

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Knowledge and the governing of the interventionary object: Mali in the German parliament

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Abstract

While studies on the role of knowledge and expertise have seen a resurgence of interest in International Relations and in literature on peacebuilding and security governance, little is known how knowledge enters the governance routines after the initial establishment of peacebuilding operations. Taking the mandate decision-making process of MINUSMA and EUTM operations in Mali in the German parliament as case for our explorative study, we ask how knowledge has entered the parliamentary process and how various epistemic practices and epistemic agency shape this peacebuilding governance since 2013. Informed by an object-centred knowledge framework, we argue that the practices and types of agency involved mostly ‘lock-in’ the governing of robust peacebuilding in Mali in much broader foreign- and security policies routines. Epistemic practices are not primarily concerned with new impulses or critical analysis, but with rendering Mali governable as interventionary object. The epistemic authority of the government is dominant and we do not find much evidence that hegemonic knowledge is challenged. Intervening agents do extract certain knowledge via transnational channels from Mali, however, broader knowledge debates or the involvement of Malian agents are missing.

Keywords: epistemic authority; epistemic practice; expertise; intervention; Mali; security governance

Introduction

Questions concerning who has the authority and agency to position particular knowledge(s) in security governance and peacebuilding matter significantly. Experts and epistemic communities shape the strategies and decision-making of governments and International Organisations on peacebuilding through their epistemic authority.¹ Knowledge determines technologies and practices of how peacebuilding interventions are conducted.² However, the severe political crisis of robust peacebuilding,³ in cases like Mali in 2021 and 2022, with a series of coups and rising

¹Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Roland Kostić, ‘Knowledge production in/about conflict and intervention: Finding “facts”, telling “truth”’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 1–20.

²Anna Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority in post/conflict interventions: From a peacebuilding field to transnational fields of interventionary objects’, *European Journal of International Security*, 5:1 (2020a), pp. 115–33.

³Robust peacebuilding stands for peacekeeping operations in which troops are authorised to employ armed force beyond self-defence, for example to protect civilians or support governments in fights with insurgents or to regain territorial control, compare Marco Longobardo, ‘Robust peacekeeping mandates and jus post bellum’, in Carsten Stahn and Jens Iverson (eds), *Jus Post Bellum and the Justice of Peace* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 165–83.

violence despite years of international, regional, and bilateral security and peacebuilding operations, raises not only serious concerns on the ‘body of knowledge ... involved in claims about how to define and act on’⁴ robust peacebuilding, but on an even more fundamental question: *How does knowledge concretely enter the process of decision-making on robust peacebuilding?* Based on an object-centred knowledge framework, analysing ‘the place of knowledge in the constitution of international objects’⁵ like robust peacebuilding in Mali, we suggest that it is not only the availability and quality of knowledge or experts, but the overall process of governance of ‘interventionary objects’⁶ that positions knowledge and limits the entry of new, critical knowledge in the process. As a consequence, knowledge on challenges, problems, on alternative perspectives, or knowledge from intervened societies like Mali find no systematic inclusion in governance routines.

We contribute to debates on politics of knowledge and expertise in international politics, intervention, and peacebuilding literature,⁷ and offer an in-depths analysis of the role of knowledge in decision-making on military mandates of the two operations United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) in the German parliament from 2013 to 2020. Especially in democracies, parliaments are important sites and agents in the routines of decision-making of security governance and peacebuilding.⁸ We trace *epistemic practices*, focusing ‘on the practical activities of producing the epistemic’⁹ as configurations of texts and ‘of doings, as well as things and artefacts, which are major devices in producing knowledge, or in which knowledge is inscribed. The core question hence becomes by which practices (authoritative) expertise is produced.’¹⁰ Recent literature suggest that this production is particularly shaped by epistemic struggles and agency.¹¹ Offering an innovative conceptualisation, we define *epistemic agency* here as the (individual) motivation and interest to position (new) knowledge on a governance object in a process of decision-making.¹² In our analysis we have identified five different, but interacting forms of epistemic agency: Authoritative, procedural, confirming, initiative, and contentious agency. We argue that it is important to acknowledge their complex interplay if we want to ‘explore the (epistemological point) about the social (and competitive) construction of ... knowledge’¹³ in the governance of peacebuilding.

In Germany, the parliament is the highest authority in mandating military operations, and policies, budgets, techniques, and personnel of the Mali operations have been decided upon there over

⁴Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, p. 8.

⁵Bentley B. Allan, ‘From subjects to objects: Knowledge in International Relations theory’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 24:4 (2018), pp. 841–64 (p. 842).

⁶‘An object of intervention refers to a distinct peacebuilding problem or issue that emerges as an effect of competing knowledge claims enacted by multiple subjects, some of which may be directly involved in peacebuilding.’ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’, p. 121.

⁷Olaf Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity* (London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*; Aurel Niederberger, ‘Independent experts with political mandates: “Role distance” in the production of political knowledge’, *European Journal of International Security*, 5:3 (2020), pp. 350–71; Finn Stepputat, ‘Knowledge production in the security–development nexus: An ethnographic reflection’, *Security Dialogue*, 43:5 (2012), pp. 439–55; Frank A. Stengel, *The Politics of Military Force: Antimilitarism, Ideational Change, and Post-Cold War German Security Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020); Carrie Booth Walling, *All Necessary Measures: The United Nations and Humanitarian Intervention* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Mariam Salehi, ‘Confined knowledge flows in transitional justice’, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, online first (2023), available at: {[10.1080/21622671.2023.2195435](https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2023.2195435)}.

⁸Patrick A. Mello and Dirk Peters, ‘Parliaments in security policy: Involvement, politicisation, and influence’, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20:1 (2018), pp. 3–18.

⁹Christian Bueger, ‘From expert communities to epistemic arrangements: Situating expertise in international relations’, in Ruth Knoblich, Mariana Carpes, and Maximilian Mayer (eds), *The Global Politics of Science and Technology*, Vol. 1. (Heidelberg: Springer 2014), pp. 39–54 (p. 48).

¹⁰Bueger, ‘From expert communities to epistemic arrangements’, p. 48.

¹¹Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’.

¹²Anne Menzel, ‘The perils of recognising local agency: A situational concept of agency and the case of victims of sexual violence and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 23 (2020), pp. 584–606.

¹³Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, p. 128.

the last decade.¹⁴ Robust peacebuilding and security governance in Mali emerged as a substantial ‘governance problem’¹⁵ in Berlin in 2013, when German troop contributions for MINUSMA and EUTM were initially mandated. Together with Afghanistan, the Mali operations have been the largest German engagements of the last decade, with recent annual costs of c. 300 million euros.¹⁶ Yet, the question of knowledge and robust peacebuilding in Mali has gained little to no attention in literature or public debate,¹⁷ which became even more apparent when the news of a military coup in 2020 ‘suddenly’ hit media and parliament.¹⁸ After a second coup in May 2021, and a failed coup attempt in May 2022, the transitory military leadership is isolated and the future of operations is unclear.¹⁹ German troops will leave at the latest in May 2024.²⁰

Our empirical work consists of a content analysis of in total 49 documents, including the mission motions from 2013 to 2020, the resolutions of the Foreign Affairs Committee and all oppositional resolution proposals, as well as the analysis of 17 expert interviews and three informal conversations. We argue that epistemic practices and forms of epistemic agency are primarily concerned with rendering Mali ‘governable’ as interventionary object, not with the critical evaluation or inclusion of new knowledge from the concerned society. Knowledge on Mali is ‘locked-in’²¹ in much broader foreign- and security governance routines in ministries and the parliament, and hegemonic knowledge is seldomly challenged. Furthermore, we can show that while intervening agents do extract certain knowledge via transnational channels from Mali, Malian knowledge does play no particular role in the governing process. Despite decades of critical reminders of academic research on the importance to include ‘local’ knowledge into peacebuilding,²² this striking absence is indeed an example of an exclusionary epistemic hierarchy, which nearly disregards voices from intervened societies.

