more specifically, to the discursive legitimation of military interventions. The third chapter, the methodology part, begins with introducing PDA and Hansen's (2006) model, and continues with exploring a case study research design in a particular moment and event, and drawing attention to the one, French *Self*. It further discusses the chosen discursive data before proceeding to the limitations of the study. The fourth chapter comprises the analysis, the investigation of basic discourses and the constructions of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* in a chronological order from 2017 to 2021 in Macron's official foreign policy discourse. This thesis ends with concluding remarks, critical reflections and considerations for future research.

2. Literature Review

To answer the main research question: *(1) How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?* and the sub-question: *(2) How did Macron construct a French 'Self' and a Malian 'Other' in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention?* this literature review examines scholarly inquiries that have been approaching similar questions. This section of the thesis has been divided into four general themes, all of which help to grasp a better understanding of the useful concepts, models, as well as limitations in the existing research. These sections are (1) Theoretical Framework, which discusses post-structuralism in relation to FPA, (2) French Foreign and Security Policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing predominantly on the post-colonial period and the continuity versus change debate, (3) French Interventionism in Mali and the Sahel Region, and (4) Legitimacy in International Interventions.

2.1 Theoretical Framework – Post-structuralism in FPA

Post-structuralism became part of IR in the 1980s with the belief that there is a need to investigate how constructions of the world, and the people and places within it, make particular policies to seem natural and therefore legitimate (Hansen, 2017: 160). In contrast to mainstream approaches, post-structuralists embrace post-positivist epistemology and believe that causality is inappropriate to utilize because structures are constituted through human action (ibid: 161).

Making use of the concept of discourse, post-structuralists show that distinctions between IR and domestic politics is neither given nor based on objective features, rather maintained through academic and policy discourses and practices (Hansen, 2016: 96). More precisely, foreign policies are dependent upon specific representations of countries, places, and people that such policies are assisting or deterring, as well as on representations of the national *Self* that undertakes these policies (ibid.). The construction of identity is thereby put epistemologically in the forefront of the analysis.

Traditionally, security discourses have constituted a national *Self* facing one or more threatening *Others*, whose identities were radically different from the one of the *Self* (Hansen, 2006: 32). One must acknowledge, however, that these constructions of identity can take on different degrees of 'Otherness', ranging from fundamental difference between *Self* and *Other* to constructions of less than radical difference (ibid.).

This research is not principally concerned with identity but rather with how the French President's discursive articulations authorize the French military intervention in Mali and the wider Sahel region. Legitimation can be considered as a key discourse goal sought by political actors and it deserves

special attention because it is from that speech act that they justify their political agenda, for instance, to alter or maintain the foreign policy decisions (Cap, 2008: 39; Reyes, 2011: 783). Hence, the purpose is additionally to contribute to expanding the use of post-structuralism within FPA as the primary focus is on the key legitimization discourses.

This thesis also aspires to develop a framework, based on Hansen's (2006) research, that is applicable to other national contexts to increase the external validity of the study. The construction of the *Self*, the official state of France, in a process of differentiation with Mali, the *Other*, is going to be further explored, since these identity constructions are embedded in the legitimization discourse. France must continuously construct itself as the legitimate 'intervening' actor to remain in the country of the 'Other'.

As the post-structuralist school of thought is a collection of sometimes counteractive assumptions, this thesis is based predominantly on Lene Hansen's (2006) work. In *Security as practice, Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*, Hansen (2006: 17) proposes a useful framework to theorize the constitutive relationship of identity and foreign policies as suggested, for example, by heads of states. In respect of the focus of this thesis, Hansen underlines that there can be no intervention without a description of the locale in which intervention takes place and that their identities are continuously restated, negotiated, and reshaped subjects and objects by decision-makers (ibid.).

The discourse analytical theory of identity and foreign policy, as well as the methodological framework introduced by Hansen (2006), will be better operationalized in the methodology section of the thesis (see 3.1; 3.2). This sub-section discussed the theoretical elements and guiding assumptions of the study. It thus highlighted the epistemological and ontological importance of both, discourse and identity in the foreign and security policy legitimization processes. The next part scrutinizes how scholars have studied French Foreign and Security Policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa to gain a better knowledge on the findings related to the proposed research questions.

2.2 French Foreign and Security Policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa

This sub-section of the literature review examines scholarly works on French foreign and security policy-making towards Africa, establishing a necessary background for the upcoming parts of the thesis. It provides useful concepts, such as *Françafrique* and *grandeur*, on France's policy orientations and on how France's presence in the region has been explored by scholars after decolonization. To understand France's Africa policy, looking back at history is important, since 'French Africa policy during the Fifth Republic is inseparable from its founder, General de Gaulle' (Chafer, 2014: 514).

In engineering the nominal independence of *Francophonie* states in Africa by means of ‘Treaties of Cooperation’ in the late 1950s and early 1960s President de Gaulle ensured a restructuring of the imperial relationship (see Gregory, 2000: 435; Chafer, 2001: 167). Consequently, France found an exclusive sphere of influence, a *pré carré africain*, on which to base its claims of *grandeur* and great power status (Gregory, 2000: 436). At the same time, African governing élites benefited from a reliable ally that provided economic, political, technical, and, if needed, military support, in a situation in which their hold of power was often fragile (Chafer, 2002: 344).

With the interest to investigate to what extent today’s Franco-African relations reflect the past, many scholars have been exploring the degree of continuity or change in French foreign and security policy-making in Africa (see Moncrieff, 2012; Cumming, 2013; Charbonneau, 2008a; Bocvon, 2011; Chafer, 2014). Re-examining both the discourse and policy of the French security state in sub-Saharan Africa, Charbonneau (2008a: 3-4) emphasizes two dimensions: (1) the policy is the result of the relationships of French and African elites, their mutual interests, their transnational hegemony over social conditions and the policy discourse, and their mutual objectives in sustaining and reproducing the status quo, and that (2) French security policy vis-à-vis Africa has always been part of a Western strategy of national and global domination, control, and governance.

That said, the former French President Nicholas Sarkozy promised a break with the occult practices of the past whereas his presidency was ultimately marked by continuity (Moncrieff, 2012: 375) and at times characterized by confusion, ‘freneticism’, and a ‘piecemeal approach with no vision’ (Cumming, 2013: 42; Haski, 2007). While surveying Sarkozy’s speeches and policy choices in a case study, Moncrieff (2012: 375) asserts that Sarkozy remained ambivalent, not willing to expend the necessary political capital at home to make a decisive break with the past. However, Sarkozy’s reform of France’s military presence, also by having a constant emphasis on multilateralism, may even be regarded as his greatest historical legacy (*ibid.*).

In a similar vein, François Hollande promised to shatter the unacceptable practices and did not possess any links to the *réseaux* of *la Françafrique* (Franco-African elite networks) (Chafer, 2014: 527). Drawing on a geopolitical lens, Chafer (2014: 513-520) states that Hollande decided to intervene in Mali in 2013 because it held a central position in the colonial federation of French West Africa and consequently continues to occupy a central place in France’s post-colonial sphere of influence, which is a crucial element of its continuing claim to global power status (*ibid.*, see also Chafer, 2002: 345-346). If France would have been ejected from Mali by Islamist militants, it would have represented a major blow to this claim (Chafer, 2014: 522).

The above-mentioned military intervention to Mali, named Operation Serval, its successor Operation Barkhane, and French interventionism in general, have been criticized and explored from

several perspectives by certain scholars (see, for example, Boeke and Schuurman, 2015; Wing, 2016, Charbonneau, 2019). As this thesis is particularly interested in France's military presence in Mali, and more accurately Operation Barkhane, the next sub-chapter is dedicated to the body of literature on French interventionism in Mali and the Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger).

