

# Communication and the Kogl-weogo Phenomenon in Burkina Faso: A Parallel Offer of Security That Creates Debates

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**Abstract:** From 2014, the Koglweogo phenomenon crystallized the debates around its opportunity, its legality and its legitimacy. Also, there are the Volunteers for the Defense of the Fatherland (VDP). These debates are highlighted in a society in full mutation and change, but also in a context of socio-political crises, and in a kind of break of trust between the populations and the society institutions. Organizing themselves to defend their territories, in another words their interests, the orientation of their activities about security problems brings them into conflict with other actors, the defense and security forces which are traditionally in charge of these problems; and raise questions in a state of law and sovereignty. The soft focus that, for a long time remained in the dynamics of their formalization or their deletion brings up to date the question of social regulation and the capacity of the State to ensure the coordination of a diversity of action in a field as complex as that of security. To arrive at such conclusions, the approach is based on a qualitative method combining press cuttings, documentary research and semi-structured interviews, individual, collective and by voice of the press, from a theoretical entry by the conflicts.

**Keywords:** Koglweogo, Security, Conflict, Legality, Legitimacy, Communication, Behavior Change, Burkina Faso

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## 1. Introduction

In 2014 in Burkina Faso, populations in different localities of the country organized themselves into a self-defense group under the name of Koglweogo. These self-defense groups appeared at a relatively critical moment in the country's history marked by a crisis considered by some as having three dimensions: a crisis of democracy, development and law [22], in an uncertain world [19, 4]. After its independence, Burkina Faso was marked by a series of crises, the last of which was the insurrection of October 30 and 31, 2014. After the 1987 coup, the Burkinabè political field remained marked by the crisis, between the resistance of the unions, the reorganization of political parties to oppose state power, the privation of public freedoms, the culmination of which ended with the murdering on December 13, 1998 of the journalist of investigation Norbert Zongo. Political violence has remained a central variable in society, to the point that the crisis is presented as a pretext for analyzing

social mobilizations.

The socio-political crises that the country has gone through in recent years, with one of its peaks in 2011, have each time shown the fragility of state power, and the hum of the population, whose the noise can quickly become deafening. [20]. The student and worker strikes, and therefore the corporatist mobilizations, the demonstrations against the high cost of living, the grumbling of the military in 2000, in 2006, and in 2011, the death of student Justin Zongo in Koudougou, one of the facts triggers of the general protest of 2011, etc., constitute so many empirical elements that materialize the social forms of protest in social movements [26].

The experience of the Koglweogo is part of this field of crises analysis, with as results in Burkina Faso or elsewhere some forms of social mobilization and which crystallize the debates on collective action. It becomes a fundamental concern, because, as organized groups, the Koglweogo act in a field of action already reserved to other social agents, but above all have methods and mechanisms for action which

then pose a problem in a legally constituted State. The strong presence of firearms at their disposal, in the aftermath of the popular uprising of October 2014, therefore in an already fragile context, raised fears of the possibility of a possible constitution of militias, capable at a certain moment of ousting state power by a coup de force. On the field, they act as an alternative in terms of securing goods and people. To participate in the debates, it is necessary to ask a certain number of questions. In what social context do the Koglweogo arise in the security landscape of Burkina Faso? What do their emergence and the issues that their actions raise in society reflect?

To answer the previous questioning, the approach of this research is based on a qualitative method that allows us to highlight the discourses, the social representations and the scope of the social imaginaries [23] in the construction of reality and social relations in a changing society.

## 2. A Qualitative Approach Centered on Discourses and Their Practical Meaning

Within the frame of this research, the production of data is based on a qualitative approach combining press clippings, documentary research and semi-structured interviews. The press clippings concerned the periods from 2014 to 2017; the interviews carried out in Ouagadougou, Kombissiri, Ouala, Mané, Seguenega in August and September 2017 concerned national police officers and Koglweogo groups. This entry by actors of informal security, and of a so-called informal form of security, enables to catch the meaning of the justification's discourses, legitimization and/or delegitimization of some in relation to others, the possibilities of rapprochement or not, and analysis of the security issue by each of the groups concerned. From this entry by the actors, we quickly realize that if the Koglweogo say they are in conflict with the bandits, their presence and their actions also highlight conflicts with other actors on the ground, in particular the forces of defense and security, actors and organizations for the defense of human rights. This is why, on the theoretical level, the choice was focused on a conflict-based approach.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### 3.1. A Perspective Through Conflict Theories

The Koglweogo issue is part of the specific field of the question of security and securing the territory, and takes on both a political and an organizational dimension [2], with the appearance of a relatively new type of actor with their *modus operandi* in an organized society [16, 7]. In this perspective, several theoretical entries are possible to approach it and understand why the Koglweogo mobilize themselves and the implications of their actions [Cefaï, 2007]. With regard to the manifestations and the practices of the actors around it, the entry through the theory of conflicts is favored in this text.