The article proceeds as follows: First, we discuss the state-of-the-art on knowledge on peacebuilding and security governance, with a particular focus on parliaments. Second, we introduce our object-centred knowledge framework and methodological approach. In the third and main part of the article, we introduce the interventionary object Mali as it emerges in parliamentary motions and then offer an in-depth analysis of the epistemic practices and forms of epistemic agency constituting this object in the parliament.

Knowledge, peacebuilding, and the governing of interventionary objects in parliaments

Peacebuilding and intervention literatures, following the wider debate on knowledge in IR,²³ do increasingly engage with the consequences of knowledge production and expertise for the politics of international interventions.²⁴

¹⁴Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Intervention theatre: Performance, authenticity and expert knowledge in politicians’ travel to post-/conflict spaces’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 58–80 (pp. 73–4).

¹⁵Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, p. 89.

¹⁶Deutsche Welle, ‘Auslandseinsätze viel teurer als geplant’, available at: {<https://www.dw.com/de/auslandseins%C3%A4tze-viel-teurer-als-geplant/a-48521527>} accessed 25 November 2022.

¹⁷I6: Interview 6, MP oppositional party, 10 November 2020; I16: Interview 16, MP oppositional party, 10 December 2020; I17: Interview 17, MP oppositional party, 10 December 2020.

¹⁸I12: Interview 12, Political Foundation, 30 November 2020.

¹⁹Denis M. Tull, ‘Calling time on the EU Mission to Mali’, *Internationale Politik Quarterly* (2022), available at: {<https://ip-quarterly.com/en/calling-time-eu-mission-mali>} accessed 09 May 2023.

²⁰Björn Lenz, ‘Bundesregierung hat entschieden: Bundeswehr zieht bis Mai 2024 aus Mali ab’, *Bundesministerium der Verteidigung*, available at: {<https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/bundeswehr-zieht-bis-mai-2024-aus-mali-ab-5530382>} accessed 8 December 2022.

²¹The concept of ‘lock-in’ originates in organisational path-dependency studies and describes the fixing of an action pattern as dominant and quasi-deterministic, bounding a process to a path as consequence. Georg Schreyögg and Jörg Sydow, ‘Organizational path dependence: A process view’, *Organization Studies*, 32:3 (2011), pp. 321–35.

²²Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²³Allan, ‘From subjects to objects’; Bueger, ‘From expert communities to epistemic arrangements’.

²⁴Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, ‘Knowledge production in/about conflict’; Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’.

A first broad strand of literature is concerned with the role of knowledge and expertise in the practice of peacebuilding on the ground, in the everyday interactions and social and political realities in the missions. For example, Séverine Autesserre argues that peacebuilding practices are shaped by ‘politics of knowledge’, in which international types of expertise, or thematic expertise, are prioritised over local knowledge.²⁵ Thereby, ‘dangerous’, while reductionist and even harmful narratives on reasons and solutions of conflicts can emerge and become hegemonic in intervening organisations²⁶ and in other knowledge producers, like the International Crisis Group.²⁷ Others show that the knowledge of peacebuilders is structured and limited by their everyday interactions,²⁸ or by their education and political ideas, in short by their ‘statebuilding habitus’.²⁹

Regarding the shaping of peacebuilding policies in and on concrete cases, further literature understands peacebuilding as a ‘neoliberal marketplace of ideas, where a high number of actors compete over interpretations of problems and access to policy debates’,³⁰ aiming for authoritative expertise.³¹ While several aspects need more attention, for example (the authority of) local knowledge and the hybridity and situatedness of transnational knowledge in peacebuilding missions,³² these studies indeed offer first insights on epistemic practices and the role of knowledge in routines and processes of peacebuilding.

If we leave the level of peacebuilding operations and turn to the international governing of peacebuilding, we find a second strand of literature on the role of knowledge and expertise in the discursive justifications for the participation in interventions, whether in states or in International Organisations.³³ While of key importance for our understanding of how peacebuilding is justified and foreign and security policies are transformed, we do seldom learn about the routinely decision-making process and the role of knowledge in this governing of peacebuilding *after* the period of the initial establishment.³⁴ Here, our article offers new insights, with its focus on parliamentary security governance. While operations ‘on the ground’ and International/Regional Organisations are important sites for the analysis of security governance, literature has shown that metropolises are key drivers and carriers of interventions.³⁵ The role of parliaments of intervening, troop-contributing

²⁵ Autesserre, *Peaceland*, p. 75.

²⁶ Séverine Autesserre, ‘Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences’, *African Affairs*, 111:443 (2012), pp. 202–22.

²⁷ Markus Hochmüller and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Encountering knowledge production: The International Crisis Group and the making of Mexico’s security crisis’, *Third World Quarterly*, 35:4 (2014), pp. 705–22.

²⁸ Werner Distler, ‘Intervention as a social practice: Knowledge formation and transfer in the everyday of police missions’, *International Peacekeeping*, 23:2 (2016), pp. 326–49.

²⁹ Catherine Goetze and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘The “statebuilding habitus”: UN staff and the cultural dimension of liberal intervention in Kosovo’, in Berit Bliesemann de Guevara (ed.), *Statebuilding and State Formation: The Political Sociology of Intervention* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012), pp. 198–213.

³⁰ Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostić, ‘Knowledge production in/about conflict’, p. 11.

³¹ David Lewis, ‘The myopic Foucauldian gaze: Discourse, knowledge and the authoritarian peace’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 21–41; Roland Kostić, ‘Shadow peacebuilders and diplomatic counterinsurgencies: Informal networks, knowledge production and the art of policy-shaping’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:1 (2017), pp. 120–39; Louise Wiuff Moe and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Counterinsurgency, knowledge production and the traveling of coercive Realpolitik between Colombia and Somalia’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53:2 (2018), pp. 193–215.

³² Anna Danielsson, ‘The urbanity of peacebuilding: Urban environments as objects and sites of peacebuilding knowledge production’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14:5 (2020b), pp. 654–70; Reina C. Neufeldt, Mary Lou Klassen, Jon Danboyi, Jessica Dyck, and Mugu Zakka Bako, ‘Gaps in knowledge about local peacebuilding: A study in deficiency from Jos, Nigeria’, *Third World Quarterly*, 41:7 (2020), pp. 1103–21.

³³ Walling, *All Necessary Measures*; Kerstin Eppert and Mitja Sienknecht, ‘Engaging with the “threat”? Tracing desecuritization between the UN Security Council and UN Missions’, in Thorsten Bonacker, Werner Distler, and Maria Ketzmerick (eds), *Securitization in Statebuilding and Intervention* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2017), pp. 105–26.

³⁴ One recent exception is Stengel, *The Politics of Military Force*.

