

**Rifle, Quill, and Rosary:  
Competing sources and corporate struggles for political legitimacy in Mali**

**International Workshop, February 4 - 5, 2021**

**Convenors:**

**Dorothea Schulz and Souleymane Diallo, University of Münster, Germany**

Recent developments in the West African Sahel and Sahara illustrate the ever-growing potential of religious idioms and actors to challenge the legitimacy of political leadership.

On August 18, 2020, after months of popular unrest and of public rallies coordinated by imam Mahamoud Dicko, a leading figure of Islamic renewal and vocal critic of the government, a group of colonels from the Kati military base seized power and forced President Keita's resignation. In spite of international pressure to immediately hand over power to a civilian government, the colonels underlined their determination to "put state politics on new foundations" prior to the next elections so as to reestablish law and order and eradicate the roots of political corruption festering under the preceding presidencies of Alpha Oumar Konaré, Amadou Toumani Touré and Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The militaries blamed the deterioration of the security and economic situation on the civilian political elite and its failure to live up to the promises of multi-party democracy, participatory politics and civil liberties. After five weeks, the colonels' reluctance to hand over power to a civil government resulted in their selection of retired Colonel Maj. Bah N'Daw as transitional civil president, while preserving the office of vice president to Colonel Assimi Goita, the leader of the military coup.

Our workshop seeks to move beyond presentist and event-oriented analyses of the "Malian crisis" that has engulfed the country since the toppling of President Touré in 2012. There is a tendency among scholars and in donor agencies' and NGO reports to interpret Mali's political turmoil and the destabilization in its central and northern regions since 2012 as a sudden disruption of the country's success story as a model of democratization. Instead, we take these developments and the 2020 military take over as recent manifestations of what we conceive as a long-standing, "corporate" struggle among different segments of a political elite that draw on competing sources of political legitimacy: first, politicians who, as Western-school educated intellectuals (the "quill"), owe their office to procedures of constitutionalism and democracy; second militaries whose power position is based on their capacity to impose order by force (the "rifle"); and third and finally, politically influential figures who claim religious and moral authority by reference to holy scripture as ultimate source of political order (the "rosary"). Drawing on Jean and John Comaroff's recent work on "incorporation" (2009; Meiu, Comaroff & Comaroff 2020), we frame these groups as "corporate formations" tied in a struggle over political dominance, legitimacy, and access to the resources of the state. We posit that although each of these corporate formations of actors claim an exclusive "ethic of good governance", their struggles for legitimacy generate de facto connections and mutual collaborations between actors across categories.

A significant body of scholarship has addressed competing sources of political legitimacy to make sense of local-level and sometimes regional political dynamics in Mali. Yet this perspective has not been applied to nation-state politics and to understand how local and regional level political dynamics have been intersecting in different ways with national-level politics. Our aim is to stimulate scholarly understanding of contemporary political instability in Mali by insisting on the need to situate local conflicts within a national context and to inversely trace back national-level tensions between different segments of the political elite to local

settings. This perspective calls for sustained attention to the economic underside of these corporate formations and struggles. In an attempt to capitalize on the many studies that focus either on “the north”, on the “central region” or on political events in Bamako, we call for analyses that trace the different regional trajectories of integration into the nation-state. Our aim is to bring these analyses together in a shared conceptual framework. The purpose of the workshop is therefore to come up with an analytical framework for a systematic understanding of these processes.

As part of this endeavor, the workshop invites contributions that explore the mobilization of rifle, quill, and rosary credentials as sources for political legitimacy in Mali’s regional and local arenas and in nation-state politics. We are interested in papers that systematically examine the complexities of contemporary political instability in Mali by drawing on case studies of these different categories of actors, of their corporate interests and economic stakes, and of their relevance to national and local political arenas. We highly welcome contributions that address empirical connections between these actors, and how individual actors mobilize quill, rifle, and rosary credentials to obtain political legitimacy.

The workshop will take place at the University of Münster, Germany, on February 4 - 5, 2021, from 2- 7 pm (Berlin time). In light of the COVID-19 situation, the workshop will take place via zoom. To attend, please register via [sdiallo@uni-muenster.de](mailto:sdiallo@uni-muenster.de) or [doschulz@uni-muenster.de](mailto:doschulz@uni-muenster.de).