The review of the literature on continuity versus change debate reveals that there is a general consensus amongst scholars that French foreign and security policy making in sub-Saharan Africa has been marked by continuity, although the French Presidents have pledged to put an end to it (Tardy, 2020: 546). Therefore, the continent remains important for France's great power status or even French domination (Charbonneau 2008a; 2008b). However, Emmanuel Macron's Africa policy has not gained scholarly attention thus far, most likely since his presidency will continue until 2022 or even longer if he wins the next presidential elections. Yet, the current literature on Franco-African relations can be expanded, especially concerning specific foreign and security policy decisions.

2.3 French Interventionism in Mali and the Sahel Region

France has launched more than 35 military interventions in the African continent between the end of the Franco-Algerian War in 1962, which officially terminated the French colonial empire, and today (Henke, 2017: 308). As a result, it has been said that France remains one of the world's most interventionist countries in the global arena (ibid.; Recchia, 2020: 508). Regardless of this fact, the academic literature has paid surprisingly little attention to French military interventions in Africa, not to mention the Sahel region or Mali.

Nonetheless, scholars became increasingly interested in French interventionism in the African continent after François Hollande, who entered public office with a non-interventionist agenda, deployed 4,000 combat troops to Mali one year later – initially without any multilateral participation (Erforth, 2020: 560). According to Chafer (2016: 136), it was the sense of historical destiny, combined with the expectations of African leaders, the international community and the French military, which meant that Hollande ultimately decided that France should intervene.

Recent scholarly inquiries have focused on the aspect of multilateralism in French interventionism (Erforth, 2020; Recchia, 2020; Tardy, 2020; Chafer et al., 2020). Relying on historical process tracing, Recchia (2020: 510) concludes that multilateralism is primarily utilized to counter nationalist pushback and related accusations of neocolonialism from African audiences and enables France to continue to shape political events as first among equals in its African sphere of influence. In the same vein, Erforth (2020: 560-562) underlines that it becomes clear from French discourse and policies that France's deft use of multilateralism also helps it fulfil its self-imposed and widely accepted role

as a '*puissance d'influence*', notably within the European Union (henceforth the 'EU') and vis-à-vis its African partners (ibid: 577).

On the other hand, Tardy (2020: 536-555) asserts that France has embraced multilateralism not only due to its weakening posture as a great power but regards it also as a means to burden-sharing and as a legitimacy provider. That is, France ostensibly opts for the EU multilateral framework to conduct operations; by resorting to the EU, France seeks the input legitimacy of an international norm-setter that is less easily accused of being an instrument of power politics (ibid: 546). Interestingly, scholars have brought up the question of legitimacy in French interventionism in Mali and the Sahel region *per se* (see Chafer, 2016; Wing, 2016; Sabrow, 2017; Recchia, 2020).

In his article, Chafer (2016: 137) underlines that the increasing difficulties in implementing Europeanisation and Africanisation have led to the necessity to establish new legitimacy for French Africa policy. However, the Franco-G5 cooperation and the fight against terrorism have provided more legitimacy for French military engagement in Africa, the latter being critically important to the international legitimacy of the mission (ibid.; Wing, 2016: 74). This research thus assumes that Macron has remarkably emphasized the aspect of terrorism in his legitimization strategies.

While examining how French actors frame the Malian conflict to their advantage in a case study, Wing (2016: 74) highlights that the expansion across the Sahel region and creation of bases may further change the perception of France's role even though most Malians welcomed the French presence in 2013. The French failing to bring stability with a years-long military operation, the citizens in the region, in fact, began to grow suspicious of France's intentions from December 2019 onwards in the Sahel (Mules, 2019). The anti-French sentiments started to translate into protests throughout the whole region, which generated multiple videos of anti-French actions, including the repeated burning of flags (Guichaoua, 2020: 900).

Accordingly, France decided in June 2021 to end its long-standing Operation Barkhane as an 'external operation in the Sahel' and to progressively operate through various multilateral frameworks. One may argue that it is linked to Paris' willingness to escape the neo-colonial trap and share the expensive costs of the missions. That is not, however, in the prime research scope of this thesis even though the different French-led multilateral initiatives and their purposes are going to be critically explored in the analysis section (see 4).

It becomes apparent that the existing academic literature has not examined the ways in which France has attempted to discursively legitimize and construct its military presence in Mali during Macron's presidency. Considering the intervention, scholars focus primarily on the moment of intervention even if the decision-makers must continuously legitimize their actions and decisions. This implies that the current literature on French interventionism can be improved. It necessitates

nevertheless the introduction of both, the literature on legitimacy in the context of international interventions and certain research on the discursive legitimation of international interventions.

2.4 Legitimacy in International Interventions

The investigation of the French military activism prerequisites to explore the meaning of the concept of legitimacy and how it is applicable to international interventions to fragile countries. As this thesis seeks to specifically examine the discursive legitimation of military interventions, this sub-section scrutinizes inquiries which establish frameworks to study discursive legitimation.

In the first place, legitimacy is usually considered a characteristic of a hierarchical relationship between two actors as well as seen as both, subjective and intersubjective normative beliefs about the appropriateness of certain rules governing state behavior (von Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017: 274; Imerman, 2018: 74; Franck, 1992: 50). Apart from the research on legitimacy that has been carried out on states, one must note that the context in which to consider legitimacy is different in international interventions to fragile or post-conflict countries (von Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017: 273).

These settings are characterized by the absence or weakness of the state, the fluidity of power relations, rapidly changing contextual factors and a constantly evolving set of actors (ibid.). This is undoubtedly the situation in Mali as the country has been roiled by ongoing political crisis at least since 2012 (Wing, 2021). Besides, *coup d'états* are said to have become commonplace as there have been two coups in the past eleven months (ibid.). Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that intervening states have at least three legitimacy audiences: domestic publics in troop-contributing states (the French citizens), actors in the state where the intervention takes place (the Malians) and the broader international community (e.g., the EU and the UN) (Coleman, 2017: 341).

Switching the focus to coalition design, Coleman (2017: 340) asserts that decision-makers presume that it is one crucial factor which affects each legitimacy audience's assessment. The legitimacy considerations shape coalition design depending on decision-makers' beliefs about (1) whether or not their operation faces (a possible) legitimacy deficit with respect to a particular audience or (2) what coalition design features might alleviate this deficit, and at what cost (ibid.).

France's military presence through Operation Barkhane has indeed faced a legitimacy deficit in the Sahel region and in France, as mentioned in the introduction and the previous sub-section (see 1; 2.4). In addition, a poll published in January 2021 by Institut français d'opinion publique (IFOP) reveals that the French support for the mission fell from 73 percent to 49 percent between February 2013 and January 2021 (Tih, 2021; IFOP, 2021). This damaged legitimacy of Paris' unilateral

intervention can be regarded as one of the main reasons behind the decision to end the operation, in line with the local governments' unwillingness to cooperate, the inefficient results and the upcoming French presidential elections in 2022.

With regard to the main research question of this thesis, it is necessary to examine the facet of discursive legitimation more profoundly. Legitimacy is something that needs to be claimed, justified and accepted through the process of legitimation (von Billerbeck and Gippert, 2017: 280; see also Beetham, 1991). Decision-makers may thus follow different strategies of legitimation, depending on the audience they seek to convince and the resources they have at their disposal (ibid.).

This process of legitimation is enacted by providing arguments that explain, *inter alia*, our social action and declarations (Reyes, 2011: 782). Drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and previous studies on legitimation (see van Leeuwen, 2008), Reyes (2011: 784) analyzes Bush's and Obama's speeches and claims that five strategies of legitimation, (1) *emotions* (2) *a hypothetical future*, (3) *rationality*, (4) *voices of expertise* and (5) *altruism*, appear to justify social practices (ibid: 784-804). These five strategies of discursive legitimation are going to be employed and better explained throughout the analysis. See the definitions from the table below (Table A).