³⁵ Marina E. Henke, *Constructing Allied Cooperation: Diplomacy, Payments, and Power in Multilateral Military Coalitions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Jacob D. Kathman and Molly M. Melin, ‘Who keeps the peace? Understanding state contributions to UN peacekeeping operations’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 61:1 (2017), pp. 150–62; Klaus Schlichte and Alexander Veit, ‘Coupled Arenas: Why State-Building is So Difficult’, Working Papers Micropolitics No. 3 (2007), pp. 1–34.

states in the governance of peacebuilding and military operations has increasingly received attention in the literature in the last decade, ending ‘the lack of interest in parliaments’ role in security’ and the ‘traditional view that regards parliaments as inconsequential actors’³⁶ for foreign and security policies. While overall the dominance of the executive in establishing troop-contributions is confirmed, literature has shown that parliaments can indeed substantially inform the mandate decision-making – especially (and little surprising) in political systems with stronger parliaments.³⁷ Constructivist and post-structuralist literature has offered studies on the mechanisms of the discourse on intervention mandates, for example the role of securitisation,³⁸ or, even more ambitious and broad, on the transformations of norms and ideas of foreign and security policies over time,³⁹ for example in Germany since the end of the Cold War.⁴⁰

However, neither the parliamentary routines, nor the role of knowledge in this process have received much attention. Of course, discourse-focused studies touch upon what Van Dijk in his work on knowledge in parliamentary debates has termed the ‘knowledge-discourse interface’:⁴¹ In engaging in a debate on a particular issue, parliamentarians’ speech acts and decisions are informed by different forms of explicit, implicit, and contextual knowledge. Regrettably, Van Dijk’s own study focuses on one particular speech by Tony Blair and the decision to attack Iraq in 2003, and thereby resembles the focus on a particular situation and data. While we find very comprehensive discourse-theoretical and text-focused approaches,⁴² which also include contextual factors in the analysis, they do not necessarily include the (silent) routines, performances, and the technologies and practices of authoritative knowledge production (like data collection, information exchange, privileged access, particular positions of authority of agents, or forms of epistemic agency, etc.). In the following, we will introduce a more inclusive theoretical framework for the analysis of knowledge in governing processes.

Knowledge objects, epistemic practices, and struggles over authority

Here, we argue for the strengths of new knowledge-focused frameworks on governance, which – while having similarities with speech-focused approaches – offer a broader analytical lens. In his inspiring mapping of the field of knowledge research in IR, Bentley B. Allan has recently carved out how object-centred frameworks ‘reorient the study of knowledge to the constitution of international objects,’⁴³ which ‘are concatenations of knowledges, artifacts, physical phenomena, and practices that have been yoked together and constituted as an entity ... provided it can

³⁶Mello and Peters, ‘Parliaments in security policy’, p. 4. Compare on parliaments: Patrick A. Mello, ‘Curbing the royal prerogative to use military force: The British House of Commons and the conflicts in Libya and Syria’, *West European Politics*, 40:1 (2017), pp. 80–100; Tapio Raunio and Wolfgang Wagner, ‘Towards parliamentarisation of foreign and security policy?’, *West European Politics*, 40:1 (2017), pp. 1–19.

³⁷Sandra Dieterich, Hartwig Hummel, and Stefan Marschall, ‘Bringing democracy back in: The democratic peace, parliamentary war powers and European participation in the 2003 Iraq War’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50:1 (2015), pp. 87–106; Daan Fonck, Tim Haesebrouck, and Yf Reykers, ‘Parliamentary involvement, party ideology and majority-opposition bargaining: Belgian participation in multinational military operations’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 40:1 (2019), pp. 85–100.

³⁸Paul Roe, ‘Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures: Securitization and the UK’s decision to invade Iraq’, *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 615–35.

³⁹Roxanna Sjöstedt and Erik Noreen, ‘When peace nations go to war: Examining the narrative transformation of Sweden and Norway in Afghanistan’, *European Journal of International Security*, 6:3 (2021), pp. 318–37.

⁴⁰Stengel, *The Politics of Military Force*.

⁴¹Teun A. Van Dijk, ‘Knowledge in parliamentary debates’, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 2:1 (2003), pp. 93–129 (p. 127): ‘It is shown what kinds of knowledge MPs need to have in order to be able to be competent members and to engage in parliamentary debates. This knowledge may range from general cultural knowledge shared with all other competent members of the same culture, to national knowledge about what goes on in the country, to group knowledge shared with other MPs, to knowledge about other MPs, parties, etc., to specific knowledge about current political events and the current context of communication, that is, the ongoing parliamentary debates.’

⁴²Stengel, *The Politics of Military Force*; Walling, *All Necessary Measures*.

⁴³Allan, ‘From subjects to objects’, p. 858.

be designated, rendered governable, and problematized.⁴⁴ As Olaf Corry has argued in his work,⁴⁵ any issue in international politics can become such a governance object, like development, global health, migration – or peacebuilding, as long as for relevant ‘governance subjects’⁴⁶ the issue is ‘considered malleable’ and ‘the target of steering efforts’,⁴⁷ which will have the consequence that ‘a vast machine of apparatus, institutions and theories for monitoring and affecting’ the object will be set in motion.⁴⁸ Here, knowledge and epistemic practices ‘underwrite the designation, translation, and problematization of objects as distinct entities subject to political interventions’,⁴⁹ thereby constituting the broader governance frames, procedures, and technologies.

While we find a range of literature on the governing of security,⁵⁰ literature with a particular focus on knowledge objects in peacebuilding is still young. Particularly comprehensive is the Bourdieu-inspired work of Anna Danielsson on informality in peacebuilding as an ‘object of intervention’, ‘a distinct peacebuilding problem or issue that emerges as an effect of competing knowledge claims enacted by multiple subjects ...’.⁵¹ Instead of focusing on peacebuilding as a *distinct* field and predominantly on peacebuilders,⁵² she suggests to acknowledge the ‘knowledge pluralisation and, particularly, the transgressiveness of knowledge production.’⁵³ Key agents in this process are not only peacebuilders and can thus have very different backgrounds and reasons for the object orientation.⁵⁴ Other literature on governance objects argues quite similarly. Corry, for example, suggests that ‘governance-subjects’ can be oriented towards several objects.⁵⁵ The relationship between governance objects and governance subjects is key, not only for the identity of objects, but also regarding the question of authority: ‘(G)overnance objects ... emerge with distinct attributes and are differentiated from other objects of governance through the competition between different actors or subjects of governance to establish some level of authority to govern them.’⁵⁶ In relation to knowledge, it could be argued that epistemic authority in peacebuilding emerges by successful positioning of specific knowledge of an object as authoritative, amid constant struggles about ‘what knowledge is to be held as authoritative.’⁵⁷ As a consequence, any epistemic authority in peacebuilding can only be temporary.⁵⁸

With our work on knowledge in the routinely parliamentary governing of robust peacebuilding, we aim at providing further impulses to this debate on interventionary objects and knowledge. While we basically agree with Danielsson’s and others’ focus on struggles on knowledge,⁵⁹ we want to concretely explore if and why these struggles are emerging in the German parliament, and how they challenge knowledge hegemony in security governance. The second, directly related aspect

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

⁴⁵ Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*. Corry is building his work on arguments from Foucault, in particular Michel Foucault, ‘The archaeology of knowledge’, *Social Science Information*, 9:1 (1970), pp. 175–85.

⁴⁶ Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, pp. 90–1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ Allan, ‘From subjects to objects’, p. 855.

⁵⁰ Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller, ‘Governing (in)security in a postcolonial world: Transnational entanglements and the worldliness of “local” practice’, *Security Dialogue*, 43:5 (2012), pp. 383–401; Vincent Pouliot, ‘Hierarchy in practice: Multilateral diplomacy and the governance of international security’, *European Journal of International Security*, 1:1 (2016), pp. 5–26.

⁵¹ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’, p. 121.

⁵² Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*; Catherine Goetze, *The Distinction Of Peace: A Social Analysis of Peacebuilding* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

⁵³ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’, p. 117.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, p. 91.

⁵⁶ Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, p. 128.

⁵⁷ Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’.

⁵⁹ Niilo Kauppi, ‘Knowledge warfare: Social scientists as operators of global governance’, *International Political Sociology*, 8:3 (2014), pp. 324–42.

leads back to the role of epistemic agency in the parliament. In our article, instead of tracing 'experts', we suggest an analytical move from *actors/agents* to *agency*, or even more precisely, to various *types of agency*, which emerge and shape the constitution of the object of intervention. In analysing epistemic agency, we try to avoid the equation of epistemic authority or resistance against hegemonic knowledge with a particular professional group or with specific unified actors. Instead, following Anne Menzel⁶⁰ in her pragmatic two-dimensional concept of agency, we suggest paying attention to the: (a) motivational dimension (what are conscious motivations?); and (b) effective dimension (what has been achieved effectively?) of epistemic agency in the context of governing robust peacebuilding.

