



Call for Papers 2026 Seminar

Local Crisis Governance in Africa: Practices, Emerging Authorities, and Situated Regulations

For several decades, **the notion of “crisis” has occupied a central place** in scholarly, expert, political, and media discourses. It has been applied to an ever-expanding range of domains and diverse situations, often without clearly defining its scope or limits. The African continent has been particularly subject to such framings, given the severity of the situations faced by governments, local societies, and external actorsⁱ. Yet these designations frequently rely on stereotypes, simplifications, and reified representations **that obscure the shifting, ambivalent, and complex realities they purport to describe**.

Building on this well-documented critique, this call seeks to shift the analytical lens on crises -or on what is labelled as such. Rather than reassessing their structural causes or macro-level reconfigurations, we propose to return to concrete field settings and to privilege empirically grounded, context-sensitive approaches. We aim to analyse: **(1) how such realities are perceived and experiencedⁱⁱ; (2) the discourses and practices they generate among diverse actorsⁱⁱⁱ**.

By conceptualizing crisis as an open-ended situation, without a predetermined trajectory or fixed endpoint^{iv}, this call adopts a constructionist perspective^v. It examines the everyday forms crisis takes, the routinized modes of governance it engenders, and the positioning of actors for whom it may represent both an opportunity -through windfall effects such as access to resources- and a stage upon which to establish themselves as legitimate authorities. Particular **attention will be paid to lived experiences** and to how individuals narrate their lives, social relations, and trajectories within contexts labelled as “crisis”^{vi}.

This perspective builds on scholarship advocating a non-normative, non-prescriptive understanding of governance. Moving beyond strictly state-centric approaches, it focuses on the practices of non-state actors involved in administering basic public goods, ensuring security, regulating access to resources, or producing forms of justice^{vii}. As crises have multiplied, intensified, and in some cases become entrenched across the African continent, these actors have assumed increasing roles. Aid frameworks, marked by injunctions to “empowerment” and “accountability”, have further reinforced this shift^{viii}. More recently, the restructuring of international aid, including the dismantling of U.S. institutions and the financial retrenchment of humanitarian operations, has expanded their responsibilities in governing resources, flows, risks, and conflicts.

Such configurations demand pragmatism, adaptability, and institutional mobility from national and local actors alike^{ix}. Research in Somalia has highlighted hybrid political innovations -local entities partially integrated into formal state structures^x - as well as ad hoc policing arrangements and taxation systems regulating what has been described as a “stateless economy”^{xi}. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), rebel activity has prompted the emergence of new coalitions, networks, and structures involved in maintaining public order^{xii}. In other contexts, marked by vigilantism and self-defence groups, security and justice are renegotiated through localized idioms of power, knowledge, and accountability^{xiii}. Borderlands affected by violence or political contestation reveal plural political orders^{xiv} and new forms of authority and regulation, including fiscal arrangements^{xv}. In aid-saturated environments, “local improvisational strategies”^{xvi} generate alternative and sometimes competing forms of public service delivery^{xvii}.



The seminar therefore focuses on how these relations are governed locally, whether through routinized management practices or through accelerated processes of mobilization and resource instrumentalization. We particularly welcome contributions **addressing the affective and political dimensions of crisis**, including analyses of “local repertoires of anger”^{xviii}, forms of resentment, contestation, and blame that emerge in crisis-labelled contexts. Such repertoires constitute specific modes of politicization and of governing affects, and fully participate in the local governance of crisis situations.

By prioritizing finely situated empirical research, this call aims **to contribute to a renewed understanding of crisis**, not as an anomaly to be corrected, **but as a privileged analytical lens through which to examine ordinary forms of governance, authority, and social regulation** as they take shape, transform, or unravel.

This approach also raises important methodological and ethical questions:

- How can meaningful data be rigorously collected “at close range” in crisis settings?
- What new “forms of fieldwork” emerge when research relies on proxies or remote engagement?
- What constitutes responsible scholarly engagement, from “critical reformism”^{xix} to radical self-reflexivity^{xx}?

Both field sites and researchers invite introspection regarding the nature of collaboration and knowledge production in such contexts.

Submission Guidelines

Proposals (in French or English) must be submitted by **March 20, 2026**, to: seminaire.gcrises.afrique@gmail.com.

Proposals (500–1000 words) must include: Title, context, research question, hypotheses, methodological framework, and main findings. Full contact details of the author(s) (status, institutional affiliation, email, full address) must be provided.

We welcome contributions from all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including history, sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, and related fields. Early-career researchers are particularly encouraged to apply.

Selected papers will be considered for publication in a thematic issue currently in preparation for submission to the Canadian Journal of African Studies.

- Abstract submission deadline: March 20, 2026
- Notification of acceptance: March 25, 2026
- Seminar series: April–June 2026

This seminar is organized by the thematic working group on the Local Governance of Crises in Africa. It extends the work of the IRD-associated junior research team “Local Governance of Migration and Food Crises in Cameroon and Mali” (JEAJ-GoMACCA). Conducted under the UNESCO Chair “Défis partagés du développement”, it aims to consolidate an international network of early-career scholars working on the local governance of crises in Africa, a network initiated during the first seminar edition in 2025.

