



Program Point Sud 2017

Peacemaking seen from Below: Experiments, Experiences and Alternatives

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Centre de Gouvernance Démocratique (CGD), Ouagadougou

Report



1 Organisers

Prof Ulf Engel, Political Science and African Studies, University of Leipzig

Prof Augustin Loada, Public Law, University of Ouagadougou II

Dr Antonia Witt, Political Science/Peace and Conflict Studies, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)

2 Themes and Objectives

Interventions by African regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) conducted in search for peace and security or in defence of democratic orders have become more prevalent and visible recently. The regional interventions in Burkina Faso in response to the 2014/15 political crisis are cases in point. The aim of this workshop was to scrutinize the local dynamics sparked by African peacemaking interventions and to analyse these efforts from the perspectives of those conducting, resisting or living with the effects of African interventions. Drawing on case studies from Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Mali, the workshop thus specifically focused on understanding the interactions between mediators, diplomats, political elites, and civil society actors as unfolding on the ground. With this, our intention was to change the top-down perspective hitherto dominant in the literature on interventions by African regional organizations and to scrutinize African interventions ‘from below’. Seen in this light, our aim was to grant more analytical attention to local dynamics, actual practices of intervention as well as the contested politics of African peacemaking efforts as experienced by those ‘doing’ or living with the effects of African interventions. Such a shift in perspective requires interdisciplinary approaches as well as dialogue and understanding across the still existing academic-practitioner divide. The workshop therefore brought together African and European researchers of various disciplines, practitioners from African regional organizations, as well as representatives of civil society organizations and other social and political actors. We specifically focused on the three following themes:

1. Scrutinizing different experiences and perceptions of crisis as articulated by local actors including different articulations of the problem that became subject of regional intervention;
2. Understanding the practices of regional interventions as unfolding on the ground as well as the multiplexity of actors involved in regional interventions. This includes taking into focus representatives from the various regional organizations, their international supporters (like the EU, UN, OIF etc.) and local interlocutors as well as those who cooperate with or even mobilise against these efforts (such as local NGOs, traditional leaders, youth activists etc.);
3. Uncovering alternative imaginaries of order and intervention that question or complement the solutions to political problems currently on offer by African regional organizations. This also includes asking what inhibits such imaginaries from being realised.

3 Methodology and Results

The workshop was held for three days at the Centre pour la gouvernance démocratique (CGD) Burkina Faso in Ouagadougou. The CGD, set up in 2001, is an independent ‘knowledge center’ for promoting dialogue on democratic governance and building capacities for civil society and political actors in Burkina Faso and Africa more generally. The CGD provided an excellent venue and intellectual environment to hold this workshop, which benefitted decisively from the centre’s expertise and reputation as renowned forum to monitor and debate the post-2014 political developments in Burkina Faso, including the involvement of AU and ECOWAS therein. The workshop was attended by 17 academics from across Europe and Africa, 12 among them junior academics, as well as 7 practitioners from regional and civil society organizations. It consisted of an academic workshop as well as two interactive sessions. In the latter, the group met with Burkinabe civil society activists, politicians and academics in order to learn from their experiences during the 2014/15 crisis and their perceptions of the role of regional organizations (AU and ECOWAS) in its resolution more specifically. The academic workshop was divided in seven thematic panels, each based on individual paper presentations followed by an open discussion among all participants. Each panel was led by one discussant whose task it was to summarize the contributions and spell out first questions and points for further discussion. The presentations were based on short think pieces, written in English or French that were circulated ahead of the workshop. As not all participants were literate in both languages, the workshop organizers provided short summaries of the think pieces in the respective other language. During the presentations and discussions, participants were free to choose between French and English as their preferred language. Two language assistants from the CGD offered individual interpretation services during the workshop sessions. The workshop panels covered the following themes: anthropological approaches to different understandings of crisis, the multiple actors of the intervention arena, mediation as particular form of intervention, the role of (different kinds of) conflict knowledge in the construction and legitimation of interventions, the role of civil society in peacemaking interventions, experiences from field offices of regional organizations, as well as the politics of inclusion/exclusion during interventions. The two interactive sessions, in turn, respectively concentrated on the lessons of the 2014/15 crisis in Burkina Faso for African peacemaking as well as the role of scholars and academia more generally during and in the aftermath of political crises. The interactive sessions provided a unique opportunity to gain in-depth insights on (different) societal discourses and perceptions about the 2014/15 crisis in Burkina Faso and to learn more deeply from the experiences and interpretations of the invited guests. As one of the practitioner participants noted, such an open articulation of societal experiences and assessments of regional interventions has been rare so far and should be organized in other cases as well. In this sense, the interactive session also provided an exceptional opportunity to establish direct exchanges between representatives from African regional organizations on the one hand and people affected by and holding particular views about the aims, strategies, and consequences of these organizations’ policies on the other. In a unique way, these exchanges made visible the dissonance and disconnects between regional organizations’ strategies and aims of intervention on the one hand and the experiences and perceptions of those in whose name such interventions are usually conducted on the other hand.