With very few existing studies on parliaments with an epistemic framework,⁶¹ and no prior study of the German parliament with a knowledge-object perspective, our work and methodological approach has an explorative character. It can best be characterised as a single case study, with interest in conceptual development and innovation, based on the intensive exploration and comparison of empirical phenomena over time⁶² – here the mandate decision-making process on Mali operations. Our empirical analysis rests on several types of parliamentary documents and interviews with subjects holding different positions of epistemic authority: While the document analysis helps us to understand the interventionary object Mali and its development (especially the respective context evaluations and mission justifications), the expert interviews provide empirical insights into the epistemic practices, such as the parliamentarian routines and techniques, and types of epistemic agency. The document analysis contained all EUTM and MINUSMA mission motions from 2013 to 2020, the respective recommended resolutions of the Foreign Affairs Committee and all oppositional resolution proposals, adding up to 49 documents. In addition, we conducted 17 expert interviews and three informal conversations: We interviewed 13 current and former MPs of government and oppositional parties who are members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Defence Committee, or both, and who have been engaging with Mali during different time periods (since 2013, during the early or the more recent years of the missions). This empirical database has been enriched by four interviews with representatives from civil society organisations, political foundations, and the field of political consultancy, all working on Mali and cooperating with the parliament. The three informal conversations with current and former employees of the Federal Foreign Ministry as well as with one staff member of one Foreign Affairs Committee MP allowed us to gain even deeper insights into the contextual embeddedness of the epistemic practices. The expert interviews have been transcribed and analysed with the software MAXQDA, allowing us to conduct an inductive content analysis of the respective epistemic practices by focusing on patterns in the parliamentarian routines, in the MPs' knowledge sources and in their practical experiences of epistemic continuity and rupture during their engagement with Mali.

The interventionary object Mali: Epistemic practices and agencies

Before the parliament: The drafting of the interventionary object 'Mali' in the mission motions

Before 2012, Germany has not been involved with large military contributions in the security governance in the context of the 'war on terror' in the Sahel region⁶³ and had abstained on the UN

⁶⁰Menzel, 'The perils of recognising local agency'.

⁶¹One example of a study of epistemic performances, authority, and spatiality is Bliesemann de Guevara's work on visits of German members of parliament as policymakers in Afghanistan. For her, the politicians' 'travel constitutes symbolic actions, in which on-site events and encounters are perceived as signs/symbols of "authenticity" and "unfiltered information" about a "reality", which is in fact a projection of varied preconceived intervention imaginaries among the travelers.' Bliesemann de Guevara, 'Intervention theatre', pp. 73–4.

⁶²Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, 'Case study methods in the International Relations subfield', *Comparative Political Studies*, 40:2 (2007), pp. 170–95 (pp. 178–80).

⁶³Jan Bachmann, 'The danger of "undergoverned" spaces: the "War on Terror" and its effects on the Sahel region', in Julia M. Eckert (ed.), *The Social Life of Anti-Terrorism Laws: The War on Terror and the Classifications of the 'Dangerous Other'* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2008), pp. 131–62; Stephen A. Harmon, *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region:*

Security Council Libya intervention mandate in 2011.⁶⁴ However, after violent conflicts had broken out in the North of Mali in 2012,⁶⁵ fuelled by weapons and fighters from Libya, and a military coup had toppled the government,⁶⁶ Germany agreed to France's request to contribute large-scale military support to international operations in Mali. The German parliament approved two motions allowing the German military forces to participate in the EU-led military training mission EUTM Mali as well as the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which was shortly after transformed into the UN-led MINUSMA mission.⁶⁷ As the German Parliamentary Participation Act prescribes an annual parliamentary (re)approval of military missions,⁶⁸ yearly follow-up motions on the EUTM and MINUSMA missions have since then been introduced to and accepted by the German parliament, each one adding to the governing of and the constitution of the interventionary object Mali.

Before reaching the German parliament, the constitution of Mali as an object of intervention underlies an already complex (trans)national process: On the basis of the respective UN and EU resolutions, the German Federal Foreign Ministry, and the Federal Ministry of Defence are drafting the motions for the Mali mandates while cooperating with the Federal Chancellery.⁶⁹ The process of governing is hence not only intertwined with supranational legislation, but also with negotiations in the respective international organisations and security alliances.⁷⁰ In the German government, the subsequent ministerial collaboration of drafting the motions is divided between the Federal Ministry of Defence, which is in charge of presenting the mission details, and the Federal Foreign Ministry elaborating the political justification for the mission in each mission motion. In addition, even within the Ministries, several working units are often simultaneously contributing to the mission motion drafts, increasing the number of governance actors involved in the routinely construction of peacebuilding in Mali.⁷¹

In order to compare the mission motions from nearly a decade, we conducted a document analysis, and observe certain continuities in the texts, as the previous mission motion texts are used as a basis for drafting subsequent motions.⁷² All texts follow a similar structure: While the first part, outlines inter alia the legal basis of the mandate, duties/capabilities of German troops, and the financing of the operation, the second part of the document presents the mission justification based on a description of the object of intervention Mali. However, the drafts get longer over the years, as the missions get expanded, and as the context of intervention appears to become more complex over time.⁷³ In addition, the structure of the mission justifications slightly changed. In the

Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012–2013 (London, UK: Routledge, 2016); Jeremy H. Keenan, 'Africa unsecured? The role of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) in securing US imperial interests in Africa', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 3:1 (2010), pp. 27–47.

⁶⁴Sarah Brockmeier, 'Germany and the intervention in Libya', *Survival*, 55:6 (2013), pp. 63–90.

⁶⁵Marina E. Henke, 'Why did France intervene in Mali in 2013? Examining the role of intervention entrepreneurs', *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 23:3 (2017), pp. 307–23.

⁶⁶Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belimat, Bruce Hall, and Wolfram Lacher, 'One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali', *Review of African Political Economy*, 40:137 (2013), pp. 343–57; Bruce Whitehouse, 'The force of action: Legitimizing the coup in Bamako, Mali', *Africa Spectrum*, 47:2–3 (2012), pp. 93–110.

⁶⁷German Parliament/Deutscher Bundestag, 'MINUSMA und EUTM Mali' (2020a), available at: https://www.bundestag.de/webarchiv/Ausschuesse/ausschuesse19/a12_Verteidigung/auslandseinsaetze/auslandseinsaetze/minusma_und_eutm_mali-542482 accessed 7 April 2023.

⁶⁸German Parliament/Deutscher Bundestag, 'Das Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz' (2017), available at: <https://www.bundestag.de/webarchiv/Ausschuesse/ausschuesse18/a12/auslandseinsaetze/parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz-247428> accessed 7 April 2023.

⁶⁹IC3, Informal Conversation with two employees of the German Foreign Federal Ministry.

⁷⁰Klaus Brummer, 'Die begrenzten "war powers" des Bundestags', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 45:3 (2014), pp. 596–614 (p. 600); Jan Ryjáček, 'Der Entscheidungsprozess über den Bundeswehreininsatz zum Schutz der Wahlen im Kongo', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 2 (2008), pp. 219–23 (pp. 223–6).

⁷¹IC3, German Foreign Federal Ministry.

⁷²IC3, German Foreign Federal Ministry.