Strategies of discursive legitimation	Definition
Emotions	To trigger people's emotions to legitimize future actions, e.g., us vs. them
A hypothetical future	To pose a threat in the future that requires our imminent action. If + past [protasis] → would + Infinitive without to [apodosis]
Rationality	Decisions are made after a heeded, evaluated, and thoughtful procedure
Voices of expertise	Experts in a specific field are backing the politician's proposal
Altruism	To ensure that the proposals do not appear driven only by personal interests

Table A. *Strategies of discursive legitimation* (Adapted from: Reyes, 2011: 785-787)

Using a chronological content analysis of statements to understand the positions adopted by the French politicians during the Arab uprisings, Beauregard et al. (2019: 40-41) uncover that the boundaries of acceptable rhetoric were a core element in the rhetorical strategies that French

policymakers adopted as they adjusted their stances over time. That is, decision-makers are prone to shift their stances if they get negative feedback and will pursue strategies to regain acceptability (ibid: 44). Some selected themes to assess French rhetorical strategies were *democracy*, *partnership*, *non-interference in internal affairs* and *multilateralism* (ibid: 48). See the definitions below (Table B).

Theme	Definition
Democracy	Any reference to the holding of elections
Partnership	Any mention of France’s special relationship or close ties with other countries. It also includes any mention of discussion or meeting with leaders of other countries
Non-interference in internal affairs	It includes any mention of the will to respect the principle of non-interference and to avoid appearing as givers of lessons to the leaders of other countries
Multilateralism	Any mention of cooperation with more than two countries in international organizations

Table B. *Definitions of the selected themes* (Adapted from: Beauregard et al., 2019: 47)

These themes are going to be taken into consideration to complement the strategies of legitimation (Reyes, 2011) and Hansen’s (2006) framework. The attention is further given to the possible repositioning of Macron’s stance due to the heightened negative feedback and the increased legitimacy deficit of the Operation Barkhane.

The examined academic literature in this sub-section demonstrates that to study legitimation of intervention by decision-makers, it is to study discourse through qualitative and interpretivist means. These methods coincide well with the post-structuralist theoretical framework due to its discursive ontological and epistemological viewpoints. Furthermore, post-structuralism can provide a broader understanding of the legitimation processes, compared to the reviewed IR theory-lacking studies, as it stresses the aspect of identity construction in the foreign and security policy-making discourse.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

To conclude, the literature review began by discussing the theoretical elements and guiding assumptions of the study. More precisely, Hansen's (2006) post-structuralist framework for FPA enables to locate the basic discourses and allows for an in-depth investigation of the construction of the *Self* in contrast to the *Other*. As can be noted from the review of the literature, no study has focused on the aspect of identity, which indicates that further investigation in this area is needed.

The second sub-section of the review explored inquiries on French foreign and security policy-making in sub-Saharan Africa. The research has been concentrated on the French discourse and policy orientations and the continuity versus change debate. However, it lacks an understanding of Macron's Africa policy, which has not gained scholarly attention thus far. This study aspires to overcome this deficiency by focusing on the Macron era.

The third sub-section subsequently enlightened principally how Operation Serval and Barkhane have been investigated. Some scholars have shed light on the aspects of multilateralism in French interventionism (Chafer et al., 2020; Erforth, 2020; Recchia, 2020; Tardy, 2020) whereas others on the question of legitimacy (see Wing, 2016; Chafer, 2016; Wing, 2016; Recchia, 2020; Tull, 2021). Yet, the existing research has not paid attention to how a French President has discursively legitimized French military presence in a theoretical and systematic manner, especially considering the heightened legitimacy shortfall, both at home and in the Sahel.

The last part thus introduced the concept of legitimacy and how it is understood in the context of international interventions to fragile countries. It also explored academic literature investigating discursive legitimation strategies of top decision-makers in relation to military interventions. These inquiries employed qualitative and interpretivist methods with a particular focus on discourse. The analysis of the thesis is going to apply strategies of legitimation (Reyes, 2011) and rhetorical themes (Beauregard et al., 2019) to examine the key legitimation strategies and possible discursive shifts of Emmanuel Macron.

3. Methodology

To reiterate, this thesis is guided by the following research question: *(1) How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?* and the sub-question: *(2) How did Macron construct a French 'Self' and a Malian 'Other' in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention?* To answer these questions, this thesis makes use of an interpretivist approach, developed by Lene Hansen (2006), to PDA, which focuses on analyzing national identity and discourse. After adjusting her framework in alignment with the objective of the thesis, the subsequent section (3.2) introduces Hansen's (2006) research design, emphasizing the utilization of a case study research design in a particular moment and event, and drawing attention to the one, French *Self*. Afterwards, intertextual model 1 is going to be discussed and the discursive data is going to be collected and selected accordingly. This section ends with considering the limitations of the methodological decisions before continuing with the analysis.

3.1 Discourse Analysis

This sub-section starts by explaining what is meant by discourse analysis (henceforward referred to as 'DA') and why it is the most suitable method for the purposes of the study. Thereafter, the concept of basic discourse and other steps from Lene Hansen's (2006) understanding of PDA are going to be explored and operationalized for the specific scope of the thesis. Thus, this part draws heavily on the theoretical and methodological guidelines presented in Hansen's (2006) book.

DA is a method for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive and constructivist (Lamont, 2015: 91). It is founded on a strong social constructivist epistemology and grows out of the belief that meaning, and hence social reality, arise out of discourses that bring new ideas, objects and practices to the world (Hardy et al., 2004: 20). The aforesaid and the intent of this thesis are indeed in line with post-structuralist thinking, which has its own branch of DA – often associated with the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972).

Consequently, it is more appropriate to utilize DA instead of quantitative analysis, which goes without saying, and other qualitative methods, such as content analysis, which has a realist ontology and presumes that scientific methods can be used to attain knowledge of the social world (Hardy et al., 2004: 21). Furthermore, PDA gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts; that is, for instance, speeches in the case of official foreign policy, which is well-fitting for this research (Hansen, 2006: 119).

As there are various approaches to PDA, such as Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) post-structuralist discourse theory, and as this thesis is primarily interested in the aspect of FPA, Lene Hansen's (2006) approach has proven to be exceedingly suitable albeit with certain adjustments. To begin with, Hansen (2006: 84) suggests that a researcher should aim to identify the *basic discourses*, 'the main structural positions within the debate', from a wide reading of texts. That is, they are the main points of contestation within a debate, facilitate a structured account of the relationship between discourses and provide a lens through which a multitude of different representations and policies can be seen as systematically connected (ibid.).

Having the discursive legitimization processes of military interventions in the central interest, the basic discourses are understood as the main discursive legitimization strategies surrounding Operation Barkhane. As already illustrated (see 2.4), strategies of legitimization (Reyes, 2011) and rhetorical themes (Beauregard et al., 2019) are going to be included in the analysis to companion Hansen's framework (2006). The basic discourses should further be built on explicit articulations of 'key representations' of identity; the analysis hence focuses also on the discursive constructions of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* in the legitimization discourse (Hansen, 2006: 84-85).

In fine, the framework proposes to investigate how radical the differentiation (degree of 'Otherness') is in the *spatial*, *temporal*, and *ethical* constructions of the *Self* and *Other* (ibid: 86). To explain further, (1) *spatially* constructed identity involves the construction of boundaries, such as countries or regions, and the construction of political subjects, e.g., 'terrorists', (2) *temporal* identity, on the other hand, encompasses temporal themes including development and transformation, and (3) *ethical* identity is linked to the construction of responsibility, even if only implicitly as applicable toward a national citizenry (ibid: 78-82).

These three analytical lenses are going to be applied to Macron's foreign policy discourse to explore the construction of the *Self* and the *Other* and how the difference is constructed between them to answer the sub-question of the thesis. As mentioned previously in the literature review (see 1.1.), Hansen (2006: 32) believes that the constructions of identity can take on different degrees of 'Otherness'.

Furthermore, Hansen (2006: 110-111) offers a specific research design for PDA which is based upon four different ways to delimit the scope of the study: *number of selves*, *temporal perspective*, *intertextual models* and *number of events*. This research design, and how it is going to be employed to this research, will be presented in the next sub-section following the presentation of the case study research design.