Insights generated from the very lively exchanges during both the academic workshop and the interactive sessions are rich and impossible to summarize in a report of this length. In fact, participants agreed that, despite their very diverse disciplinary backgrounds and individual research interests, it was this plurality that opened new ways of seeing and understanding their respectively own research area from a different perspective and to learn from others' disciplinary approaches, empirical expertise and practical experiences. The contributions to the special issue published as result of this workshop (see further below) may show just a glimpse of the productivity of this intended change in perspective for studying African interventions. Despite this plurality of individual insights and surprises taken from the workshop, three general observations merit being highlighted here. Firstly, by treating a multiplicity of different case studies, the workshop was an opportunity to combine participants' outstanding expertise on single cases and experiences of regional intervention on the one hand with an interest in highlighting the broader picture of the more general characters, challenges and dilemmas of these undertakings on the other. As of now, regional organizations like the AU or ECOWAS still seem to follow one-size-fits-all solutions that are promoted and applied almost irrespective of concrete local contexts. The workshop exchanges hence sparked an important, albeit certainly unfinished, re-thinking about how much uniqueness the currently dominant forms of regional intervention grant to each individual case and, tied to that, raised the question of how much uniqueness would be necessary for more sustainable and locally legitimate interventions in the future. These questions are not only important for those planning and conducting interventions. In fact, the exchanges with Burkinabe civil society also highlighted that having knowledge about other cases and experiences is also crucial for all those affected by, seeking to influence, or retrospectively learning from past intervention experiences. The workshop hence showed the important role of simultaneity in perspective – of seeing the small and the big together and finding the right balance between them – for which the specific workshop format provided an invaluable opportunity, but which still needs to be more effectively translated into scholarly work and the formulation of practical solutions. Secondly, the workshop underlined the various forms of disconnects that prevail between the imagination and implementation of large institutional architectures for the promotion of peace and security in Africa on the one hand and their local imprints, interpretations and evaluations on the other. These disconnects became especially visible during the interactive session, where heated but constructive debates opened up about how to evaluate AU and ECOWAS's role in the 2014/15 Burkina Faso. Not least, they underlined the need for much more empirical attention towards the multiple and diverging perceptions and expectations of regional organizations held by those in whose name AU and ECOWAS promote peace, security and democratic orders today, in Burkina Faso as elsewhere on the continent. Thirdly, the discussions highlighted the pressing need to engage more thoroughly with the question of whose and what kind of knowledge and ideas the scholarly debate about regional interventions currently promotes and is able to promote and translate more generally. At several instances, the workshop discussion touched upon the crucial role knowledge plays for the imagination and legitimation of (peace) interventions, to which scholarly debates similarly contribute. The intention to turn academic perspectives upside down by looking 'from below' instead of 'top-down' in this sense only partially solves the problem. Whom do we listen to when we scrutinize interventions 'from below' remains a practical, normative and

epistemic challenge for everyone interested in changing the terms of researching interventions. In this regard, the interdisciplinary character of the workshop group, especially bringing together anthropologists and political scientists, was particularly useful and will hopefully set the path for future interdisciplinary advances.