Conflicts oppose, in very diverse forms, individuals or groups whose interests are divergent [15]. They are manifestations of open antagonisms between two actors (individual or collective) with temporarily incompatible interests regarding the possession or management of rare goods – material or symbolic. They can bring States into confrontation (wars) or, within the same society, religious, national or ethnic groups, social classes or any other social institutions (Churches, parties, businesses, organizations and various associations. within the same community (family, trade union), they can be, within themselves, categories of individuals with different statuses and roles [3].

From this theoretical entry, it appears that the analysis of the conflict highlights at least the nature of the conflict, the object of the conflict or the nature of the interests and antagonisms, as well as the context of occurrence and manifestation of the conflict. Within the framework of research about conflicts, actors oppose of security, by staging debates on who has the legitimacy to act in terms of security and who is legally provided with a competence to act in this field. The conflict also opposes the self-defense groups with the incriminated persons, thieves and various bandits, around their production or their means of production, or at the same time and rare symbolism that is security at a period when as well the responses of the State in this area did not entirely meet the expectations of the populations, that the national situation was trying around the inclinations of modification of article 37 of the Constitution.

We are not in a class opposition, in the Marxist sense of the term, but in a process of construction of a collective actor, aware of itself, and of what he offers, a new opportunity to organize society around the defense of the interests of populations in an uncertain world. This is an actor who is also aware of his limits, if not of his precariousness in facing other groups organized to plunder their resources, therefore an actor who has gradually built himself up in adversity and the need for self-protection, within a society, if not a system.

Precisely, in [5], the springs of collective action are based on the fact that the antagonisms of interests and aspirations are constitutive of life in society, and are at the heart of collective action. He uses three levels of analysis to understand the construction of social antagonisms and conflicts of interest: the objective logics of situations, the social construction of expectations, and the politicization of antagonisms. It is in such a perspective of analysis of the antagonisms of interests that the present research is oriented, considering [4], the position that the actor occupies in a social field as an explanation of his interests and aspirations, and the basis of potentially conflicting interests.

Based on this approach, the results obtained allow several conclusions to be drawn. The first postulates that the Koglweogo phenomenon appears in a social context marked by a kind of crisis in the relationship between the government institutions. It is from this crisis of confidence and the subsequent problems that the need for populations to organize themselves to watch over their territory was born. Only, in fact, the relationship to territories poses problems in

a State of law and provokes as much confrontation as contradiction; and confronts a situation of presence-absence, between the necessities of regulation and the constraints which present themselves to the State as regards devices of action in the field of the security of the goods and the people.

### ***3.1.1. From the Crisis of Confidence in Government Institutions***

In Burkina Faso, the Koglweogo phenomenon was born in a social context marked by crisis, and in a need to fight against insecurity and organized crime. This crisis is rooted in several expressions or manifestations: organized crime, robbery, armed robbery, purse robbery, breaking and entering. These manifestations of the crisis have led to the rise of violence and almost generalized insecurity in the country. This situation of insecurity is accentuated, according to what we hear in public opinion, by the striking off in 2011 of more than 1,000 police and soldiers, accused of being responsible for the mutiny that undermined and exposed the fragility of State power. These soldiers removed, trained and armed, would then have come to increase the lot of highwaymen; and heist operations that presented characteristics that seemed to bear the mark of prepared men. This insecurity is also marked by terrorist attacks, the day after the popular uprising of October 2014 which had just put an end to nearly three decades of power of the Congress for Democracy and Progress.

Robbery and insecurity are also often analyzed as a response, if not a reaction to the employment crisis [21] and [14]. The solutions available in terms of access to employment, centered on entrance examinations to the civil service, and training and employment promotion activities, do not facilitate an employment offer to a more numerous youth, than the offers available. The educational model so far, centered on graduation and civil service, does not guarantee young people access to employment for all.

... the population of Burkina Faso has a low level of education, and [...] the training offers do not cover the needs of the economy. Technical and vocational education and training offer more opportunities for integration into the labor market. However, the supply of this type of education remains insufficient and does not cover the needs of the working populations in the primary sector, which is nevertheless the largest pool of jobs [14].