3.2 Research Design for Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis

The review of the existing literature demonstrated that most of the research on French interventionism in Mali and the wider Sahel region have chosen a case study research design for their inquiries (see Moncrieff, 2012; Wing, 2016) even if many scholars have been focusing on the continuity versus change debate whilst analyzing Franco-African relations (see, for instance, Charbonneau, 2008b; Bocvon, 2011). The continuity-change spectrum does not, however, offer an in-depth investigation of how an international intervention is legitimized through different discursive and rhetorical legitimation strategies.

Since this study pursues to develop an in-depth analysis of the discursive legitimation practices of France's military intervention in Mali, a qualitative case study permits a useful research design as well in contrast to a small-N comparative study, which typically involves the comparison of two or more cases and requires that they are selected attentively (Creswell and Creswell, 2018: 14). Good case studies should contribute to the academic literature that has been written on the subject with reference to the particular case (*internally valid*) and should aim to say something more general and engage with wider academic debates that might be applicable to other contexts and other cases (*externally valid*) (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 205).

The purpose of this thesis is *de facto* to contribute to the existing literature on Franco-African relations and French interventionism in the Sahel region. As aforesaid, there has been negligence on Macron's Africa policy and discursive legitimation of French military presence in Mali and the wider Sahel region. The goal is additionally to contribute to developing the use of post-structuralism and Hansen's (2006) model, as exemplified previously in the literature review (see 1.1), since the prime focus is on the key discursive legitimation strategies in contrast to sole concentration on the interlinkage between national identity and discourse.

On the other hand, the aspiration is to provide a model, based on Hansen's (2006) work, that may be applied to other national contexts when analyzing discursive legitimation of military intervention by decision-makers. As mentioned earlier, Hansen (2006: 110-111) offers a specific research design for PDA which is based upon four different ways to delimit the scope of the study (see figure A). This research design is not going to be explored in detail, rather which components will be used in the analysis.

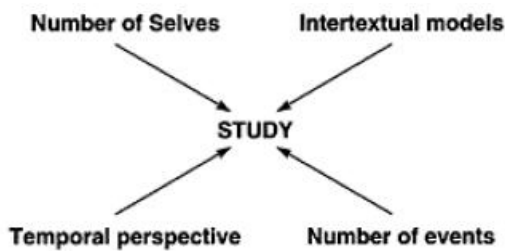


Figure A. *Research design for discourse analysis* (Hansen, 2006: 110-111)

This thesis examines the one, French *Self*, during Macron’s presidency, which is the *temporal perspective* of the study since the objective of a case study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the French President discursively legitimized France’s military presence through Operation Barkhane in Mali while constructing the French *Self* and the Malian *Other*. Having chosen a one-moment study, it is logical to choose one event (that is, Operation Barkhane) in contrast to multiple event studies (Hansen, 2006: 115-116).

Out of the three intertextual models that Hansen suggests: (1) official discourse, (2) wider political debate, (3a) cultural representations, (3b) marginal political discourses, the most suitable for this study is model 1, which is directly based on official foreign policy discourse through which state action is legitimized (ibid: 93). It also centers on political leaders with official authority to sanction the foreign policies pursued and those with central roles in executing these policies (ibid: 93-94). This leads us to the next sub-section, data collection and selection, which explains more precisely both the type of relevant data chosen for the study and how it will be collected.

3.3 Data Collection and Selection

The previous sub-section already explored certain boundaries that must be set before starting data gathering. This part concerns more precisely how the data will be collected from specific official websites of the French Republic and on what basis the data is selected for the analysis.

Having the focus on Macron’s presidency, the time frame for the data collection is set from 14th May in 2017 to 10th of June in 2021 when the French President announced the ending of the Operation Barkhane and a significant change to France’s strategy in the Sahel. As this study has decided to utilize intertextual model 1, it is justified to examine the discourse of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who is also the commander-in-chief of the French Armed Forces.

Furthermore, the President’s discourse reflects the entire ‘*French touch*’ on foreign policy while providing a great continuation to the literature on Franco-African relations and French interventionism as the inquiries have focused on the former French Presidents. To ensure that the data

is authentic, it is retrieved from official governmental websites: <https://www.elysee.fr/>, www.vie-publique.fr and www.diplomatie.gouv.fr. To detect relevant material and to further limit the amount of text, keywords such as ‘Macron’, ‘Barkhane’, ‘Mali’, ‘Sahel’ and ‘G5’ are used.

A total of twenty-one speeches, declarations and press statements are collected and carefully read through multiple times. The primary data that is being selected is limited either to maximum 2800 words or 25 minutes of video. As the material is gathered online, all three legitimacy audiences (see 2.4) are able to view them. Out of the statements that fit the above-mentioned criteria, one speech and two declarations are selected. To increase the accuracy of results, the material collected from 2018 and 2019 is not going to be subsumed due to the inattention on Mali and the limited scope of this research. The selected material can be scrutinized from the table below (Table C).

Number of the speech or declaration	Title	Date and place
1	Discours sur la base Barkhane	19 th of May 2017 in Gao, Mali
2	Déclaration à la presse du Président de la République, Emmanuel Macron, lors du G5 Sahel	13 th of January 2020 in Pau, France (Pau Summit)
3	Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, président de la République, sur la lutte contre le terrorisme au Sahel	16 th of February 2021 in Paris, France (N’Djamena Summit)

Table C. *The selected material for the analysis*

The speech of 2017 is eminently relevant because it is given in the beginning of Macron’s presidency. Macron is thus trying to assert both a certain vision of French foreign policy in Africa and his image as a president committed to managing conflicts in the Sahel. The declarations of 2020 and 2021, on the other hand, have been delivered in high-profile Summits which took place following France’s increased legitimacy deficit.

Moreover, the chosen material is in French and it is therefore essential to ensure that the words are translated properly while holding their true meaning, especially in conducting DA to guarantee the reliability of the text. The author of this thesis has passed a French DALF C1 language exam, which indicates a professional command of the French language and the possibility not to depend on a translator during the research process.

Nevertheless, Hansen (2006: 84) points out that certain types of policy texts and official communiqués are of a declaratory nature and do not elaborate on what constructions of identity are implicated. Simultaneously, they are usually prepared with a lot of consideration by a team of professionals with the intention to gain legitimacy. The aforesaid is certainly detected while going through France's Defense and National Strategy 2017 and Strategic Update of 2021, which were supposed to be analyzed in compliance with Macron's speeches and declarations. Next, the limitations of the methodological decisions are going to be explored more thoroughly.

3.4 Limitations

Before continuing to the analysis section, it is of crucial importance to discuss certain limitations of the methodological decisions that have been made to conduct the study. In brief, it is necessary to explore the shortcomings of interpretivism, DA and case study research design.

In the first place, this research is located in the interpretivist approach to social inquiry, which maintains that the social world does not exist independently of our interpretation of it (Halperin and Heath, 2012: 39-40). Thus, it is impossible to gain knowledge of the social world by searching for *objective* regularities of behavior that can be summed up in social scientific laws (ibid.). As a consequence, it must be acknowledged that this research does not seek to claim any objective truth.

Secondly, DA as a method has been criticized predominantly in terms of *validity*. This study desires, therefore, to demonstrate a careful reading of the material; provide an interpretation that is clearly related to the textual evidence; and present an analysis which aims to be plausible, credible, and fruitful (ibid.). Furthermore, this research is open and transparent both about the textual evidence under review and the basis of the claims made (ibid.).

Another limitation concerns the choice of a case study as the research design. Although case studies enable a single case to be intensively examined, they also suffer from certain limitations, particularly in terms of how far the findings from one case study may be generalized to other contexts (ibid: 208). This research, however, aspires to develop Hansen's (2006) model to be more applicable to the study of discursive legitimation of military intervention, which can be indeed utilized in similar studies than this case study.

