

AFRICA'S STRUGGLES – INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

SORBONNE – PARIS / NOVEMBER, 26&27, 2009

CALL FOR PAPERS

Armed rebellions, hunger riots, urban unrest, rural escapism, social movements, advocacy mobilizations, nationalist struggles and peasant movements, preachers, union activists and “African social movements”... Almost 50 years after independence, Africa is more than ever “indocile”<sup>1</sup>. Nearly 30 years after the launch of the “politics from below” research trend, the question of the struggles and forms of resistance on the African continent – as well as the theoretical tools mobilized to study them – are of the utmost relevance, both scientifically and politically.

Theorizing struggles in the Africa-s, amounts to resisting the overused image of an Africa deemed to have stepped out of history, a continent of endless consent (that of the dominated) and of immutable authority (that of leaders), an Africa of consensus that one should leave to the gaze of an a-historical anthropology. Opting for such a focus also means questioning and assessing the specificity of the forms and repertoires of dissent enacted on the continent. In turn, this entails exploring in further depth the diversity of the modes of protest. What about, for instance, the ideological logics of protest, not studied so much today whereas they were central in, the years of the independences? Can professionalized forms of protest crystallized around NGOs and violent groups with insurrectionary aims be analyzed together? This involves, finally, accounting for specific cases of protest in light of current transformations pervading African societies, be they related to mutations pertaining to the division between the urbane and the rural, tensions over land, or to religious repertoires of enunciation of the political. This colloquium thus aims at studying both the forms of dissent and the strategies of challengers (e.g. modalities of involvement, *extraversion*, of accumulation of resources...), but also the management of protest by governments through the State apparatus (repression, cooptation...).

Such a focus on political and social struggles does not mean, however, that the latter encompass the whole gamut of situations of dissent and protest against the dominants. One of the headways of the “politics from below”<sup>2</sup> approach is doubtlessly to have driven the focus out of the most obvious sites of observation of the political, and to have fostered research on the practices of enunciation of dissent: indeed, “silence does not always imply consent”, as demonstrated by songs, escapes and other threads of indocility.

What is the current state of theoretical work on such forms of dissent in Africa? One of the pioneer writings<sup>3</sup> on protest was explicitly posited within nationalist historiography – to the extent that the second piece of work focusing on this question aimed precisely at opposing this positioning<sup>4</sup>. While the “politics from below” approach has largely contributed to the

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<sup>1</sup> MBEMBE, Achille, *Afriques indociles. Christianisme, pouvoir et État en société postcoloniale*, Paris, Karthala, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> BAYART, Jean-François, “Le politique par le bas en Afrique Noire : questions de méthode”, *Politique africaine*, janv 1981, p. 53-82.

<sup>3</sup> ROTBERG, Robert I., MAZRUI, Ali A. (ed.), *Protest and power in Black Africa*. New York: Oxford university press (Center for International Affairs, Harvard university), 1970.

<sup>4</sup> CRUMMEY, Donald (ed.), *Banditry, rebellion and social protest in Africa*. London: J. Currey Portsmouth : Heinemann, 1986.

vibrancy of African studies, what are the current usages of central concepts such as “popular modes of political action” or “moral economy”? While the critical historiography of resistances is now well engaged<sup>5</sup>, one of the central aims of this colloquium is thus to open a conceptual discussion over theoretical renditions of the forms of dissent in Africa, so as to read them in light of other approaches on protest, by and large developed on Western objects of analysis. Does the opening up of African studies to other theoretical trends imply importing the tools developed by the sociology of social movements – even though the latter has entered a process of routinization, letting its key concepts calcify? This colloquium will pursue the theoretical aim of critically assessing the central paradigms mobilized to account for protest –and “non-consent”- on the African continent, with the hope, among others, that this will contribute to emphasizing the extremely dated and historically situated character of the concept of social movement. How have the analytical tools of the sociology of social movements circulated and been applied to the African continent? With what gains? What is to be made of intersections or, on the contrary, of the differences in the application, or not, of these theoretical frameworks? What is their (more or less) added value, compared to approaches on popular modes of political action – which provide a grid of analysis whose relevance should also be questioned? How should one articulate recent writings in social movement sociology that purport to take into account the transnationalization of mobilizations and the new perspectives opened by a historical sociology of extraversion (J.-F. Bayart)? Should one think at once the circulation and internationalization of modes of protest and that of the theoretical tools purporting to account for them?

On the basis of this theoretical interrogation, the colloquium aims at fostering innovative empirical work on the question of struggles in the Africa-s. Paradoxically, during the decades of dictatorships and then “liberalization”, research on mobilizations, including on processes of delegitimization of authorities, have been set aside. Writings exploring forms of circulation between diverse strata of society have first obscured forms of dissent – culminating with a focus on “civil society” that has “neutralized” research on this theme. As the notion has definitely been cast away as non-operative, work on diverse forms of struggles can anew venture on slippery fields (religious, militia, peasant groups) and sound out the most relevant theoretical tools to address these phenomena.

### **Focus of the colloquium:**

This colloquium is open to all social sciences traditions: history, anthropology, sociology, political science, economy...

The historical focus is not limited to the period ranging from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and proposals can focus on more remote forms of protest.

Discussions will not be based on a prior typology of struggles to be analyzed (social movements, riots, mobilizations), but rather on forms of dissent or protest, be they head-on or indirect, collective or individual, against given forms of authority. However, papers should offer an in-depth historiographic, conceptual and theoretical analysis to explore given phenomena.

While empirical studies are encouraged, purely theoretical contributions, focusing for instance on key concepts used to study forms of protest on the African continent, are also accepted.

Papers focusing on Lusophone or Anglophone Africa are particularly welcome.

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<sup>5</sup> VAN WALRAVEN Klaas, ABBINK Jon, 'Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction', in Abbink J., DE BRUIJN M., van Walraven K. [eds], *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History* (Brill Academic Publishers: Leiden and Boston, 2003), pp. 1-40

## **Practical modalities**

### **Detailed schedule**

- Submission of abstracts: 31 May 2009
- Notification of acceptance: 30 July 2009
- Submission of final drafts of papers, via e-mail: 30 October 2009

Papers should not be longer than 50 000 characters.

### **Languages**

Abstracts and papers can be submitted in French or in English. Oral communications can be performed in French or in English.

### **Application procedure**

Applications should be sent via e-mail to the members of the organizing committee of the colloquium.

*Application format: applications, in French or in English, should be drafted in the following manner :*

Name, First name:

Institution:

Status:

Electronic address:

Postal address:

Telephone number(s):

Fax :

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Title of the paper:

Summary of the paper in 4 lines :

Abstract (between 3000 and 6000 characters, with spaces), outlining the approach adopted (empirical, theoretical):

Key words :

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For further information on the focus of the colloquium, please contact:

[jsimeant@univ-paris1.fr](mailto:jsimeant@univ-paris1.fr)

[mepommerolle@free.fr](mailto:mepommerolle@free.fr)

[richard.banegas@noos.fr](mailto:richard.banegas@noos.fr)

**Scientific committee**

Richard Banégas (Université Paris I, CEMAF)

Jean-François Bayart (CERI-CNRS)

Jean Copans (EHESS)

Miles Larmer (University of Sheffield)

John Lonsdale (Trinity College, Cambridge)

Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle (Université des Antilles Guyane - IESG - CRPLC)

Johanna Siméant (Université Paris I, CRPS)

Anne-Catherine Wagner (Université Paris I, CSE)

K. van Walraven (African Studies Centre, Leiden)