4 Sustainability of the Event

The workshop provided a unique opportunity to bring together scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds interested in researching African interventions and to establish research partnerships for the future. For junior researchers and PhD candidates in particular, the presence of several high-ranking practitioners from African regional organizations also provided an invaluable chance to establish contacts for future field research at AU and ECOWAS headquarters and to conduct expert interviews on the side of the workshop. In terms of research outputs, eight papers from the workshop were selected for publication in a special issue of the South African Journal of International Affairs (peer-reviewed), guestedited by Antonia Witt, which will be published in March 2018¹. The papers are framed by a longer introductory article by Antonia Witt as well as a conclusion co-authored by Gilbert Khadiagala and Antonia Witt. Both translate this workshop's aim of establishing a new research perspective for the study of African interventions, which is hoped to be of relevance and use for a much broader audience interested in understanding African interventions in hitherto novel perspectives. Moreover, in order to broaden the workshop participants' network of research contacts, all participants were invited to join the West Africa Security Network, a network of scholars and practitioners interested in studying issues of peace and conflict in West Africa in particular. Finally, the workshop also served as crucial inspiration for the development of a new research project by one of the organizers, Antonia Witt, for which a research grant application was submitted in February 2018. The planned project, entitled "Local perceptions of regional interventions: AU and ECOWAS in Burkina Faso and The Gambia", scrutinizes how people living in societies affected by African interventions experience, perceive and evaluate these endeavors. The project not only draws on insights generated through this workshop, but also benefitted from and extends research collaborations between the applicant and three Burkinabe academics - Augustin Loada, Abdoul Karim Saidou and Ludovic Kibora - who were part of this workshop and are active participants in the network of Programme Point Sud.

5 Participants

1. Igor Acko, United States Institute for Peace, Central African Republic
2. Dr Vincent Bonnacase, Political Science, LAM Bordeaux, France
3. Francois Butedi, AU Liaison Office Antananarivo, Madagascar
4. Amb. Aboudou Cheaka Touré, ECOWAS Mali
5. Amb. Ki-Doulay Coirentin, ECOWAS/CMI, Burkina Faso
6. Sabine Coulibaly, CNRST Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
7. Katharina Döring, PhD-Student, Political Science, University of Leipzig, Germany
8. Prof Ulf Engel, Political Science, University of Leipzig, Germany

¹ Two of the originally selected authors unfortunately had to drop out during the preparation of the special issue, which now includes one more contribution by an author who had not participated at the workshop.

9. Marie-Christin Gabriel, PhD-Student, Anthropology, University of Mainz, Germany
10. Dr Tim Glawion, Political Science, GIGA Hamburg, Germany
11. João Gomes Porto, IPSS Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
12. Prof Sten Hagberg, Anthropology, Uppsala University, Sweden
13. Jens Herpolsheimer, PhD-Student, African Studies, University of Leipzig, Germany
14. Liliane Hien, CGD Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
15. Prof Gilbert Khadiagala, International Relations, Wits Johannesburg, South Africa
16. Mouni Lemba, Research assistant, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
17. Prof Augustin Loada, Public Law, University Ouaga 2, Burkina Faso
18. Cynthia Ohayon, International Crisis Group, Senegal
19. Thomas Ouedraogo, CGD Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
20. Dr. Abdoul Karim Saidou, Political Science, CGD Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
21. Alice Somé, CNRST Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
22. Boris Somé, WANEP Burkina Faso
23. Dr Antonia Witt, Political Science, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany
24. Patekda S. André Yougbaré, Université Ouaga 2, Burkina Faso

Invited guests from Burkina Faso for interactive sessions

25. Prof Serge Théophile Balima, Communication Science, University of Ouagadougou,
26. Evariste Konseimbo, President, Cercle d'éveil
27. Abdoulaye Diallo, Journalist, Centre National de Presse Norbert Zongo
28. Jonas Hien, President, Conseil national des OSC
29. Olo Kambou, Balai citoyen
30. Prof Ludovic Kibora, Anthropology, INSS, Ouagadougou
31. Anselme Somda, Balai citoyen/CGD
32. Prof Magloire Somé, History, University of Ouagadougou
33. Boukari Woba, Journalist, Mutations
34. Martine Yabré, Union Africaine des ONG de Développement pour le Faso
35. Prof Vincent Zakané, Former Minister, International Law