4. Analysis

To explore the main research question: *(1) How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?* and the sub-question: *(2) How did Macron construct a French 'Self' and a Malian 'Other' in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention?* this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the selected speech and official declarations of Emmanuel Macron. It examines the main discursive legitimation strategies and the construction of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* in a chronological order. More specifically, it makes use of the frameworks introduced by Reyes (2011) and Beauregard et al. (2019) to enhance Hansen's (2006) approach which does not touch upon the issue of discursive legitimation *per se*. The analysis further applies Hansen's (2006) understandings to analyze the construction of the *Self* and the *Other* and pays particular attention to *spatially, temporally, and ethically* constructed identities. Furthermore, the attention is directed to the degree of 'Otherness' in the material to scrutinize how different the Malian *Other* is from the French *Self*.

4.1 Basic Discourses and the Constructions of the *Self* and the *Other*

4.1.1 2017

The newly elected President of the French Republic and the Chief of Armed Forces, Emmanuel Macron, held a speech on the 19th of May in 2017 on the Barkhane military base in Gao, Mali. In the beginning of his speech, Macron declares to the French soldiers that:

[...] you should know that there is not a single Frenchman who does not know what he owes you
[...] There is not a single French person who does not know that the serenity of our lives, the security of our children, the joys of each day have a price, and that price is your sacrifices [...]
These sacrifices honor you and honor France. (19/05/2017)

The purpose is evidently to appeal to emotions, since the President mentions separately the security of the children and emphasizes that French people, overall, are safe due to the presence of the French soldiers in Mali. Thus, Macron utilizes an *emotive legitimation strategy*, introduced in the literature review (see 2.4), to alter the cognitive structure of the audiences' emotions (Reyes, 2011: 789). Furthermore, Macron constructs implicitly an *ethical identity* for the French *Self* to have a responsibility towards the French national citizenry to remain in Mali to protect their children and the

joy of their everyday life. Indeed, Mali is simultaneously constructed as the *Other* who is jeopardizing the security and social fabric of the national *Self*.

A threat generated a few kilometers from here will very quickly strike the women and children of France if we do not intervene with our resolute and powerful action [...] You are more than ever our sentinels and our bulwark against the excesses of terrorism, extremism, and fanaticism. Here, you are the vanguard of the Republic [...]. (19/05/2017)

Herein, the French President draws attention to possible dangers in which French women and children might be if France does not intervene. That is, the French soldiers have the responsibility (*ethical identity*), as the sentinel and bulwark of France, to combat against the above-mentioned threats and to protect the *Self*. It is worth noting that Macron does not specify who he regards as a possible terrorist but rather remains vague. As the terrorists consist of Malians, it is complicated to know whether the President sees all Malians as potential terrorists and threats to France's national security. Afterwards, Macron begins to specify the events that took place in 2013 when François Hollande decided to launch Operation Serval:

[...] [the] intelligence and determination with which you are carrying out this mission is necessary for the stability of Mali and, more broadly, of the Sahel, and therefore for our security. In January 2013, Mali was in danger. This danger could have spread to its neighbors in West Africa. The armed terrorist groups that enslave the north of the country wanted to march on Bamako. At the request of the Malian government, France [...] stopped them, and I would like to salute the courageous decision to intervene by President François Hollande. (19/05/2017)

One can note for the first time that Macron mentions the necessity of the mission for Mali and the Sahel region, although he re-mentions the importance of the operation for the security of France. Hence, Macron switches the discursive strategy to *legitimation through altruism* since France's actions are presented also as beneficial for Mali. The usage of this legitimation strategy may help the process of justification and to circumvent judgement about the selfishness of the speaker (Reyes, 2011: 801).

Furthermore, Macron emphasizes that it is due to the request of the Malian government that France intervened in the first place, which is, indeed, of critical importance considering the legitimacy of military interventions. Thereby the consent of the inviting state justifies military action that would, in the absence of thereof, amount to a prohibited use of force by one state in the territory of another (Kenny and Butler, 2019: 138).

It is in the continuity of these efforts that the United Nations mission, the MINUSMA, has been deployed. I would like to pay tribute to all the European armies that are fighting alongside us. (19/05/2017)

In other words, Macron starts to enlighten France's *multilateral* strategy, which further expresses the approval of the third legitimacy audience, the main multilateral organizations in which France enjoys a leading role. One must remark, however, that the Rwandan genocide in 1994 – in which France contributed – is regarded as the moment when a reassessment of France's old-style unilateralist military approach to Africa became inescapable (Chafer et al., 2020: 490). Thereafter, the focus shifts towards the increasing development-security nexus in French policy-making:

This is why, beyond this military action, I will resolutely lead an action for the development of the region. I came today with the director of the French Development Agency and what we are going to do is to create a real continuum between your action and the development action. I know that already today, the Chief of Defense Staff and the Director General are working hand in hand on this subject. Our armies have a long history of expertise in this respect. (19/05/2017)

The aforesaid is linked to *legitimation through expertise*. The voices of experts are employed occasionally in discourse to show the legitimacy audiences that experts in a specific field are backing the politician's proposal, as outlined previously (see 2.4) (Reyes, 2011: 786). This legitimation refers to the 'authorization' that a speaker brings to the immediate context of the current speech to strengthen his position (ibid.). Moreover, Macron resorts to constructing all, *spatial* (space), *temporal* (time) and *ethical* (responsibility) *identities*.

First, he clearly constructs countries and boundaries; 'France' and 'Mali' and draws upon a regional construction; 'the Sahel'. In this setting, France is constructed as the progressive, developed *Self* who will lead, under Macron and with the help of the director of AFD and the Chief of Defense Staff, an action to develop the Malian *Other* that needs to be developed and temporally progressed towards the *Self*. This is accomplished by developing the *Other's* adoption of Western policies and advice.

I want these roads of terrorism, war and necessity to become roads of freedom, and what will make this possible is your military action, our political action and our development work. Obviously, other actors, especially private actors, should be associated with these initiatives, in conjunction with governments, because Africa must become a continent conducive to investment in education, health, culture and access to major infrastructure. (19/05/2017)

Besides emphasizing the importance of the French *Self* to remain and continue its military, political and development action in the country of the *Other*, Macron points at the whole continent of underdeveloped Africa, which is also linked to the construction of boundaries (*spatial identity*). The French President hence continues to construct the *Self* as superior to the *Other* while creating a temporal distance between those who have developed and those who have not yet (*temporal identity*).

Ladies and gentlemen who make up the Barkhane force, the mission that I am asking you to pursue has several aspects: to directly combat the armed terrorist groups that remain and that are seeking to reconstitute themselves at every moment, to develop the partnership that will enable the Malian army, which is being renewed, and the armies of the other Sahel States to control their territory, to provide the UN forces with the military support they need to fully assume their task [...]. (19/05/2017)

Macron frames the Operation Barkhane around *terrorism*, but it is interesting to notice that he does not emphasize it to a greater degree, especially since it is of critical significance of the international legitimacy of the mission (Chafer, 2014: 137; Wing, 2016: 74). Furthermore, Macron underlines the aspects of *partnership* and *multilateralism* in France's military presence in Mali and the Sahel. Whereas the development of a partnership with the Malian army reflects the possibility of cooperation with the *Other*, the UN forces certainly increase the military operation's legitimacy by signaling that the intervention's objective is not to deny self-determination, but instead to advance the goals of national sovereignty, democracy, and human rights (Recchia, 2020: 514).

You will have learned that, in addition to the fight against armed terrorist groups [...] it is a question of gaining the trust of the populations, of helping them, of accompanying the authorities in their responsibilities, according to their needs and their demands, in the service of their people [...] and what earns you the recognition of the French people, because they know that you are carrying out your mission for their security, for their protection, while upholding the values of the Republic. (19/05/2017)

After re-emphasizing the fight against terrorism, Macron constructs an *ethical identity* for the French *Self* to have the responsibility towards the local people and authorities of Mali to help and support them while re-mentioning the security and protection of the French citizens at home. At the same time, it relates to *spatial identity* since Macron demarcates France's

boundaries and non-French values of Mali, with the clear aim of advancing French values abroad.

