



MIASA-PAPA International Conference

Challenging Conflict Research in Africa: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological issues



10 - 12 December 2021

J.H. Kwabena Nketia Conference Hall
Institute of African Studies (IAS)
University of Ghana, Legon

Conveners

Pilot African Postgraduate Academy – PAPA, funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation, Germany represented by:

Dr. Issouf Binaté, University, Alassane Ouattara, Côte d'Ivoire
Prof. Mamadou Diawara, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Dr. Habibou Fofana, University Thomas Sankara, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
Dr. Abdoulaye Imorou, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Dr. Sheila Médina Karambiri, University Joseph KI-ZERBO, Burkina Faso
Prof. Elisio Macamo, University of Basel, Switzerland
Prof. Jean Bernard Ouedraogo, EHESS Paris, France
Dr. Mahamadou Bassirou Tangara, University of Social Sciences and Management, Bamako, Mali

Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, MIASA project, represented by:

Prof. Mamadou Diawara
Dr. Stefan Schmid
Dr. Marko Scholze

Hosted by:

Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA) & Institute of African Studies (IAS)
University of Ghana, Legon, Accra / Ghana

Welcome Address from MIASA Directors

The Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA) is committed to making African thinking increasingly relevant in the global academic world, and it encourages the intellectual exchange across existing boundaries: between disciplines, between different academic cultures, countries, and continents, as well as between established and younger researchers.

This conference is a perfect example for achieving these objectives. MIASA addresses its umbrella topic, the issue of “sustainable governance” as a theoretical and conceptual challenge likely to yield new answers to key societal problems. Taking the imperatives of sustainable governance seriously requires acknowledgement of diverging perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches. One of MIASA’s main research axes for exploring this is the topic of conflict and sustainable peace, which will be critically discussed during this conference.

We are grateful that this conference has been organized jointly by MIASA with the Point Sud-run Pilot African Postgraduate Academy (PAPA), the Goethe University Frankfurt and the Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Ghana. This collaboration reflects MIASA’s cooperation with its German partners, across Africa and within the College of Humanities at the University of Ghana. We are happy that with PAPA we are bringing in a large group of excellent early career scholars who are based at universities in Francophone Africa.

MIASA offers time and space for supporting innovative academic research of top international quality through academic events and its fellowship programme.

As participants of this conference, we encourage you to look out for current and future MIASA calls for writing and publishing workshops, female academic careers in Africa workshops, international conferences as well as for individual and tandem fellowships and Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups.

We welcome our visitors to the University of Ghana campus and to MIASA; Akwaaba – Willkommen – Welcome – Bienvenue. We would like to thank the organizing committee for their brilliant work in realizing this conference programme, the support team for putting this in place as well as MIASA’s funders, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the University of Ghana for their sponsorship. Thank you all very much for accepting the invitation to participate in this three-day event and enjoy the fruitful and thought-provoking academic exchange.

For more information on MIASA and its fellowships and activities please visit www.ug.edu.gh/mias-africa/ or follow us on twitter @MIASA_UG.

Dr. Susann Baller
MIASA Director (Germany)
Research Fellow at the German Historical Institute Paris

Prof. Charlotte Wrigley-Asante
MIASA Director (Ghana)
Associate Professor of Geography and Resource Development

Introduction

In recent years, the social sciences have been crossed by a major questioning movement of scientific discourse on Africa. The inventory of the colonial library, decolonial thought, and the decoding of the contents of the “black boxes” that are the most used concepts in the social sciences constitute various declinations of this ambition to reappropriate a science of Africa that was built without this continent. The conference *Challenging Conflict Research in Africa* is part of this renewal of African social sciences. This conference is convened by the fellows of the African Postdoctoral Pilot Academy (PAPA), a program of excellence based at the Point Sud Institute in Bamako (Mali) that brings together fifteen postdoctoral students from various African higher education and research institutions. The conference is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education in Research and is organized in collaboration with MIASA and the Institute of African Studies in Accra (Ghana) as well as the Goethe University in Frankfurt (Germany).

Context and justification

The epithets used to describe social conflicts taking place on the African continent, the descriptions made of them, and the perspectives applied to them contribute more to obscure rather than further our understanding and the careful questioning of social violence. This observation is not limited to the field of conflict studies in Africa. The salvage critique undertaken by various authors over the last few decades continues to challenge the mode of researching African contexts.