Unemployment and idleness will then become factors of discouragement [14] and triggers of anxiety and the search for immediate alternatives for survival. These alternatives can also take the name of crime; in a context where the prospects for job creation remain marginal, the promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship comes up against the issue of financing and the availability of resources to constitute working capital.

In terms of security, the coverage of the national territory is not yet an achievement. The police and security forces do not cover all parts of the country through their activities. The peasant world remains the area least covered by the public force represented by the State. However, the social demand

for safety and security is quite strong there. The loss of the means of production and survival, the resources produced in precarious working conditions by populations with limited means are sources of permanent anxiety. The ad hoc and sporadic responses of the security forces do not contribute to assure the populations of the cities and the countryside. The forms of fighting against organized crime and the solutions provided are subject to debate. These debates show that the populations do not have enough confidence in the institutions, in particular the structures of security and justice.

A recent anecdote fact reflects all this crisis of confidence between populations and justice. This fact also shows that between actors relatively close in appearance, there arises, around the same problem, discontent, misunderstandings, contradictions, and crises. The fact occurs when the police arrested a gang wanted for a long time. Transferred to the prosecution, these four bandits were seen, only two days later, in freedom. The head of the commando who carried out the operation, whom the gang had tried in vain to corrupt at the time, claims to have gone back to see the judge with his report, almost threatening him, with the only condition that the bandits return to prison, within a maximum of two weeks. Following this threat, he said, the bandits were imprisoned for 15 and 20 years in prison. This type of anecdote is common in Burkina Faso; they reflect a social malaise that manifests itself in the loss of confidence in the administration in general. For a long time, and this until the years 2010 and 2015, this crisis of confidence was characterized by the rise of violence and specifically popular vindictiveness; it characterized by the populations of incivility. The populations then preferred to solve the problem of their thief, by beating him to death rather than handing him over to the police, with the risk of being told a few days later that he had been released for lack of substantial evidence. Judges have the formula to say it, and the populations do not always really understand it, in a context where corruption has plagued justice.

### ***3.1.2. Get Organized Around a Behavior Change for a Better Defense of the Territory***

The entry of the theory of information, communication and sensitization for a behavior change and decision-making have become essential. The thieves attacked us and made us suffer. One day, the thieves entered my village in 2012. They came at 9 p.m. and left at 5 a.m. And until 5 a.m., the police did not come to our rescue. They were no more than 9 people. I said to myself that if these 9 people can attack and subjugate a whole village of more than 1000 people, it is because there is no harmony between the 1000 people there. The bandits even raped women, and there were two deaths. After that, we understood that we had to organize and show solidarity against the bandits. Since that time, we have made the decision to show solidarity instead of waiting for the arrival of the police or the gendarmerie. [interview with a Koglweogo chief in Kombissiri, 09 August 2017].

In this crisis of confidence, the populations, who had already become used of solving part of their problems

without the intervention of the government, had to organize themselves to respond to their security problems, i.e. say self-defense. The idea came from the peasant world, tired when the few resources produced to ensure their survival are plundered with impunity, and the relative inability of the government to ensure the security of goods and people throughout the territory. This is reflected in the results of the surveys conducted in Kombissiri, Sapouy in the Centre-South, Seguenega, Mané, and Oula in the North, beyond a few differences observed in the operating methods. The rural populations then put themselves in order of battle, if not of defense of their property and of themselves. *Tond n bëin, wagda ka beye*, is the motto of this auto defense group, postulating that "where we exist, there is no thief".



Source: Ouedraogo, 2016

**Figure 1.** The Kogl-weogo team in full rally.

The discourse of justification and legitimization is very oriented, convincing for populations tired of having the resources produced in difficult conditions plundered. Their name remains evocative of what they assign themselves as missions and as role. Presenting themselves as *Supervisor of the territory*, [*Kogl* and *weogo*] the self-defense structures are actors who watch over the populations of a given territory, protect them and help prevent other people from monopolizing their property violently and unfairly. Under these conditions, they present themselves as shareholders tending to deter banditry in all its forms. For this, their *modus operandi* consists of carrying out investigations in case of theft, arresting the presumed thieves to whom they subject a particular interrogation, correcting them if the theft is proven. The sanction consists of torture considered as physical abuse, and which is punctuated by a final decision: that the defendant undertakes not to commit this type of crime in the future, therefore, that he undertakes to become a right man, to seek by work, the means of his subsistence and not in banditry.