## WORKSHOP PROGRAM

*Thursday, February 4*

Time	<b>Rifle, Quill, and Rosary: Competing sources and corporate struggles for political legitimacy in Mali</b>
14:00-15:15	<p><b>Section 1: Welcome+ Introduction+ Keynote</b></p> <p>Dorothea Schulz and Souleymane Diallo: Welcome</p> <p>Souleymane Diallo: Introduction to the workshop</p> <p>Leonardo A. Villalon, University of Florida: <i>Between soldiers, intellectuals and marabouts: The politics of democratization and institutional legitimacy in the Sahel</i></p> <p><i>Moderation and Discussion: Dorothea Schulz</i></p>

15:15-16:35	<p><b>Section 2: The quill and the rosary: rivalry and bricolage?</b></p> <p><i>Moderation &amp; Discussion: Dorothea Schulz</i></p> <p>Dianna Bell, University of Cape town: <i>Subscribing Intent: Education Type and Parent Motives in Southern</i></p> <p>Bruce Whitehouse, Lehigh University: <i>'When a father speaks, the child cannot answer back': Conflicts over domestic authority, gender, and the state in 21st-century Mali</i></p> <p>Gregory Mann, Columbia University: <i>The Broken Quill: Political Comity and the Death of Mamadou Konaté, 1956</i></p>
16:35 – 16:50	<i>Break/Pause</i>
16:50 – 17:50	<p><i>Moderation &amp; Discussion: Souleymane Diallo</i></p> <p>Gilles Holder, CNRS, IMAF, Laboratoire MaCoTer de Bamako: <i>Entre impensés et amnésies: l'impossibilité de État malien, par la force des choses</i></p> <p>Lotte Pelckmans, University of Copenhagen: <i>The rifle, the quill, the rosary and the lineage in debates over authority and state integration of the Kayes region. Competing actors and subjectivities in debates over legacies of slavery and access to (state) resources</i></p>
17:50-18:00	<i>Break/Pause</i>
18:00-19:00	<p><b>Section 2: Generating and challenging legitimacy at the intersections of the national and the transnational</b></p> <p><i>Moderation &amp; Discussion: Dorothea Schulz</i></p> <p>Susanna Wing, Haverford College: <i>Competing Legitimacies: International Agencies and Rule of Law in Mali</i></p> <p>Isaline Bergamaschi, Université Libre de Bruxelles: <i>What, exactly, is new about international intervention in Mali and the academic debate about it?</i></p>

**Friday, February 5**

14:00-14:30	<p>Dorothea Schulz, University of Münster: <b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Discussion</p>

14:30 – 15:30	<p><b>Section 3: Generating in/securities in the interstices of the state</b></p> <p><i>Moderation and Discussion: Souleymane Diallo</i></p> <p>Ibrahima Poudiougou, University of Turin: <i>Comment des « simples paysans » deviennent hauts dignitaires de l'État ?</i></p> <p>Andrew Hernandez, City University of New York, New York: <i>From militia to army: Ganda Koy's struggle for political legitimacy in Mali</i></p>
15:30- 15:45	<p><i>Break/Pause</i></p>
15:45- 17:05	<p><b>Section 4: Military control, wealth, legitimacy: translocal dynamics of incorporation</b></p> <p><i>Moderation and Discussion: Dorothea Schulz</i></p> <p>Charles Grémont, IRD / LPED / MaCoTer : <i>« Nous avons troqué nos chèvres contre des kalachnikov » L'entrée des Idagsahak sur la scène politique locale et nationale</i></p> <p>Adib El. Bencherif, University of Florida: <i>Competition and Corporate Struggles among Tuareg Political Elites in Mali</i></p> <p>Luca Raineri and Francesco Strazzari, Pisa, Italy: <i>Drug smuggling, hybrid incorporation, and the stability of fragile states. The diverging trajectories of Mali and Niger</i></p>
17:05- 17:20	<p><i>Break/Pause</i></p>
17:20- 18:20	<p><b>Section 5: Security brokers and translocal trajectories: beyond the “rosary”?</b></p> <p><i>Moderation and Discussion: Souleymane Diallo</i></p> <p>Bintou Koné, L'Institut des Sciences humaines de Bamako(Mali): <i>Héros locaux dans l'insécurité sahélienne: Une étude des peurs, courage et sacrifice au Burkina Faso et au Mal</i></p> <p>Issiaka Kansaye, ISFRA/ ULSHB (Mali): <i>Pouvoir milicien et pouvoir municipal au centre du Mali: cohabitation ou absorption?</i></p>
18:20- 19:00	<p><i>Final debate</i> <i>Publication plans</i></p>