

Call for Papers: Workshop on African Government Forces: New theoretical and methodological approaches, Uppsala, Sweden, 1-2 December, 2014

Background

While there is a prolific literature on insurgencies in Sub-Saharan Africa that is both empirically and theoretically rich, scholarly attention to African government forces has lagged behind. Moreover, the focus of this attention has been rather limited, being predominantly directed towards (colonial) history, organizational aspects, or the influence of the military on the (formal) political sphere and the question of democratic control, often at the level of the military or the polity as a whole.

The study of other questions in relation to government forces, like their role as an economic actor or whether they strengthen or weaken 'the state', has been relatively rare. This also applies to research at the meso and micro-levels, focusing for example on unit cohesion, the informal and everyday workings of the military, the discourses, narratives and identities of soldiers, or local-level interaction with civilians.

The relative paucity of academic research on African government forces is remarkable in light of their elevated importance for the dynamics of conflict and violence. Efforts to 'stabilize' zones of violent conflict often crucially hinge on the practices of state armed forces—not only as regards combat performance, but also in terms of their economic activities, conduct towards civilians and what these forces signify to populations in war-affected areas.

Similar issues might play in post-conflict zones, or other areas affected by processes of militarization, where armed actors have come to play an important role in economic, political and social regulation. In such areas, the presence and practices of the military do not only shape citizens' everyday lives in paramount ways, they also have important longer-term effects on the legitimacy of rulers, the development of the economy and social relations more widely.

Workshop themes

By convening a workshop on state armed forces in Africa, we hope to reduce some of these knowledge deficiencies and stimulate new theoretical and methodological approaches. We invite empirically grounded and theoretically innovative contributions, in particular, but not exclusively, those that address any of the following themes:

- The military as an economic actor: In what formal and informal forms of revenue generation do armed forces engage? How do they interact with civilian economic operators? And what are the effects of these activities on civilian livelihoods as well as on the structure of the political-economy in general?

- Civilian-military relations and the micro-dynamics of violent conflict: How do armed forces shape local dynamics of conflict and violence; for example by militarizing civilian disputes; by being seen as partial, by creating grievances and by contributing to the militarization of local governance?
- The military and statehood: Do armed forces strengthen or weaken “the state” in areas of limited statehood, not only in its regulatory dimensions, but also in its symbolic aspects. What are the relations between government forces and local civilian authorities? How do armed forces draw upon the language of stateness to discursively frame their practices and how are such performances read by civilians?
- Armed forces and gender: What forms of masculinity dominate among armed forces and how are soldiers socialized into them? What are representations of ‘feminization’ in the armed forces both among male and female soldiers, as well as civilians? What is the position of female combatants in African armed forces and how do their professional identities converge/diverge with those of male soldiers?
- African militaries and peacekeeping: What are the effects of participation in peacekeeping missions both on the internal dynamics of armed forces and the role they play domestically? In how far does such participation shape organizational structures and professional identities, or alter representations of the military in civilian eyes?
- Cohesion in combat units: What factors foster or undermine horizontal and vertical cohesion, in the face of circumstances like adverse service conditions, the importance of patron-client ties and rebel-military integration. How does cohesion impact on norm-enforcement and military conduct?

How to submit

Applicants are asked to submit a paper proposal of 500-1000 words, detailing also the data on which the paper is based and the used methodology, to marie.karlsson@nai.uu.se by **September 15, 2014**

Authors will receive notice of the final disposition of their submission by **September 30, 2014**.

By accepting participation, authors commit themselves to submitting a final paper of 7000-10.000 **before November 15, 2014**

The costs for travel and accommodation for accepted participants will be covered by the organizers.

Maria Eriksson Baaz, Senior Researcher, The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala

Judith Verweijen, Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala and Ghent University, Belgium