### **3.2. Kogl Weogo, Territories, and Rule of Law: The Challenge of Double Confrontation or Contradiction**

Since their creation, the Kogl-weogo have to their credit many cases of arrest of thieves and bandits reputed to be dangerous and subject to their *modus operandi*. The media coverage of these results has allowed public opinion to know

them, if not to discover them and get an idea of them. Praised and loved by some, they are hated and contested by others. The former (the local populations in general) highlight their social usefulness, in view of the significant results achieved in terms of securing the territories, if not, of the territorial jurisdiction that they have defined by themselves and to mark their presence in terms of areas of intervention. The latter (security force, court officers, certain populations in urban areas, victims and/or families and relatives of victims of Koglweogo actions) dispute them with regard to the consequences of their actions. What is incriminated here are their *modus operandi*, their mode of interrogation marked by torture in different forms to access the confession of the presumed culprit. In this situation, excesses quickly arrived, the constraint as a means of action being able to lead to errors of judgment, and to the incrimination of innocent people. This constraint also led to the deaths of men. We are in the presence of situations that bring into play the general problem of human rights, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial executions. These are basic questions which acutely pose the place of the Kogl-weogo in a rule of law, automatically raising the question of their legality.

From their creation, the Koglweogo have tried to spread and establish themselves in all regions of the country, including the capital in Ouagadougou, where they exist in the sectors and neighborhoods of the city. If the Kogl-weogo present themselves as *guardians* [ndlr. locals] *of the territory*, supervisors of goods and people on a territorial basis, the tendency to want to establish itself everywhere has posed problems here and there. In this dialogue built by the journalist [Hebdomadaire Bendoré], Boukary Kaboré dit le lion affirms "Everyone is calling for us in the West". "False, we don't want it at home", retorts Siriki Sanou, Supreme Chief of the Bobo Mandarè. This controversy alone translates, on the basis of these extracts from speeches, the contradictions and social resistance faced with the inclinations of dissemination and extension of the Koglweogo throughout the territory. For this case, in the West of Burkina Faso, the Bobo Mandarè and most of the peoples belonging to the Mandé, or the Mandings, would have their self-defense group: the *dozos*. If the operating methods are not the same, these groups do not want a double of this type of groups organized in their regions. This situation also shows that it is necessary to approach the question from the angle of territoriality. The kogl-weogo in their current form, appeared or reappeared, do not constitute a new invention. It seems that they have existed for a long time, especially in the north of the country. Some believe that the village of Oula in Yatenga is the place of foundation of these self-defense groups. One of their leaders, nicknamed Cool, said so on January 24, 2016 and presented the effectiveness of his model. According to him, it never occurs to anyone in his jurisdiction to steal anything again. Here, if you lose your cell phone, you'll find it either where you left it, or with the kogl-weogo chief. The Kogl-weogo are active and present around Ouagadougou, in Saaba, in Kombissiri, in Fada N'Gourma, in Manga, Kaya, Yako, Koudougou, etc., in

several other localities of the country. The practices and problems experienced by the populations can be of a different nature depending on the location; the answers to these problems too. The clashes between Kogl-weogo and local populations crystallize the forms of conflict, resistance and misunderstanding between those who present themselves as defenders of the interests of the populations, and those who believe that their operating methods fall into illegality and create more problems than they solve. The cases of Zongo in 2016 around Ouagadougou, of Tialogo 2017 in the Center West almost alone crystallize the uncertainties around the Koglweogo.

### 3.3. A Presence-Absence Situation

Under the law, no provision currently provides for the place and attributions of the Koglweogo in the country's security system. Their appearance is part of a social process of construction of an actor seeking to provide a function in a context where the State itself, with its existing structures, is unable to fully provide security services for the benefit of all populations in all parts of the country. This creates a situation of presence-absence; presence in the facts and on the ground of the action, absence in legal dispositions. However, this presence-absence is often analyzed from the angle of necessity and opportunity in a world characterized by uncertainties, particularly in terms of security. The emergence of factors influencing the process of securing the national territory from terrorism contributes to reducing the capacities of the defense and security forces in their missions of protection of property and people. The legitimacy of the Koglweogo is partly located in such a field marked by an opening of possibilities and which explains the alternative offer of services for securing goods and people. This alternative offer, in view of the results obtained, is perceived positively by some, especially rural populations, who are constantly confronted with attacks and robberies, and the absence of the State. The populations invoke here the right to have rights, those of being able to protect themselves where the State struggles to offer the security service. This kind of considerations is in the age of time, at a time when the question of; to action constitutes a credo; appeals from all sides, media, politicians, technicians and researchers, tend to magnify the strength and interest of participation or of participatory democracy [18, 1, 17]. In the field of security, the Koglweogo are then often presented as a participatory offer, a contribution of the populations to ensuring security issues. This partly explains the relaunch of the local police, from the decree issued by the Council of Ministers on October 5, 2016.