This criticism concerns both the dimension of the relationship to the object, as Mudimbe (1988) pointed out, revealing "the Western epistemological order" which structures the "scientific representations²" of Africa and imposes criteria of intelligibility, as well as on the conceptual mechanisms in charge of local histories which want to be universal invariants, the African specificities being highlighted only through a posture of "essentialising practices concepts" (Ouédraogo, 1997).

As Macamo (2018) rightly reminds us, the danger is that most of these concepts function as "black boxes" whose apparent success poorly hides the assumptions of which they are the products and, consequently, the preconceptions they convey. Generally inscribed in

unquestioned theoretical and methodological frameworks, the perspectives engaged in many studies of conflict in Africa consist of explaining why African countries encounter difficulties in becoming "States" like others, i.e., like "the model" that Western history has produced.

Instead of questioning how in African contexts or elsewhere groups and individuals make society, perpetuate or question local agreements and understandings, affirm or contest values or benchmarks of collective life, we have often endeavored to explain "deviations" from norms, "failures" and "anomalies" concerning expected performances. In this way, we believe we are exempt from questioning the local forms of construction of political legitimacies. When we do venture there, however, we do so by often framing the issues based on a fortress of consecrated concepts and theories. For this reason, our procedures may lack the necessary critical edge.

Thus, theoretical reflection has regularly been nourished by some analytical categories considered essential to the understanding of politics. These include "citizenship", "democracy", "governance", "civil society", among others. However, there is no challenge to the operational value of these concepts, the contexts to which they are applied, and not taking into account of the possible variation of the meaning of these concepts according to the contexts.

In this respect, rigorous and uncompromising questioning of the theories that have so far claimed to account for conflicts in Africa is a prerequisite for opening up avenues of reflection more concerned with the agreement between facts and theories. The difficulties of such an undertaking are significant. Indeed, the "obvious" established by a long tradition of social sciences in analyzing the political phenomenon in Africa seems to exempt researchers from an interrogation starting from the object and not from a preconceived idea of it. Getting rid of these apparent facts implies a sustained questioning of the theoretical models that give them coherence and impose them as unavoidable categories of scientific analysis.

Of course, it is not a question of wiping the slate clean of the common scientific heritage. Rather, we should revisit the theoretical and conceptual frameworks involved in thinking about the phenomena of conflict

in African contexts. If theories on the State in Africa have sufficiently highlighted "dysfunctions" and pronounced verdicts on the "decay", "failure" and "bankruptcy" of the State, there has been minimal questioning of these phenomena for their own sake, just as there has been little interest in questioning the sources of what was hitherto held to be public peace. What can taking into account the "forgotten" dimensions contribute to the understanding of conflicts in Africa? And above all, how can they be reinserted into conflict analysis projects and what forms of theoretical and conceptual revision are indispensable?

Therefore, this colloquium's objective is fundamentally epistemological and is deployed on three main aspects on which the proposals could focus:

1/ Identities, historicities, alterity

By caricaturing individuals and conflicts, analysts have sometimes become accustomed to assessing phenomena in Africa in the short, rather than in the long term. This raises the question of how researchers³ who "objectify" African contexts think about the values of the "other", values in which they do not participate or share. The proposal should focus on the use of concepts in African conflict studies, the deployment of a theoretical model of analysis or interpretation, or the critique of a specific work. For this first strand, then, applicants are encouraged to examine how the political object is constructed in African contexts, the assumptions on which this construction rests, and how the deployed concepts impose a certain intelligibility on phenomena.

2/ Broadening the field of observation

For the second part, applicants are invited to focus more directly on how a theoretical renewal of the analysis of politics and conflict in African contexts can reopen the space for interpreting facts, producing facts that have been rendered invisible or irrelevant by the usual theoretical frameworks, or forging new analytical perspectives that have not been thought about. The ambition is to open up the object of conflict by placing it within the more global dynamics of transformation of African societies.

Indeed, analyses that restrict the study of conflicts to the most immediate motives and expressions of conflictual elements lose sight of the overall configuration within which specific dimensions are essential, but "silent". Seeing, describing, and showing the links of these dimensions with the conflict phenomenon requires theoretical audacity.

Applicants are encouraged to be daring in their proposals. It means thinking, for example, about land conflicts concerning transformations in education, family structure, food culture, techniques, and technologies, etc., some of which seem far removed from the immediate object and showing how this broadening of perspective allows for a better understanding of the phenomena.

