



## Call for Application

### **Politics and Armed Conflict in Africa: Bringing the Peasantry Back to the Center of the Debate**

**-- Ouagadougou, 16 – 24 August 2021--**

**A workshop of the “Programme Point Sud”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in collaboration with the Goethe University in Frankfurt/Main**

#### **Conveners**

Dr. Mahamadou Bassirou Tangara, Development Economist, Lecturer and Researcher, University of Bamako, Mali

Prof. Dr. Baz Lecocq, Historian, Professor, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

Dr. Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka, Political Scientist, Lecturer and Researcher, University of Mons, Belgium

Dr. Zakaria Soré, Sociologist, Lecturer and Researcher, University Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Burkina Faso

Dr. Lamine Savané, Political Scientist, Lecturer and Researcher, University of Ségou, Mali

Dr. Gillian Mathys, Historian, Lecturer and Researcher, Gent University, Belgium

In collaboration with the Laboratory Gender and Development at the Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

#### **Argument**

The dominant discourses on armed groups and mobilizations in Africa have evolved over time, ranging from a focus on levels of extreme violence, particularly with regard to rape as a weapon of war (Verweijen, 2015), to identity politics as a primary motive for violence (Lemarchand, 2009), or the role of economic incentives as drivers of conflict and motivators of armed actors (Collier 2000; Verweijen, 2015). A growing body of research analyzes the recurrence of armed groups in countries in armed conflict (Vlassenroot et al., 2018). However, the impact of violence and conflict on the peasantry, including forced displacement and the destruction of territory as a place for peasant life requires more attention. Far from being a product of nature, the peasantry identifies itself through a series of claims, mobilizations, innovations and a particular way of life (Peemans, 2002; Scott 1985). This makes it a dynamic actor that (co-) shapes conflicts and contributes to the different processes it generates. Most researchers neglect the role of the peasantry in their analyses and publications on the transformation processes under violent conflict, and its political capital. In the existing literature on armed groups and violent conflict, peasants are mainly defined in two stereotypical roles: either as helpless victims of violent conflict who must be helped at all costs (Maedl & al., 2013); or as opportunistic accomplices, often naively manipulated by local or national political entrepreneurs (Conca and Wallace, 2009; Jourdan, 2004).

This workshop is devoted to the reflection on the relationship between the peasantry and armed conflicts in the Sahel and the Great Lakes region. Four main objectives are targeted in this workshop. First, it will bring together a group of researchers (junior and senior) from various disciplines and geographical areas around the issue of the relationship between peasantry and armed conflict, in order to exchange on methodological approaches to address this topic from a multidisciplinary perspective. This will contribute to the state of knowledge on the subject and to find the epistemological stumbling blocks.

Second, it will also deconstruct classic categories of approaches to armed groups in which peasants in conflict-affected areas are often invisible as actors in their own rights. The result of this invisibility is often an analysis of armed conflict that is divorced from the peasant context in which it takes place, and that does not sufficiently take into account the political claims related to this context. These discussions are necessary insofar as the impact of the violence of armed conflicts on the peasantry and the role of the peasantry in the conflicts and the processes of transformation of social relations that result from them, as well as the political capital of the peasantry, are very important, but often forgotten in pacification interventions.

Thirdly, this workshop aims to set up a research program that will aim to study the discourses and actions of peasants and draw lessons to be used in setting up a catalog of the peasantry-armed conflict relationship to inform and guide the prevention and management of armed conflicts in Africa.

Last but not least, the central issue raised by this workshop is the process of "peace building". On this subject, a round table, bringing together the different actors involved in the search for peace, farmers, politicians, victims (displaced and others), combatants, civil society... will be organized.

The present call for papers focuses on theoretical or empirical academic contributions on the relationship between the peasantry and conflict. It then invites case studies and/or reflections that address specific questions related to one of the following workshop axes:

#### **Axis 1 : Epistemology, Theory, Concepts and Ethics in Peasantry and Armed Group Studies**

This first axis gathers texts that bring back the peasantry and politics in the debates on armed conflicts by discussing the epistemological decentering, theoretical and conceptual choices and state considerations. In other words, these are scholarly contributions justifying the need to focus on the "margins" (peasants) for issues often studied from the elite (Bayart et al. 2008); seeking to understand the relationship between these margins and political processes (Scott, 1998); or clarifying the theoretical implications that require the evolution of concepts such as peasantry, peasants, etc. (Peemans, 2002); proposing a debate on the ethical stances that influence conceptual choices in these studies (Ansoms et al., 2014).

#### **Axis 2: Modalities of Conflict in the Peasantry**

In this second axis, we discuss the way in which the relationship between the peasantry and the political in contexts linked to armed conflicts is shaped by the modalities of conflictuality. This may include terrorism, civil wars, inter-state conflicts (Kaldor, 2009), armed groups, self-defense groups, etc. Here, the contributions requested should focus on the different forms of agentivity of peasants in these different contexts (subjugation, peasants as members of the armed groups themselves, cohabitation, etc.).

### **Axis 3: Specific Case Studies on the Relationship between Peasantry and Armed Groups**

This third axis deals with peasantry, armed conflict and the modalities of politics linked to specific socio-historical and political contexts. The main goal is to discuss the limits of homogenizing these specificities in order to deepen the understanding of the relationship between peasantry and armed conflict. The work of this axis must propose an analysis of the complexity of the relationship between peasantry and armed conflict captured from multiple descriptions and theorization work (Macamo, 2019). Preferably, these case studies are based on empirical research.

### **Axis 4: Interventions of Pacification in the Peasantry**

Peace and conflict studies is one of the most normative areas of research in the social sciences (Curtis, 2013) where the starting point is often the moral view that peace is better than war (Boutros, Boutros, 1992). This positioning underlies the multiple interventions that are part of any widely studied line of research. What is the place of the peasantry in these studies? What are the links between the ways in which the peasantry is taken into account in these interventions and their effectiveness and sustainability? What is the relationship between the "local turn" (Chandler, 2015; UN, 2014) in peace building and the question of the peasantry? This axis aims to focus on these different intervention questions by asking both evaluative and programmatic questions, in a dialogue between practitioners and academics.

### **Practical Aspects**

All costs related to travel and stay in Ouagadougou for accepted speakers will be covered by the Point Sud Program. Early career researchers and African researchers are particularly encouraged to propose a paper. The workshop is committed to promoting equal opportunities for participation in terms of gender, religion and other socio-cultural differences. Paper proposals may be submitted in English or French.

### **Covid 19**

All deadlines and dates are subject to revision as the situation regarding COVID-19 evolves. Our preference is to hold a face-to-face event in Ouagadougou. If the development of the pandemic does not allow for a workshop in presence, we will consider either rescheduling the event to a later date, or a virtual conference and discuss this with the selected participants. Please note that the DFG does not cover the costs of Covid 19 tests. We hope you will apply despite these pandemic-related challenges. The safety and health of participants is our top priority.

### **Deadlines**

Submission of proposals (500 words maximum) and a CV (2 pages maximum): May 31, 2021 (by email to **mb.t75@mesrs.ml**)

Notification of acceptance/rejection: June 15, 2021

Deadline for submissions/completed papers: July 26, 2021