Throughout the speech, the President of the French Republic constructs a great difference between the *Self* and *Other*. Macron considers the French *Self* as developed and superior while constructing a temporal identity of the Malian *Other* as an object in a time immensely dissimilar from the one of the *Self* (Hansen, 2006: 79-80, see also Fabian, 1983). Regardless of this difference, Mali is viewed as capable of transformation and cooperation, which demonstrates that it is not constructed as wholly radically different. Although Macron further utilizes an *altruistic legitimation strategy*, the operation's priority for the protection of the French citizens appears remarkably in this speech.

4.1.2 2020

On the 13th of January in 2020, Emmanuel Macron and the heads of state of the G5 Sahel gathered at the Pau Summit in France to clarify the political framework, to specify and reinforce the military and political objectives and, above all, the new terms of engagement they had established. It must be reiterated that the French demand for the African leaders to come to Pau seems to date back to mid-November in 2019 when the anti-French sentiments started to increase in the Sahel region (Guichaoua, 2020: 899-900).

It is also worth mentioning that various representatives of the international community, the third legitimacy audience of the French military presence in Mali, such as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of the European Council and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission were present at this Summit (Tih, 2020). This approval of multilateral institutions may *de facto* reassure sceptics in the Malian state that an intervention is likely to improve conditions for the local population (Recchia, 2020: 514). In the beginning of his declaration at the Pau Summit, Macron constructs *spatial identities* by stating:

I obviously want to think here, first, of the civilians of all the African countries of the G5 Sahel who have fallen in the context of this conflict, which has been going on for several years now, under the attacks of armed terrorist groups [...]. (13/01/2020)

More precisely, the French President constructs the boundaries of Africa and G5 Sahel, which is increasingly utilized as a reference of the Sahelian states after the establishment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force on the 2nd of July in 2017. It is further associated with France's drift away from a country- to a region-based partnership (Chafer et al., 2020: 496). Furthermore, it is crucial to point out, at the

latest at this stage, that France and every other actor defines the Sahel region according to their own needs, interests, and perceptions, since there is no internationally accepted definition of the ‘Sahel’ (Helly et al., 2015: 2-3). Following President Kaboré’s speech, Macron highlights the reasons for which France is in the Sahel:

Why is France in the Sahel? The first [...] [reason] is the fight against terrorism. We are in the Sahel at war against armed terrorist groups that obviously strike friendly populations and are active in the region [...] And the second is that we are there to enable the Sahelian states to assume full sovereignty over their territory [...] It is the choice, the decision, the request of sovereign States to preserve their sovereignty by calling on friends and allies to combat these armed terrorist groups [...]. (13/01/2020)

It is certainly possible to detect the heightened legitimacy deficit of Operation Barkhane from this part of the declaration, since Macron frames the French presence around terrorism even stronger and emphasizes the request of the G5 states, as previously in the discourse of 2017. Aiming to legitimize the French military’s continued presence in the region to protect the ‘friendly populations’ and not their own self-interests is linked to *legitimation through altruism*. It is often claimed by leaders that their actions will benefit others, where ‘others’ is used to refer, for instance, to people without democracy (Reyes, 2011: 802).

In addition to the above-stated, Macron’s previous sentences combine two themes of rhetorical strategies, *partnership* and *non-interference in internal affairs*, considering that he designates France implicitly either as an ally or friend to Mali and puts emphasis on the full sovereignty of the Sahelian states. In other words, the goal is undeniably to underline the independence of the States, to diminish the renewed neo-colonial accusations and to gain legitimacy. It is thus linked to *discursive instability* as the French President repositions his stance and changes rhetoric due to the heightened allegations (see 2.4; Beauregard et al., 2019). Moreover, Macron keeps on constructing a pan-Sahelian, regional identity (*spatial identity*) for Mali when he mentions ‘Sahel’ and ‘Sahelian states’. As aforementioned in this sub-section and in the literature review (2.3; 2.4), it is linked to France’s expanding regional approach and coalition-building promotion.

The military objective is the Tri-border area [...] To achieve this objective, we are changing the method by setting up a military coalition with a joint command between the Barkhane force and the joint G5 Sahel force, by concentrating our efforts on this zone and therefore by integrating our intelligence forces, our military forces in this zone with much greater latitude for engagement. (13/01/2020)

The French President thus goes on with promoting equal *partnership* and cooperation with the G5 Sahel force through the new joint command. Therefore, Macron constructs the Malian *Other* as more equal to the French *Self*, particularly in comparison to the speech of 2017. By actively promoting the G5 Sahel joint force as a regional partner, France is further playing a central force in coalition-building, which certainly affects each legitimacy audience's assessment, as explored in the literature review (see 2.4) (Chafer et al., 2020: 496; Coleman, 2017: 340). At the same time, cooperating with the G5 Sahel joint force provides new legitimacy for French military actions in the continent, most probably decreasing the number of neo-colonial accusations (Chafer, 2016: 136).

[...] I have decided to commit additional combat capabilities: 220 soldiers to start this dynamic will swell the troops already present on the ground in Barkhane. All partner countries that wish to join this dynamic are welcome to do so: European partners, African and international partners [...] And I want to thank in particular our European partners who have agreed to join the Takuba task force which will bring together special forces from several European countries in a few months' time. (13/01/2020)

In fact, a further 600 soldiers were deployed in the region, making an increase from 4,500 to 5,100 (Casola, 2021). Notwithstanding the increased legitimacy deficit of France's Operation Barkhane, Pau summit legitimized an even stronger French military presence. Macron also smoothly combines the aspect of *multilateralism* while including more combat capabilities to the French operation. To note, France remains an outstanding player in the special forces in question, since these elite forces are placed under French command and accompanying 300 French soldiers out of the 600 members (Palasoe, 2021).

As examined in the literature review (2.3), the increased *multilateralism* allows France to continue to shape political events as first among equals in its African sphere of influence at the same time as helps it fulfil its self-imposed and widely accepted role as a '*puissance d'influence*' (Erforth, 2020: 577; Recchia, 2020: 510). This may thus lie behind the expansion of the multilateral initiatives that France has been promoting in the Sahel (the Sahel Alliance in 2017 and all three, P3S, the Coalition for the Sahel and Takuba Task Force in 2020). France can express its power efficiently and have its regional status recognized by forging and leading multinational coalitions, acting as the pivotal state with endorsements from global and regional organizations (Recchia, 2020: 530).

[it] is the consolidation of the state, the return of the state everywhere and in all regions. We have talked about the return of the Malian state to Kidal [...] this political objective is indispensable and complementary to the military objective. (13/01/2020)

In this part, Macron implicitly constructs *temporal identities*, since the Malian *Other* is constructed as temporally progressing towards the developed, French *Self*. One must acknowledge that Macron certainly aspires Mali and the other Sahelian states to follow the path of the Western liberal democracies, that of France and the other Western countries that are providing advice in the Sahel. Consolidation of the state is highly linked to *democracy*, which is one of the aforementioned themes (see 2.4; Beauregard et al., 2019). It should be noted that Macron has not stressed this aspect as much, and especially not as one of France's main objectives, in the analyzed primary data thus far.

[...] what we are proposing to launch this evening is a major international coalition for the Sahel, which will have the task of bringing together in a coherent manner the various strands of international action: the fight against terrorism [...] the strengthening of military capacities [...] with the commitment of the UN presence through MINUSMA, the work with the European Union in particular (EUTM, EUCAP), the work with the AU and ECOWAS; the third pillar, which is support for the return of the State; the fourth pillar, which is the development pillar, with in particular the Alliance for the Sahel. (13/01/2020)

The coalition-builder, Macron hence announces the establishment of the Coalition for the Sahel, which has the aim to promote a comprehensive approach at the regional level including all levers and actors involved in the Sahel, whether being military, security, political or development actors (Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Apart from the fact that France views Mali as capable of transformation, one may argue that the promotion of the creation of the Coalition for the Sahel is certainly connected to France's willingness to ensure the Western way of development and progress of the *Other*. Furthermore, to stay extremely clear about the aspect of *multilateralism*, Africanisation and Europeanisation, their representation, commitment, and cooperation in conjunction remains emphasized.