⁷³IC3, German Foreign Federal Ministry.

beginning, the German role was only mentioned in one paragraph, whereas in later motions the significance of the German activities is explained after each subtopic (e.g., challenges for Mali, the humanitarian situation, MINUSMA, etc.). As the descriptions of German activities and military matters get more and more detailed, the 'self-presentation' is taking more space and even different activities beyond military matters, like development and peace work, are increasingly mentioned over the years. Next to these slight changes, our analysis revealed only one significant change of the interventionary object 'robust peacebuilding in Mali'. After the 'long summer of migration'⁷⁴ in 2015, the topic of migration has been newly included in the mission justifications. The need for the stabilisation of Mali as 'an important transit region for refugees',⁷⁵ or the 'fight against the causes of flight and an improved migration control'⁷⁶ is suddenly related to the interventionary object Mali. This adaption of the object of intervention is also traceable in the following account by one interviewed Member of the Parliament, who took part in several subsequent travels with the Minister of Defence:

and then in 2016, I was travelling [to Mali] with von der Leyen [*the then minister of defence, MT*] and, because refugee prevention always played a role and also the question of escape routes, but that was not mentioned as a main argument, but during this travel, this was the first thing that, so we have been sitting in the governmental plane ... and then they show on the screen the direction of smuggling and escape routes. And this was then the first topic that was set, so 2016, so a non-hidden agenda, but usually the missions are justified by positive things such as stabilization, building peace ..., etc., it was very clear in the first slides that we received, this have been escape routes and this was the motivation. It is usual that current topics are related to the missions, but I thought it was striking how a travel is framed by the actual goal of the government.⁷⁷

Next to the mission justifications, this self-referential, in the sense of amplifying a topic of concern for the German government, adaption of the interventionary object by the governmental bodies is thus equally reflected in the governmental information practices. The attempt to create knowledge databases in ministries is a key technique for these information practices. For example, when parliamentarians make inquiries on the Mali mandates, those are mostly informed by a collection of continuously updated documents in the ministry. This data collection includes information on Mali gathered by the ministerial staff on the basis of diverse reports from embassies, UN institutions or political foundations,⁷⁸ among others.⁷⁹ Interestingly, instead of proactively seeking new information on Mali, the ministerial staff creates this collection rather by reacting to external inputs, for example, when German political foundations in Mali offer context interpretations and they consider it as a relevant additional information.⁸⁰ This data collection is in fact a powerful epistemic artefact in the process of object constitution because it represents the gathered governance knowledge of bureaucracies – avoiding the lack of institutional memory⁸¹ – and predetermine to a certain degree the content of texts. But despite the regular updates of the collection, the knowledge gathered in it is not reviewed or checked with respect to authenticity.

⁷⁴Sabine Hess, Ben Kasperek, Stefanie Kron, Mathias Rodatz, Maria Schwertl, and Simon Sontowski (eds), *Der lange Sommer der Migration: Grenzregime III* (Berlin: Assoziation A., 2017).

⁷⁵Parliamentary Printing Matter 18/7206.

⁷⁶Parliamentary Printing Matter 18/11628.

⁷⁷I16, MP opposition party.

⁷⁸In Germany, main political parties have established political foundations. These have international offices and support specific political, educational, and societal programmes via their funds. See also Alexander Mohr, *The German Political Foundations as Actors in Democracy Assistance* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal-Publishers, 2010).

⁷⁹IC1, Informal Conversation with a former employee of the German Foreign Federal Ministry; IC3, German Foreign Federal Ministry; I12, Political Foundation; I14: Interview 14, MP government party, 4 December 2020; I17, MP opposition party.

⁸⁰I12, Political Foundation; I15: Interview 15, Political Foundation, 4 December 2020.

⁸¹Francis Fukuyama, *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

The constitution of the interventionary object Mali is hence embedded in a highly routinised process. The continuities in the mission motions are an indicator of the ‘lock-in’ of Mali in governing routines, in which epistemic practices largely reproduce existing information. While getting longer and broader, the mission motions do not focus on Mali and the situation in the country – but space is given to present the German participation and engagement in more and more detail.

Epistemic practices in the parliament

The governance of objects is a complex process, determined by various techniques, physical, and discursive routines.⁸² With our analysis of epistemic practices and agency, we will open up this process in greater detail in the following. As a starting point, the process of mandating military missions in the German parliament entails a substantial difference to other legislative procedures: the parliament can’t adjust the motions of the government themselves, the MPs can only entirely approve or disapprove the military missions.⁸³

From a comparative perspective, the German Bundestag falls in the category of an ‘Arbeitsparlament’ (working parliament), describing a parliament mostly working through its committees in which legislative decision-making is significantly shaped.⁸⁴ While debates in the parliaments’ plenary still play an important role for the external presentation as well as for raising public awareness, the in-depth discussion of motions is taking place in the committees, in which all parliamentary groups from the government and opposition are represented.⁸⁵ The committees usually thematically mirror the Ministries and regarding military mandates, the Foreign Affairs Committee officially has the lead, while the Defence Committee has an advisory role.⁸⁶ The mission motions are initially presented to the parliament’s plenary in a first reading and then forwarded to the Foreign Affairs Committee.⁸⁷ Within the committee, several governing agents are key in the internal procedures:

First, the parliamentary group’s thematic *rapporteurs* on Mali examine the mission motions in the respective committees.⁸⁸ Second, the rapporteur’s formal epistemic authority entails the consolidation of the parliamentary group’s position: if the rapporteur’s position is not succeeding in convincing the other MPs in the *committee’s working groups* (all MPs of one parliamentary group in the committee), the position will further be discussed in the *thematic working group* (all MPs of one parliamentary group working in a specific thematic field), or even in the *session of the parliamentary group* itself.⁸⁹ Third, the rapporteurs are usually the ones signing the committee’s recommended resolution and holding a speech on the motion within the committee itself, but also in the *parliament’s plenary session*.⁹⁰ Despite this epistemic authority, the recommended resolution approved

⁸² Allan, ‘From subjects to objects’.

⁸³ German Parliament/Deutscher Bundestag, ‘Das Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz’; The opposition factions try regularly to influence the course of the military missions by creating oppositional resolution proposals (e.g., within the foreign affairs committee, see Parliamentary Printing Matter 17/12543, 18/00610; 18/06874; 18/07376; 19/10009; 19/19154; 19/19155; 19/19598; 19/19599; 19/19600; 19/22187; 19/22118; 19/701846). But instead of wanting to challenge the governmental position, these oppositional resolution proposals have a rather representative function to the outside electorate, in order to officially stress the parliamentary group’s opposing position (I6, MP opposition party).

⁸⁴ René Lüddecke, *Parlamentarisierung der nationalen Außenpolitik*, Reihe Studien zum Parlamentarismus, 16 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), p. 85.

⁸⁵ Sven T. Siefken, ‘Plenum im Kleinen oder Ort der Verhandlung? Verständnisse und Forschungsbedarf zu den Fachausschüssen des Deutschen Bundestages’, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 4 (2018), pp. 777–92 (pp. 778–80).

⁸⁶ Brummer, ‘Die begrenzten “war powers”’, p. 606.

⁸⁷ Ryjáček, ‘Der Entscheidungsprozess über den Bundeswehreinsetz’, p. 221.

⁸⁸ I4: Interview 4, MP opposition party, 5 November 2020; I8: Interview 8, MP opposition party, 12 November 2020; I9: Interview 9, MP government party, 13 November 2020; I10: Interview 10, MP government party, 26 November 2020; I14, MP government party; I16, MP opposition party.

⁸⁹ I2: Interview 2, former MP opposition party, 4 November 2020; I6, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party; I16, MP opposition party; I17, MP opposition party.

⁹⁰ I8, MP opposition party.

within the Foreign Affairs Committee is usually backing the government's position towards the object of intervention, as the government parliamentary groups hold the majority in all parliamentary committees. In fact, the recommended resolutions of the Foreign Affairs Committee usually only contain copied passages from the motion drafts, which underlines again the high dependency from the mission motions and the reproduction of existing knowledge. Finally, the approved recommended resolution is then handed over to the parliament's plenary session for giving an orientation on the mission motion during the second reading. The MPs can then finally vote on the mission motion.