3/ The voice of fire that is heard, hear the voice of water

Birago Diop poetically prescribed a particular disposition to understand the specificities of Africa that a form of rationality had reduced to irrationality. One could take up these concerns that the poet expressed in literature in the social sciences. From experience, one of the limits of our studies is often not knowing what to do with what we sometimes discover in the field because our measuring instruments are not calibrated to accommodate them. To get an idea of this, we need only think of our neglect of ordinary situations in people's lives to focus on the most official contexts and actors corresponding to our idea of "resource persons", important subjects or key actors. These approaches, which constitute limits to our research, should encourage us to reflect on how to integrate and bring the unexpected into our inquiries. Furthermore, in this third section, applicants are encouraged to emphasize the methodological added value that a fundamental consideration of the characteristics of local contexts could bring to the researcher. This could be done through a discussion, starting from concrete and specific cases, of the modes of engagement of the procedures, techniques, tools by which the researchers question the political phenomenon and, particularly, the conflicts, adjustments, reconstructions, reinventions that these engagements have called or could have called for. And consequently, the contribution that this reactivation of the attention to the object can constitute in the research on conflicts.

Selected References

Macamo Elisio, « Translating Black-boxes: the social sciences and Africa », in Ouédraogo, J-B., Diawara, M., Macamo, E. (Editors), Translation revisited: Contesting the Sense of African social realities, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, pp 335-352.

Mudimbe Valentin-Yves, *The Invention of Africa, Philosophy, Gnosis and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988.

Ouédraogo Jean-Bernard, *Violences et communautés en Afrique noire*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1997.

PROGRAMME

For each paper (with the exception of the keynotes), 30 minutes are scheduled (15 minutes presentation & 15 minutes discussion).

1st day, December 10th 2021	
Welcome and opening speech of the workshop (MC: Habibou Fofana, University Ouaga II)	
	Welcome from MIASA by the director Susann Baller
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome from Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, by Richard Asante Welcome from Pilot African Postgraduate Academy (PAPA) by Mahamadou Bassirou Tangara
Introductory conference (Chair: Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo, CNRS/EHESS Paris)	
9:30 – 10:30	<i>The production of knowledge on conflicts in Africa: the challenge of method</i> , Mamadou Diawara, University of Frankfurt
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 13:00	<i>Conflicting Knowledge – Avoiding analytical demons in conflict research</i> , Elisio Macamo, University of Basel <i>Violence souveraine ? Enquête sur l'affrontement des valeurs (Sovereign violence? An investigation into the clash of values)</i> , Jean-Bernard Ouédraogo, CNRS/EHESS-Paris
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch
1st Session: Epistemological and methodological issues (Chair: Sheila Médina Karambiri, University of Ziniaré)	
	<i>L'ajustement des rapports sociaux. De quelques pièges conceptuels dans l'analyse des litiges/conflits sociaux et de leurs modes de règlement en contextes africains</i>
14:30 – 15:30	(The adjustment of social relations. Some conceptual pitfalls in the analysis of social disputes/conflicts and their modes of settlement in African contexts), Habibou Fofana, University Thomas Sankara <i>Négociation de la légitimité de l'Etat en Côte d'Ivoire Post-Conflict. Présupposés théoriques selon Haggman et Péclard</i> (Negotiating state legitimacy in post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire. Theoretical presuppositions according to Haggman and Péclard), Cynthia Ozoua Bailly, University Alassane Ouattara
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 – 16:30	<i>Enquêter dans un contexte de terrorisme : anxiété et défis épistémologique et méthodologique. Récit de recherche sur la construction de la paix dans la commune de Thiou (Burkina Faso)</i> (Investigating in a context of terrorism: anxiety and epistemological and methodological challenges. A research story on peace building in the commune of Thiou, Burkina Faso), Zakaria Soré, University Joseph Ki-Zerbo
16:30	Visit to MIASA

2nd day, December 11th 2021

Chair: Mamadou Diawara (Goethe University Frankfurt)

9:00 – 10:00 *Considering Violence and Security Actors in Burkina Faso. A Perspective from the Rural Milieu*, Hans Peter Hahn & Melina C. Kalfelis, Goethe Univ. Frankfurt Main

Alternance et crises postélectorales dans la sous-région CEMAC: cas de la RCA (Alternation and post-election crises in the CEMAC sub-region: the case of the CAR), Mahoula Ndjokwe Rose Nadine, University of Ngaoundéré