It is relevant to discern that Macron did not construct *ethical identities*, the responsibility of the *Self* to remain in Mali to protect the *Other* or the French citizens at home. It can be said that France has already internalized its responsibility to 'lead' not only the development of the Sahel region, but all new multilateral initiatives which were stated earlier in this sub-section. Simultaneously, the Summit took place during the increased legitimacy deficit of Operation Barkhane and the heightened Franco-Sahelian cooperation, so it might have been something that Macron avoided to address. To

note, the countries of the G5 Sahel, and Mali, were discussed, heretofore, the most temporally akin to the French *Self*.

4.1.3 2021

Emmanuel Macron made a declaration after the complementation of the discussions at the N'Djamena Summit on the 16th of February in 2021, after a dialogue that took place the day before behind closed doors with the leaders of the G5 Sahel countries and the French President. This summit occurred after the Malian coup d'état on the 18th of August in 2020, and a year after the Pau Summit, which was explored in the previous sub-chapter.

In Pau, we were first able to obtain a clarification of the request from our Sahelian partners to maintain our military presence and of their desire to participate in the fight against terrorist groups [...] Our presence there was requested by the States. It is in support of the sovereignty of these States and we are fighting against a common enemy which has also already struck us on our territory, the agenda of which is international and which has made the Sahel its main area of growth, threatening the stability of all West Africa. (16/02/2021)

Thus, once again, Macron emphasizes the request from the Sahelian states to maintain the French military presence and the aspect of *partnership*. The French *Self* and the Malian *Other* are therefore highly similar since the States are described as partners and the emphasis is put on the common enemy that all, France, the Sahelian states and the international community are facing. The above-mentioned further indicates a high *discursive stability* as Macron's statement is in accordance with his declaration in Pau.

The enemy, of course, is Islamist terrorism [...] And I would like to remind you here that the main victims of this terrorism are the civilian populations of the Sahel States and then the Sahelian soldiers and our soldiers. (16/02/2021)

Here, Macron aims to legitimize both through *altruism* and *emotions* as the emphasis is put on supporting the Sahelian states and on the fact that the main victims are the citizens and the soldiers of these states. Furthermore, he keeps on highlighting the enemy, Islamist terrorism, and therefore continues to legitimize the French military presence and behavior through terrorism. Beginning to consider the increased cooperation and the obtained successes of the Sahelian countries, Macron states:

The success of this strategy, as we defined it in Pau, is a partnership. We have deepened our cooperation with the Sahelian armies [...] Our European partners have also taken their part through the rise of the Takuba task force [...] And the success of the Pau is not only a military success, but also a democratic success. Two Sahelian states have led or are in the process of conducting an electoral process [...]. (16/02/2021)

In this part, Macron stresses the aspects of *partnership*, Europeanisation and *democracy*. It is worth emphasizing that this is the first time, during this analysis, that Macron talks about a ‘democratic success’ or the ‘electoral process’ although he talked about the consolidation of the state in his declaration in 2020. The aforesaid also demonstrates that the Malian *Other* is capable of cooperating with the French *Self* and that they can be regarded as partners – and not at least at this point discussed as radically different from each other.

The coup d'état in Mali penalized the implementation of the Pau roadmap, but the establishment of the transnational authorities very clearly opens a new window of opportunity. The August 2020 coup d'état in Bamako interrupted the implementation of this roadmap, as it was preceded by a long political crisis which led to a period of inaction before the coup d'état, then very legitimate float with regional and national discussions [...]. (16/02/2021)

In contrast to the previous sentences in this declaration, the President of the French Republic begins to highlight the difference of the undemocratic, underdeveloped Malian *Other* from the democratic, developed French *Self*. Specifically, Macron does so by constructing *temporal identities* since he implicitly emphasizes both the underdevelopment and democratic failure of the Malian state and constructs a temporal distance between the French *Self* and the Malian *Other*. Overall, it must be noted that *spatial identities* are identifiable, since Macron delineates space by constructing ‘Mali’, and earlier regional construction ‘Sahel’, both of which are noticeable throughout his statement.

The Malian transitional authorities are now realigned on the three fundamental axes in which we expect them [...] The ECOWAS roadmap, for holding the elections within 18 months, Pau's roadmap in the fight against terrorism [...] the relaunch of the implementation of the Algiers agreements [...] which was the commitment that the president of the transition had made to me [...] I must say that these transnational authorities have given more pledges than the previous authorities in 3 years [...] [It] opens a window of opportunity for making military inroads, civil and political. (16/02/2021)

Above, Macron re-emphasizes that the transnational authorities open a ‘window opportunity’, which enlightens France’s willingness to cooperate with these authorities, especially after having realigned with various axes and giving pledges. As the Malian *Other* is considered as a feasible partner, capable of transformation and able to break with its backward identity, it is constructed as a less-than-radical *Other* (Hansen, 2006: 79-80). It is essential to recognize that while Macron accentuates the partnership with the intergovernmental cooperation framework of G5 Sahel, he also discusses the Malian situation on its own. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that Macron is constructing similar identities to all the G5 Sahelian states, although they are continuously mentioned in regional terms (e.g., G5 Sahel).

[...] this fight against terrorist groups [...] is obviously the priority of the military priorities. It is complemented by a consolidation of the G5 Sahel joint force, which has made immense progress over the past year. Our will is to consolidate this joint G5 Sahel force through sustainable funding. The European Union met its financial commitments for the equipment [...] and obtain from our international partners, in particular from the Gulf region and Europe and the United States, and our will is also to obtain a UN mandate under chapter 7 [to] allow long-lasting funding. (16/02/2021)

Following the re-emphasis on the fight against terrorism, Macron refers to the increasing Africanisation of militarization practices in Mali and the Sahel region as the aim is to consolidate the G5 Sahel joint force with the help of the EU and the international community. It is therefore in line with the former French President Hollande’s praised and promoted narrative of ‘*African solutions to African problems*’ (Erforth, 2019: 5). However, it must be pointed out that the French operation raises questions about the French commitment to Africanisation, since it bypasses ECOWAS – neither Mauritania nor Chad is a member of the organization – and enables France to present itself as the key actor guaranteeing peace and security in the West African region (Chafer, 2016: 136). Later the focus shifts to the discussion on the Alliance for the Sahel, launched in July 2017, and the 4 pillars that were defined in Pau:

[...] there is a missing link which is the minimum level of state presence in the most vulnerable areas [...] this requires a deep re-engagement of Mali [...] to deploy for civil action a system comparable to that which has been put in place for military action [...] [to] ensure good governance of [the] projects and precisely allow the return of State and development projects once military victory is achieved [...] First pillar, the fight against terrorism [...] Second pillar, the strengthening of Sahelian military capacities with the G5 joint force. Third pillar, the return of

the State and the administration in all its components. And the fourth pillar, development policy [...] Because as soon as we liberate an area, the State must come back, the State services. (16/02/2021)

Herein, the French President repeats the aspect of terrorism, Africanisation, and the return of the State (*democracy*). One should keep in mind that the Sahel Alliance was initiated by two major European powers, France and Germany, and the European Union itself. Consequently, it cannot be denied that Macron is not only constructing a superior France in his declaration, but also a superior Europe. The desire is to advance specific Western policies and ideas of development in Mali and the wider Sahel. In other words, the less-than-radical construction of the Malian *Other*, that Macron is carrying out, is further linked to construction of concrete policies that the *Other* should undertake to comply with the proscribed identity (Hansen, 2006: 71, see also Doty, 1992).