While waiting to come back on it, the other side of the concern is refocusing on the legality of the Koglweogo and their actions. The actors who put forward such an argument do not look on the side of the usefulness or the advisability of having at the same time an actor to ensure the safety of goods and people, while the police and gendarmerie already ensure these attributions? Such collaboration, or this form of current presence-absence in fact poses the question from the angle of

legal pluralism, and the tools that legal anthropology offers to analyze and understand this type of question. We are in a situation of plurality of norms [6] if not in an inversion of the process [8, 26] translating a sort of change in modernity [25], or even a change in relationships with the norms of society [9].

The politician has not yet really decided on the question, even if one can suspect that the presence and the actions of the koglweogo constituted a factor having influenced the relaunch project of the community police. In this revival of the community police, the Council of Ministers, in its session of October 05, 2016 issued [10] defining the modalities of participation of the populations in the implementation of the community police. *Official Journal* n°51 of December 22, 2016. Before this relaunch decree, there were a number of legal texts on local security committees and local police. These are Internal Security Law No. 032-2003/AN; in [11] of 12 May 2005 on the creation, composition, powers and operation of local security committees. This decree repeals all previous dispositions to the contrary, in particular those of [13] of 09/15/98 on the creation, composition and powers of safety advisory committees; [12] adopting the Action Plan for the implementation of community police in Burkina Faso. This means that the current debates on the legality of koglweogo are not taking place in a legal vacuum. There are texts which rule on the question, and which show the need for social regulation [24] of the question of security; even though these texts do not expressly refer to koglweogo. However, this text deserves to be read again in order to understand the scope of the media coverage of koglweogo on the implementation of an action instrument, filling a gap or a quasi-absence in the architecture of the security system from the country. The reading of this text should also take into account concerns about the koglweogo. In its article 2, the decree specifies that *the participation of the populations in the implementation of the community police is done through local community structures of security and coordination*.

The text does not explicitly mention the koglweogo, and prefer to remain in generality, communal coordination, or provincial, or even regional security. It speaks of structures and organizations, without explicit reference to the word koglweogo. The coordination of these structures is ensured either by the mayor, the high commissioner or the governor. However, on the ground, they are part of the *declared structures* which currently offer security services which they say are recognized by the populations. Is this local police a progressive strategy for the suppression of koglweogo ? or on the contrary, is it, as some think, a legalization of the Koglweogo ? Is it possible, if necessary, to have the police and gendarmerie collaborate with all forms of organized groups to defend and secure themselves, with an argument based on the promotion of participation [Bacqué, Rey, Sintomer, 2005]?

It remains that on the incriminations and the reproaches made to the koglweogo, on the limits of their actions and the violations of human rights observed, each and everyone calls for their organization, their training, in order to reframe them and that they intervene taking into account the idea of the rule of law.

## 4. Recommendations

The recommendations resulting from the study on the Kogl-weogo are numerous. Nevertheless, we retain among others:

- 1) A better reorganization of the Kogl-weogo integrating legal elements to avoid abuse of power over the alleged victims;
- 2) Provision of adequate means of transport as part of their field operations mission;
- 3) A frank collaboration between Kogl-weogo chiefs and State judicial officials;
- 4) An invitation to the State to assume its sovereign role which is the security of people and property throughout the territory;
- 5) Supervision of the actions of the main players in the field.

## 5. Conclusion

If the Kogl-weogo phenomenon has taken an importance in Burkina Faso, it is because it appeared in a social context of generalized crisis, with the political uncertainties linked to the desire to revise Article 37, the employment crisis but also with the crisis of confidence which has gradually taken hold between the populations and the institutions of the Republic. Its emergence echoes the need to ensure the survival of populations whose confidence in state institutions has diminished over time and experience. Organized into self-defense groups, the Koglweogo have come to bring up to date the policy of community police which emphasizes local security initiatives and the participation of populations in these actions. However, their presence and their operating methods are subject to debate, with regard to the norms of society, their legitimacy, and the new concerns they bring to light. The debates take place against a background of cognitive dissonance, by mobilizing different social imaginaries and the arguments that go with them.

The stakes are then on the capacity of the actors through the mechanisms and the direction of their mutual understanding by a communication for the behavior change and also for the development, so that the solution wanted by the Koglweogo does not become the problem of security of people and their property. This situation has unfortunately deteriorated over time on the battlefield and has resulted today in a new appearance of volunteers for the Defense of the Fatherland (VDP) which we will come back on it in our next publications.

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