10:00 – 10:30 Coffee break

2nd Session: Singularity and diversity of conflicts (Chair: Abdoulaye Imorou, University of Ghana)

10:30 – 12:00 *« Bras ballants » contre « bras croisés ». Une relecture du conflit wahhabite en Côte d'Ivoire au prisme de la mosquée* ("Flailing arms" versus "crossed arms". A rereading of the Wahhabi conflict in Côte d'Ivoire through the prism of the mosque), Bourahima Diomandé, University Alassane Ouattara

'Weapons only are not sufficient': Former Congolese soldiers' accounts of the power of ritual practices in wartime, Mulopo Lakika Dostin, University of the Witwatersrand

In the face of conflicts, African "spectacular difference", Silvana Carotenuto, University Napoli L'Orientale

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch

3rd Session: Conflicts through the prism uncentered (Chair: Mahamadou Bassirou Tangara, University Bamako)

13:30 – 15:00 *L'ordre du surplomb et l'analyse de la conflictualité en Afrique. Regards décentrés depuis l'analyse des tensions socio-humanitaires à l'Est-Cameroun* (The order of the overhang and the analysis of conflictuality in Africa. Decentered views from the analysis of socio-humanitarian tensions in East Cameroon), Calvin Minfegue Assouga, Catholic University of Central Africa

Perception européenne des conflits et terrorisme au Mali et en Centrafrique à travers le cinéma: Timbuktu (franco-mauritanien), Les Otages du désert (espagnol) et touriste (russe) (European perception of conflicts and terrorism in Mali and Central African Republic through cinema: Timbuktu (Franco-Mauritanian), The Hostages of the desert (Spanish) and tourist (Russian), Aboubacar Abdoulwahidou Maiga, University of Literature and Human Sciences of Bamako

Mes ancêtres seraient fiers de moi. Lire l'expérience guerrière dans le bassin Tchadien au prisme d'une histoire locale

(My ancestors would be proud of me. Reading the war experience in the Chadian Basin through the prism of a local history), Erick Sourna Loumtouang, National Center of Education

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break

4th Session: Conflicts, field of resistance and social and political reforms (Chair: Zakaria Soré, University Joseph Ki Zerbo)

15:30 – 17:00 *Resistance, negotiation, or silent dissent? Analyzing conflicts over land from a multidimensional perspective*, Sarah Kirst, Freie Universität Berlin

Beyond violent extremism: An examination of young muslims narratives on social and political reform, Yunus Dumbe, University Kwame Nkrumah

Singular geography, conflictual temporalities: diaspora, (im)mobility and contestations of time in farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria, Senayon Olaoluwa, University of Ibadan

19:00 Conference dinner

3rd day, December 12th 2021	
Keynote (Chair: Bettina Engels, Freie Universität Berlin)	
9:00 – 10:00	<i>The merits of the comparative approach: understanding violence against "outsiders" in Kenya and South Africa</i> , Laura Freeman, University of Cape Town
10:00 – 10:30	Coffee Break
5th Session: Conflict and peace building (Chair: Abdoulaye Imorou, University of Ghana)	
10:30 – 11:30	<i>Déconstruction de la violence et paix : approche cinétique des mouvements sociaux et possibilités théoriques de linkage avec la peacebuilding dans l'Afrique contemporaine</i> (Deconstructing Violence and Peace: A Kinetic Approach to Social Movements and Theoretical Possibilities for Linking with Peacebuilding in Contemporary Africa), Ludovic Boris Pountougnigni Njuh, University of Dschang
	<i>Comprendre la dynamique de l'économie locale en période de conflits armés : ramener l'économie informelle dans les études de paix et de conflits</i> (Understanding the Dynamics of the Local Economy in Times of Armed Conflict: Bringing the Informal Economy into Peace and Conflict Studies), Mahamadou Bassirou Tangara, University of Social Sciences and Management
11:30 – 12:30	<i>About a will to power: Contemporary conflicts in Africa and the politics of knowledge production</i> , Zubairu Wai, University of Toronto
Final Discussion & Closing Speech (MC: Habibou Fofana, University Ouaga II)	
	Lessons learned and the way forward
12:30 – 13:30	Closing remarks from MIASA Closing remarks from PAPA
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch
Afternoon	Individual visit to Accra

PARTICIPANTS

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