The rapporteurs are just one group of agents with epistemic authority in the governing routines. The *committee's chairperson*, the *committee's deputy chairperson*, as well as the *parliamentary groups' chairpersons* have the opportunity to receive additional ministerial information, for instance during the *chairperson briefing* taking place one hour before the committee sessions with the political director of the Federal Foreign Ministry. Next to this confidential meeting, the chairpersons can be invited to a *telephone briefing* to get informed about current or urgent developments in the military missions. In addition, together with the chairpersons of the Defence Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee's chairpersons are invited to *quarterly briefings in the Ministry of Defence*, which take place under absolute secrecy in a tap-proof room in order to be informed about sensitive mission details.⁹¹ These practices lead to a significant imbalance regarding the information access of the Committee members, but also within the parliamentary groups. One interviewed MP stated 'since I became a chairperson, I knew two-thirds more than a regular committee member.'⁹²

Beyond the procedural information practices by ministerial representatives in the committees, where the Mali mandates can be discussed,⁹³ individual MPs or the committee working groups can actively seek further knowledge, as shown by the circles exceeding the governmental information in Figure 1.⁹⁴ But even if individual MPs rely on German and international media⁹⁵ or some working groups invite external experts to their sessions,⁹⁶ non-governmental knowledge on Mali is only sporadically present in the parliament's formal procedures. One rare example of epistemic practices exceeding this executive epistemic authority are the so-called *parliamentarian breakfasts*. These events, which are organised by MPs and their scientific staff, have a rather informal character, as they allow the MPs to eat their breakfast while listening to external inputs one hour before the committee sessions start.⁹⁷ Such events thus appear to be better suited for providing alternative knowledge on Mali.⁹⁸

Another opportunity for MPs to broaden their knowledge on the Mali missions are *travels*. Besides the MPs possibility of organising travel themselves, the respective committees can organise delegation travels. While the Defence Committee mostly organises delegation travels to Mali, also in order to talk to the German soldiers on site,⁹⁹ the MPs of the Foreign Affairs Committee are rather travelling to Mali by being invited to join the Foreign Affairs Minister or the Defence Minister and a delegation of the ministerial staff to Mali. These travels have a tense time schedule for visiting the military camps, exchanging with Malian politicians or meeting with Civil Society Organisations.¹⁰⁰ While MPs consider these travels as an immense benefit for receiving a lot of

⁹¹ I8, MP opposition party.

⁹² I8, MP opposition party.

⁹³ I6, MP opposition party.

⁹⁴ While the proximity of the different knowledge circles to the MPs and their staff represent the accessibility of possible epistemic practices, the strength and direction of the flashes show the probability of the MPs receiving or actively seeking specific knowledge dimensions.

⁹⁵ I4, MP opposition party; I6, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party; I14, MP government party; I17, MP opposition party.

⁹⁶ I9, MP government party.

⁹⁷ I2, former MP opposition party.

⁹⁸ I1: Interview 1, Civil Society, 3 November 2020.

⁹⁹ I6, MP opposition party; I10, MP government party.

¹⁰⁰ I9, MP government party; I10, MP government party.

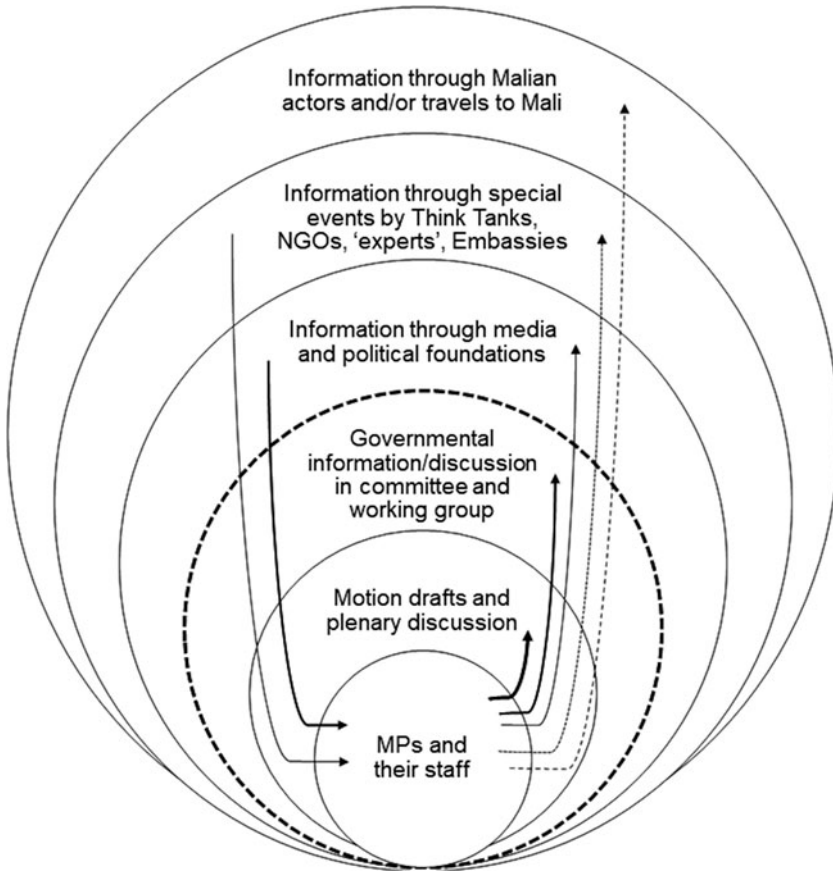


Figure 1. Epistemic practices in the German parliament.

information in a concentrated manner¹⁰¹ – which they later share in the form of travel reports and discussions in working groups¹⁰² or with other MPs¹⁰³ – some consider especially the conversations with German soldiers and police personnel as fruitful.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, the benefit of being confronted with diverse Malian perspectives during the performance of this ‘intervention theater’¹⁰⁵ is rarely mentioned in the interviews.

Our analysis also shows that the governance routines that shape the decision-making process in the parliament impede an in-depth engagement with Mali, as the adoption of a mission motion is taking place under immense time pressure.¹⁰⁶ This time pressure is due to the late submission of the mission motions by the government. The first reading, the discussion in the Foreign Affairs Committee, the consolidation of the parliamentary groups’ positions as well as the second reading sometimes happen all within a week.¹⁰⁷ One oppositional MP noticed in this regard ‘[c]oncerning the mandates, we can’t even get started the discussion machine of the ‘faction’, as they

¹⁰¹ I6, MP opposition party.

¹⁰² I9, MP government party.

¹⁰³ I2, former MP opposition party; I4, MP opposition party.

¹⁰⁴ I10, MP government party.

¹⁰⁵ Bliesemann de Guevara, ‘Intervention theater’.

¹⁰⁶ I2, former MP opposition party; I4, MP opposition party.

¹⁰⁷ I6, MP opposition party.

[the mission motions] are presented way too late.¹⁰⁸ Due to fixed organisational procedures, time pressure is equally constraining the committee discussions with governmental representatives, who are informing and answering questions about the mission mandates.¹⁰⁹

According to another MP, the possibility of an in-depth discussion about the Mali missions within the Foreign Affairs Committee depends on the parliamentary group's initiative to propose a public hearing within the committee, which until 2021 has *never* been the case with regard to Mali.¹¹⁰ The only public hearing in which Mali has been discussed was held in January 2020 in the Foreign Affairs Committees' Sub-Committee Civil Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Comprehensive Approach.¹¹¹ However, the Civil Society Representative invited to this hearing to speak about Mali witnessed severe time constraints, hindering a constructive exchange with the MPs.¹¹² In addition, the parliamentary groups rarely use their possibility of putting the Mali missions on the committees' agenda outside of the governmental inputs in the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defence Committee.¹¹³ The parliamentary discussion of the missions due to the coup d'état in Mali in summer 2020 presents a rare exception in this regard.¹¹⁴

Based on our analysis, understanding the role and limitations of knowledge input in the governing of robust peacebuilding in Mali in the German parliament is very much connected not only to epistemic practices, but epistemic agency and the (lack of) epistemic struggles in governing routines.