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ⁱ Nicolas Van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999*, Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions (Cambridge University Press, 2001); Vincent Bonnacase et Julien Brachet, « Les « crises sahéliennes » entre perceptions locales et gestions internationales », *Géographie, Politique africaine* 130, n° 2 (2013): 5-22.

ⁱⁱ Pierre Janin *et al.*, « Batailles de la faim : jeux d'acteurs, d'échelles et de pouvoir », *Tracés*, n° 41 (2021), en ligne; Flore Dazet, « « Remettre la vie parmi nous ». Expériences de la faim et organisation paysanne dans le Bas Nord-Ouest haïtien », *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Families, religious or traditional leaders, municipalities, administrative authorities, patrons or major business leaders, local groups and associations, etc.

^{iv} Gerd Spittler, « Explorations in African Vitality: Local Actions in Conquest, Resistance, Famine and Interethnic Relations », in *Between Resistance and Expansion: Explorations of Local Vitality in Africa*, éd. par Peter Probst et Gerd Spittler (LIT Verlag Münster, 2004).

^v Genest, Sylvie. (2018) Constructivismes en études ethniques au Québec. *Anthropologie et Sociétés*, 41. DOI: [10.7202/1043042ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1043042ar); Philippe Poutignat et Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart, « L'approche constructiviste de l'ethnicité et ses ambiguïtés », *Terrains/Théories* [En ligne], 3 | 2015, mis en ligne le 23 octobre 2015, consulté le 13 février 2026. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/teth/581> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/teth.581> ; Piaget, Jean (dir.) (1967), Logique et connaissance scientifique, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Paris : Gallimard

^{vi} Janet Roitman, *Anti-Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2014).

^{vii} Giorgio Blundo, « La gouvernance, entre technique de gouvernement et outil d'exploration empirique », *Bulletin de l'APAD*, n°s 23-24 (décembre 2002): 23-24; Ken Menkhaus, « Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping », *International Security* 31, n° 3 (2007): 74-106; Timothy Raeymaekers *et al.*, « State and Non-State Regulation in African Protracted Crises: Governance without Government? », *Afrika Focus* 21, n° 2 (2008): 7-21.

^{viii} Naohiko Omata, « The Role of Developmental 'Buzzwords' in the International Refugee Regime: Self-Reliance, Resilience, and Economic Inclusion », *World Development* 167 (2023).

^{ix} Karel Arnaut *et al.*, « Governance and ethnography in a time of crisis: On the study of emerging orders in Africa between war and peace », *Political Science, Politique africaine* 111, n° 3 (2008): 5-21; Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, « The Eight Modes of Local Governance in West Africa », *IDS Bulletin* 42, n° 2 (2011): 22-31.

^x Ken Menkhaus et Henri-Michel Yéré, « Arrangements sécuritaires locaux dans les régions somaliennes de la Corne de l'Afrique », *Politique africaine* 111, n° 3 (2008): 22-43.

^{xi} Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State* (Currey, 2003).

^{xii} Koen Vlassenroot et Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo* (Academia Press, 2004); Koen Vlassenroot et Nathalie Delaleeuwe, « Négocié et contester l'ordre public dans l'Est de la République démocratique du Congo », *Science Politique, Politique africaine* 111, n° 3 (2008): 44-68.



^{xiii} Lars Buur, « Reordering Society: Vigilantism and Expressions of Sovereignty in Port Elizabeth's Townships », *Development and Change* 37, n° 4 (2006): 735-57; Charles Gore et David Pratten, « The politics of plunder: The rhetorics of order and disorder in Southern Nigeria », *African Affairs* 102, n° 407 (2003): 211-40.

^{xiv} Christian Kordt Højbjerg et Ibrahim Ndzesop, « Le « Master General » et Madame le Maire: L'émergence d'un ordre de gouvernance dans l'hinterland libérien », *Science Politique, Politique africaine* 111, n° 3 (2008): 69-89.

^{xv} Janet Roitman, *Fiscal disobedience: an anthropology of economic regulation in Central Africa*, In-formation series (Princeton University Press, 2005).

^{xvi} Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, « Aide humanitaire ou aide au développement ? La "famine" de 2005 au Niger », *Ethnologie française* (Paris cedex 14) 41, n° 3 (2011): 415-29.

^{xvii} Marion Fresia, « Humanitarian Governance: Assisting Mauritanian Refugees In Senegal », in *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa*, éd. par Giorgio Blundo et Pierre-Yves Le Meur (Brill, 2008); Claire Lefort, « Aide internationale, production de services publics et souveraineté étatique: l'exemple des réfugiés centrafricains dans l'Est-Cameroun », *Politique africaine* 158, n° 2 (2020): 205-22.

^{xviii} Vincent Bonnacase, « Politique des prix, vie chère et contestation sociale à Niamey : quels répertoires locaux de la colère ? », *Politique africaine* 130, n° 2 (2013): 89-111.

^{xix} Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *La revanche des contextes: des mésaventures de l'ingénierie sociale, en Afrique et au-delà* (Karthala, 2021).

^{xx} Arturo Escobar, *Encountering development* (Princeton University Press, 1995).