Takuba, I remind you; it is our desire to bring together European special forces to have support troops for the Malian Armed Forces in combat. France will have a pillar role in which we will be very involved with several hundred combatants but gather around us Europeans and internationals [...] [the] re-engagement of the new American administration with a video message from Secretary of State BLINKEN. We also had confirmation of an Algerian and Moroccan re-engagement [...] We have been able to set up a High Representative of the coalition who will be a Sahelian face to guarantee the good progress of the pillars [...]. (16/02/2021)

The previous indicates an ever-increased *multilateralisation* of the military level of participation in Mali and the Sahel, now with the participation of the U.S., Algeria and Morocco. Meanwhile, the willingness to choose a Sahelian to the Coalition is most probably accompanied with the objective to advance African ownership, '*African solutions to African problems*'. One may argue it is a way to progressively hide the French power behind a Sahelian face that has been set up as the High Representative. As explored in the literature review (2.2), this decision can be even regarded as the mutual objective of the French and African elites in sustaining and reproducing the status quo (Charbonneau, 2008: 3-4).

No doubt significant changes will be made to our military system in the Sahel in due course. But they will not intervene immediately because they will first be the result of a collective discussion with our Sahelian partners and with the partners who have agreed to follow us, and they will depend on the results obtained and the degree of effective commitment of our partners. (16/02/2021)

In this final part, Macron clearly hints at the possible end of Operation Barkhane but describes it as a ‘rational’ process which necessitates further negotiations and consultations with the Sahelian and international partners. Thus, it can be associated with *legitimation through rationality*, which is linked to the legitimation process where decisions have been made after a heeded, evaluated, and thoughtful procedure (Reyes, 2011: 789).

Although the Malian *Other* was considered as the most temporally approaching to the French *Self* during the Pau Summit in 2020, Macron’s declaration in N’Djamena reveals that Mali is still being constructed as the more-or-less radically different *Other* that is (or might be) able to cooperate with France and its Western allies. It further affirms that whilst Mali is considered through the sub-regional framework of G5, it is constructed as more equal to the French *Self*. Hence, Macron does not regard Mali as cooperative without its Sahelian counterparts – which he seeks to cover up with the cooperation between France and the G5.

Furthermore, the declaration of 2021 emphasizes the fight against terrorism, intensifying *multilateralisation*, Africanisation and France’s preparedness to end its unilateral operation. It would not occur, nevertheless, without ensuring that the French power is deep-seated to the region by multilateral means, so that it can continue to shape African affairs and project its power. See the identified constructions of the *Self* and the *Other* below (Table D).

	Spatial	Temporal	Ethical
The French Self	France, Europe	Developed, progressive, ‘leader’, democratic, ‘developer’	France’s sentinel and bulwark, to advance the French values abroad, responsible to protect the French citizens, responsibility towards Mali and the Sahel region
The Malian Other	Mali, Sahel, Africa, Sahelian states, G5	Underdeveloped, undemocratic, capable of transformation	Responsible to develop towards the <i>Self</i> and to employ the pillars that were defined in Pau

Table D. *The identified constructions of the Self and the Other in Macron’s discourse*

5. Conclusion

Without a doubt France remains an important security actor in its former *pré carré africain*. Amid the constantly failed military efforts of Operation Barkhane, the presence of the ex-colonial power has witnessed both increased anti-French sentiments in the Sahel and dissatisfaction among French citizens. This thesis sought to unravel theoretically and systematically *how* the French external military presence was legitimized by *discursive means*. Therefore, the following main research question was proposed: **(1) How did the French President Emmanuel Macron discursively legitimize and construct France's military presence in Mali before the announcement of the end of Operation Barkhane?**

The thesis thus explored various discursive legitimation strategies and rhetorical themes, further pointing at the discursive (in)stability. These basic discourses were also built around several constructions of the French *Self* and the Malian *Other* to maintain the French mission. Hence, it was necessary to examine the subsequent sub-question: **(2) How did Macron construct a French 'Self' and a Malian 'Other' in his discourse as legitimate reasons for maintaining the intervention?** To investigate these questions, this research made use of PDA to FPA and, more particularly, of Lene Hansen's (2006) approach. By virtue of the approach's focus on the interlinkage between national identity and discourse, it was then complemented with inquiries on discursive legitimation and rhetorical strategies (Reyes, 2011; Beauregard et al., 2019).

While exploring the selected discursive data in a case study, it became apparent that Macron resolutely underscored the importance of Operation Barkhane to protect the French citizens in his speech of 2017. Following the creation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force in July 2017, the emphasis shifted progressively to the aspect of (sub)regional-based *partnership*, constructing the Malian *Other* as more equal to the French *Self* in the declarations of 2020 and 2021.

Notwithstanding the mentioning of the fight against terrorism in 2017, it appeared more distinguishable in the light of the intensified legitimacy deficit – especially in 2021 when Islamist terrorism was discussed as a 'common enemy' with an international agenda. This increased emphasis took place in accordance with the focus on accentuated *partnership*, *democracy* and *non-interference in internal affairs* and accelerating *multilateralism*. Furthermore, the Africanisation discourse became intensively utilized in 2021, referring to the consolidation of the G5's military capabilities and the willingness to choose a Sahelian visage as the High representative for the Sahel Coalition. Therefore, Macron repositioned his stance at the same time as he desired to underline that French military activism is not self-serving.

Despite the willingness to escape the renewed neo-colonial complaints and to gain legitimacy, one must comprehend that the construction of the Malian *Other* as more equal to the French *Self* through the G5 framework also expresses the French view regarding the Malian *Other* not as cooperative without collaborating with the Sahelian states. This sparked especially at the N'Djamena Summit when the 'undemocratic, underdeveloped Malian *Other*' was constructed in a great difference from the 'democratic, developed French *Self*'. This thesis hence argued that the construction of the more-or-less radically different *Other* has been hidden behind the Franco-G5 cooperation.

It is further pertinent to assert that Macron sought to construct a superior Europe through the encouragement of new alliances with other European superpowers, such as Germany. France sees the *Other* as a potential for transformation and progressing towards the *Self*, but it is achievable only by means of the advice from the superior *Self* and Europe. The aspiration to ensure this transformation and progress is accomplished through the creation of multilateral frameworks in which the French power and interests are submerged.

In addition to the brand-new, French-led initiatives, it is critical to bear in mind that France plays a dominant role as the lead nation as well due to its influential position within or in relation to the various bodies involved: it is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a key player in the EU, particularly in African issues, and is politically close to many of the Francophone states of West and Central Africa, which it has a long tradition of military cooperation (Chafer et al., 2020: 497). Thus, the power relations between France and Mali, or the whole G5 Sahel grouping, are undoubtedly asymmetric (ibid.).

Considering the research gaps on Macron's Africa policy and the issue of discursive legitimation of French interventionism in the Sahel, this thesis contributes to the explored literature on Franco-African relations (see 2.1; 2.2). In respect to the renowned continuity-versus debate, this thesis argues that Franco-African relations are characterized by continuity under Macron's epoch despite France's desire to end its unilateral operation. France, indeed, continues to be the central pillar of the new European forces along with other coalitions, whilst bringing together its European and international partners.

Engaging with post-structuralist FPA, and more specifically Hansen's (2006) framework, this thesis develops its application by incorporating the investigation of discursive legitimation strategies concomitantly with the construction of the *Self* and the *Other*. It provides an exemplary and thorough framework for researchers to explore other national contexts or even that of France. It would be interesting for future studies to broaden the scope of this study by examining Macron's official statements to a greater extent or to include multiple French decision-makers affiliated with the

operation, such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yves Le Drian and the Minister of Armed Forces, Florence Parly to the scope.

Time will further tell whether the French Republic will remain a forever superior French *Self* in its former *pré carré africain* or whether it will be, for instance, rivalled by the world's great powers, including China and Russia. It would, therefore, be fascinating to explore the discursive legitimation of the presence of these new intervening actors through a multiple-selves study and to examine the (dis)similarities in the constructions of the *Self* and the *Other*.

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