Epistemic agency, authority, and struggles in the parliamentary governing process

Recent knowledge-focused literature in peacebuilding literature, including new object-centred studies, highlight the importance of struggles and competitions on epistemic authority in peacebuilding governing.¹¹⁵ In such struggles, hegemonic knowledge could potentially be challenged, or at least new knowledge could gain ground. This section addresses thus how epistemic agency, authority, and struggles are constituted in routinely parliamentary security governance of Mali.

As the formal and informal epistemic practices in the German parliament are highly dependent on the governmental presentation of the object of intervention Mali, the executive epistemic authority is immense.¹¹⁶ Instead of a clear separation of powers between government and parliament, a dividing line, also with regard to epistemic practices, can thus rather be drawn between governmental or oppositional parliamentary groups, leading at the same time to personal linkages between the MPs of the governmental parliamentary groups and the governmental administrative bodies.¹¹⁷ MPs from the governmental parliamentary groups benefit from informal privileged information channels: Before introducing the mission motions to the parliament, the mission motions are discussed with the governmental parliamentary groups' authorities (e.g., the parliamentary group's chairperson, its foreign political spokesperson and/or the rapporteur for the Mali

¹⁰⁸I6, MP opposition party.

¹⁰⁹I6, MP opposition party.

¹¹⁰I9, MP government party.

¹¹¹German Parliament/Deutscher Bundestag, 'Wie UN-Friedensmissionen zur Konfliktlösung beitragen können' (2020b), available at: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2020/kw03-pa-zivile-krisenpraevention-676012> accessed 7 April 2023.

¹¹²I1: Interview 1, Civil Society, 3 November 2020.

¹¹³I6, MP opposition party.

¹¹⁴I14, MP government party.

¹¹⁵Danielsson, 'Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority'; Roland Kostić, 'Transnational think-tanks: Foot soldiers in the battlefield of ideas? Examining the role of the ICG in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2000–01', *Third World Quarterly*, 35:4 (2014), pp. 634–51.

¹¹⁶Ryjáček, 'Der Entscheidungsprozess über den Bundeswehreinsatz'.

¹¹⁷I4, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party; I9, MP government party; Lüddecke, *Parlamentarisierung*, p. 90.

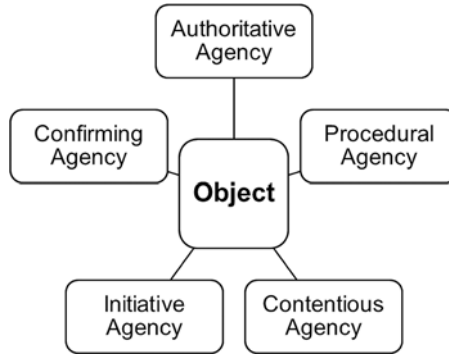


Figure 2. Epistemic agency in the parliament.

missions), in order to assure their parliamentary support.¹¹⁸ This results in further informational imbalances between governmental and oppositional MPs.¹¹⁹

Our analysis allows us to reflect in detail on types of epistemic agency emerging in this governance process, each with different motivational and effective dimensions and consequences for epistemic authority. We have identified five main types of agency: authoritative agency, procedural agency, confirming agency, initiative agency, and contentious agency, as shown in [Figure 2](#).

- (1) The dominance of the government and of powerful agents in the parliamentary groups manifests in *authoritative agency*, which is often a result of a privileged access to information and which can dissolve competition over the parliamentary group's position. Authoritative agency maintains the hierarchies of parliamentary epistemic practices, and privileges access to sensitive information.¹²⁰ Effectively, MPs accept the authoritative position as necessary function of governance.¹²¹ In addition, such an authoritative agency can also lead to the inclusion of additional information channels in epistemic practices, for example by including additional actors in ministerial travel plans.¹²²
- (2) *Procedural agency* is the dominant form of epistemic agency in the governing process of Mali, meaning that MPs follow the epistemic practices of the highly routinised and self-referential parliamentarian procedures, like plenary debates as well as debates and test-voting in the faction meetings.¹²³ This form of agency is particularly focused on the functioning of parliamentary groups and legislative governing, not on Mali. Here, the 'lock-in' of Mali in wider governing routines manifests particular obvious.
- (3) The epistemic practices as a consequence of *confirming agency* are exemplified by MPs who actively ask their colleagues, who have been travelling to Mali¹²⁴ or who gained information on the Mali missions through additional channels¹²⁵ to share their insights. These practices are enhanced by the wish to gain additional or alternative information to the governmental authoritative knowledge,¹²⁶ or simply by trying to find 'good' arguments in order to strengthen their parliamentary group's position.¹²⁷ The corresponding effective dimension

¹¹⁸19, MP government party.

¹¹⁹Lüddecke, *Parlamentarisierung*, p. 100.

¹²⁰18, MP opposition party.

¹²¹16, MP opposition party; 18, MP opposition party.

¹²²18, MP opposition party.

¹²³16, MP opposition party; 114, MP government party.

¹²⁴14, MP opposition party; 16, MP opposition party; 18, MP opposition party.

¹²⁵18, MP opposition party; 19, MP government party.

¹²⁶110, MP government party; 114, MP government party.

¹²⁷12, former MP opposition party; 14, MP opposition party; 16, MP opposition party; 18, MP opposition party.

is that a certain exchange between different committees dealing with the Mali missions is enhanced or even institutionalised,¹²⁸ and that a parliamentary group's position is consolidated or adapted according to the newly gained information.¹²⁹ Simultaneously, this also leads to a privileged information of those MPs and strengthens their epistemic authority within their parliamentary group.¹³⁰

- (4) While these first three agency types are mostly self-referentially directed to the governance process inside the parliament, the fourth type of *initiative agency* manifests in epistemic practices that are explicitly directed towards outside knowledge. Such initiatives can be due to the motivation of gaining on-site impressions for improving the own positioning towards the Mali mandates,¹³¹ but they can equally be based on a general disappointment with the military missions¹³² or on exceptional events, such as the coup d'état in 2020.¹³³ The effective dimension is that additional knowledge on the missions can be gathered, or MPs adapt a political position diverging from the own parliamentary group.¹³⁴ One oppositional MP with strong connections to the Malian opposition and civil society explained for example how she took the initiative to meet the leader of a Malian oppositional party during a ministerial travel to Mali. As her parliamentary colleagues could witness this performance of initiative agency, she recognised during a subsequent ministerial travel to Mali how one MP from the governing parliamentary groups also used the opportunity of meeting with a representative of his party's political foundation.¹³⁵ In contrast to this oppositional epistemic practice, MPs from the government parties used their initiative agency predominantly for inner-fractional practices by creating specialised working groups for an intensive cross-committee engagement with the Mali missions.¹³⁶
- (5) The last type of *contentious agency* drives epistemic practices that challenge an existing epistemic hegemony. These practices are enhanced by the motivational dimension of asserting the own opinion on the mission mandates,¹³⁷ of using different arguments in order to influence the governmental position,¹³⁸ or simply of seeking increased public or at least inner-factional attention.¹³⁹ Effectively, these practices lead, again, to an increased authoritative agency of individual MPs,¹⁴⁰ to an engagement with and possibly the later consolidation of a different parliamentary group's position,¹⁴¹ or simply to the possibility of being able to hold the parliamentary group's speech on the Mali missions in the plenary session.¹⁴² One example is the increased questioning of the EUTM mission by the MPs of one oppositional party since 2017: The effects of this critique directed towards the mission have only been visible a year later, as the subsequent mission motion included a changed mission justification. But the changed mission motion didn't stop the critique directed towards it, leading finally to the oppositional party's withdrawal of its approving position towards the EUTM mission in 2020.¹⁴³

¹²⁸I6, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party; I10, MP government party.

¹²⁹I8, MP opposition party; I9, MP government party; I17, MP opposition party.

¹³⁰I8, MP opposition party; I9, MP government party; I10, MP government party.

¹³¹I2, former MP opposition party; I6, MP opposition party; I9, MP government party; I10, MP government party.

¹³²I9, MP government party.

¹³³I9, MP government party.

¹³⁴I8, MP opposition party.

¹³⁵I16, MP opposition party.

¹³⁶I9, MP government party.

¹³⁷I2, former MP opposition party; I4, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party.

¹³⁸I16, MP opposition party.

¹³⁹I8, MP opposition party; I17, MP opposition party.

¹⁴⁰I4, MP opposition party; I6, MP opposition party; I8, MP opposition party; I9, MP government party.

¹⁴¹I2, former MP opposition party; I9, MP government party; I10, MP government party; I17, MP opposition party.

¹⁴²I10, MP government party.

¹⁴³I17, MP opposition party.

This detailed analysis of forms of epistemic agency reveals that instead of seeking to question the governmental hegemony or engage with Mali directly (inviting Malian agents, listening and including knowledge from Mali), we can see a certain degree of lock-in of the interventionary object of robust peacebuilding in Mali in internal logics of parliamentary governance. In these mandate decision-making routines in Germany, a highly institutionalised process in and surrounding the German parliament, epistemic struggles or battles¹⁴⁴ are mostly absent – and with that also their transformative potential. The few changes in the object constitution we have identified have been initiated by the executive, which controls the epistemic practices and technologies in the Federal Foreign Ministry. The little ruptures or initiatives we have identified in the process – and related types of agency – are mainly motivated by ‘internal’ power struggles (meaning that they are mostly not related to Mali after all) and the rules of parliamentary competition.

Conclusion

Against the background of the substantial political crisis and rising violence in Mali after nearly a decade of robust peacebuilding, the questions of how knowledge enters routines of security governance gains urgency. While knowledge-related literature has increasingly focused on expertise and types of knowledge in peacebuilding operations and International Organisations in the last years, we have less insights on knowledge in processes and routines of security governance in state institutions, for example in parliaments as highest legislative bodies and public arenas of mandate decision-making. Taking this gap as a starting point, we have put the mandates of robust peacebuilding operations in Mali as a governing issue in the German parliament at the centre of our explorative analysis. Germany has been a key intervener in Mali since 2013, and the troop contributions in the two missions EUTM and MINUSMA constituted the biggest German participation in international robust peacebuilding next to Afghanistan. We have asked how knowledge enters the routines of mandate decision-making process on Mali in the parliament. Newer, knowledge object-centred theoretical frameworks¹⁴⁵ have inspired our work, allowing a more holistic analysis of epistemic practices, agency, and authority in the governing routines of Mali as ‘object of intervention’¹⁴⁶ than traditional, subject-centred frameworks on policy experts, or discourse and speech-focused studies.

Our first argument regarding the role and limitations of knowledge in the governing process is that we observe a lock-in of peacebuilding in Mali in parliamentary routines. Already very much reliant on an international epistemic practices and authority (the UN and EU), knowledge on Mali reaches the parliament predominantly via the executive, as mandate motions are based on knowledge collected in data bases in ministries. Instead of opening up the process by referring to diverse sources from or with regard to Mali, the object ‘Mali’ is epistemically even further narrowed down to what appears to be merely relevant to the German engagement. This is not a simple bureaucratic practice, but a conscience and power-infused process, which was equally stressed in the informal conversations we conducted with ministerial staff. In the parliament, a few privileged and less-privileged agents are concerned in formal and informal institutionalised epistemic routines to prepare party group positions and voting. Due to the character of the German parliament, government parliamentary groups are closer to executive knowledge and consolidate the governments’ epistemic authority. Oppositional groups rely on government member questioning, briefings, motions in parliament, and invitations to travels. Mali, despite being the most substantial German military mission, only sporadically gained substantial attention in special meetings or hearings in committees. While a yearly routine, the governing process in the parliament is under constant temporal pressure and motions have to be decided upon in weeks. We conclude that

¹⁴⁴ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’.

¹⁴⁵ Allan, ‘From subjects to objects’; Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*.

¹⁴⁶ Danielsson, ‘Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority’.

epistemic practices serve primarily self-referential purposes, instead of allowing in-depths analyses of the situation in Mali or being potentially open to the inclusion of new or critical knowledge.

Recent knowledge focused peacebuilding literature, including new object-centred studies, highlight the importance of struggles and competitions on epistemic authority in peacebuilding governing.¹⁴⁷ In such struggles, hegemonic knowledge could potentially be challenged, or at least new knowledge could gain ground. Based on our research, we argue that authoritative knowledge is in fact rarely challenged in the parliament and if so, only for the self-referential presentation of the (oppositional) parliamentary groups. Such 'battles' on ideas are rarely motivated by the intention to change policies. In addition, the few moments of rupture with regard to the parliamentary routines, which are able to challenge the governmental epistemic authority, are highly constraint in their effects.

To understand the concrete interplay of agency and authority,¹⁴⁸ and the constraining effects on knowledge transformation in this relationship, we have extracted and defined different types of epistemic agency in the parliament. We argue that the main epistemic agency in the parliament is mere procedural agency, which dominates the whole process of object governance. Authoritative agency is limited to few agents, while confirming and initiative agency offer some kind of influence, mostly by individuals – but are not disruptive in character. Finally, only contentious agency remains for alternative epistemic challenges, however, its effects are limited, as contestation mostly happens in inner-factional discussions that are not necessarily brought into public deliberations. The few substantial changes in object constitution, like the inclusion of the threat of migration as justification for operations in Mali, have been enforced via authoritative agency.

Coming back to the initial questions we have raised, our study shows that epistemic practices and agency are primarily concerned with making Mali governable – and not with a critical, evaluating perspective. Broader, alternative knowledge on peacebuilding is not a necessary condition for the continuity of security governance and the constitution of the object of intervention Mali has barely changed over one decade.

Which avenues for future research does our analysis suggest? First, our engagement with questions of decision-making, authority, and agency from an object-centred knowledge perspective¹⁴⁹ suggests that a *processual* perspective can indeed add to our understanding of the role of knowledge in security governance and peacebuilding. With a processual perspective on governing routines, we can identify how new knowledge emerges (or not), and how governance subjects are able to influence the governing of peacebuilding via knowledge. More comparative analyses with such a processual perspective on epistemic practices and agencies in ministries and governments, in policy institutions and the non-governmental sector, will, for example, offer a broader picture on how particular knowledge does *not* reach decision-making, or is simply ignored or silenced. The issue of silence leads to another avenue for potential future research. While the asymmetries of 'local' and 'international' knowledge have been problematised before,¹⁵⁰ we have been surprised that in our case of the German parliament, Malian experts, experiences, and knowledge do virtually not play any role and are barely existent in epistemic practices. In the routinised, hierarchical, and time-constricted process, knowledge from Mali is neither integrated, valued, nor reflected upon as an important asset. The constitution of an object of intervention in German foreign and security policy is seemingly solely shaped by governing preferences in Germany or by international partners and International Organisations. This extreme lack of local perspectives, the silencing and ignoring of knowledge from intervened societies would indeed confirm the critique of the governance of

¹⁴⁷ Danielsson, 'Reconceptualising the politics of knowledge authority'; Kostić, 'Transnational think-tanks'.

¹⁴⁸ Allan, 'From subjects to objects', p. 858.

¹⁴⁹ Allan, 'From subjects to objects'.

¹⁵⁰ Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Bliesemant de Guevara and Kostić, 'Knowledge production in/about conflict'.

robust peacebuilding in the metropole primarily as a form of postcolonial and hegemonic security governance, based on substantial epistemic hierarchies.¹⁵¹

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¹⁵¹Bruno Charbonneau, *France and the New Imperialism: Security Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016); Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).