

Symposium in Senegal (Dakar, UCAD, 18-20 December 2019)

Call for papers, 8th of March 2019

« Low-noise » mobilizations: New promises of change?

Discussion and test of a concept in the African context

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Argumentary

The concept of mobilization has long been over-determined by its relationship to politics. However, there has been a certain de-legitimization of politics as a vehicle for social change (fall of the Berlin Wall, rise of authoritarian populism, etc.). At the same time, the somewhat "routinized" field of the sociology of mobilizations has also begun to build ready-to-think, standardized phenomena. Diversified economic and cultural practices carry egalitarian and emancipatory (or on the contrary conservative) dimensions which political significance is neither a prerequisite nor an unavoidable consequence: they relate to the habits and lifestyles that we assume are partially autonomous from the political field, in any case without having to be positioned *hic et nunc* with regard to politics. On the other hand, contesting is not always a guarantee of the depth of mobilization: demonstrative violence and media noise can challenge institutions or public authorities, without always threatening traditional social relations, these hierarchies and social dominations at the heart of lifestyles and well summarized by the Anglo-Saxon triptych: race, class and gender. The question of lifestyles therefore goes beyond the targeting of the institutional framework, since contesting and subverting are not always synonymous: if it is not a question of pitting them against each other, would there also be discreet ways to make things change?

It is just as much in the apprehension of forms of counter-power, breaches, counter-culture and flaws, that one can grasp a deviant form, sometimes alternative, original or minority without being duly "protestor". The political and historical analysis of social movements, the socio-economic or socio-anthropological approach can be based on an understanding of emotions, the role of memory, forms of sociability and mutual aid networks. In economics, mobilizations of actors can be examined as ways of circumventing the perverse effects of public development decisions (structural adjustment plans, projects with devastating effects on local populations, etc.), based on the community to which they belong, but without engaging in structured political mobilization.

Between resistance, lifestyle as politics, daily activism, social (non) movements, those type of mobilisations, even if not very contested, are defined first of all by the greater or lesser collective participation of a given population, whose intentional project, cunning strategies or

erratic behaviour, induce a questioning of the hierarchy of social relations, from the fourfold point of view of economic and social, racial and post-colonial (or decolonial), gender or environmental (and their negation) inequalities.

To shed light on these mobilizations, we are counting on internal dialogue in the social sciences and on comparison between different countries, particularly in Africa. The epistemological challenge is that a renewal of the problems of mobilization can come from disciplinary pluralism and decentration of the gaze. The various perspectives (sociological, anthropological, economic, political, historical) on the different mobilizations are welcome, focusing on plural social objects (NGOs, State, local development, networks, local groups...), in the various fields of health, work, urban planning, politics, arts, culture or religion, along three main issues.

An alchemy with the state? Display versus participation and negotiated orientation.

The history of resistance in Africa has seen many developments. Away from the anti-colonial nationalist doxa, it is a question of thinking about the alchemy between violent and hidden forms, between popular mobilizations and elite games, in more or less stable political regimes. Forms of hybridization between musical and political forms have emerged, citizen movements initiated by rappers or other civil society actors, such as "Y en a marre" in Senegal and "Balai citoyen" in Burkina Faso; without forgetting the forms of disillusionment, disengagement or demobilization, observed for example in Cameroon.

To study mobilizations is first of all to criticize the official name. The risk is indeed to reduce the term of mobilization to a nominative and declarative approach, in order to display so-called "community", "popular", "participatory", "cooperative", "innovative" programs, etc. The focus will therefore be on conducting the investigation and using the analytical scalpel, without predicting whether State and Society will oppose or combine. It should be recalled here that the structuring of local groups and vertical integration can go hand in hand (in the sense that the use of elites is a factor of collective mobilization, as in the case of black pastoralists in the American civic movement).

For example, the population may take ownership of a system, even if it is not well adapted. The linking of collective mobilization to an institution raises the problem of the boundary between social and political, in the sense of the manipulation of one by the other, or, unlike the possibility of socialization of institutions: thus, forms of participation, whether electoral, co-managerial (participatory budget) or organizational, can have a hybrid character, or even a horizontal experience of local subversion of socio-hierarchical relationships.

These transformations of mobilizations and collective action are undoubtedly to be linked to contemporary developments in public action, which is also less and less part of major political projects but in principle refers to pragmatic choices and negotiated orientations. When public action is decided and negotiated in discrete spaces, around complex instruments and away from public debates, social movements and collective action have more difficulty in having control over it and taking ownership of its challenges.

A chemistry without a state? Autonomy of civil society.

Opening up the field of investigation in this way then implies taking into account the categories of thinking of the actors, even if they do not immediately appear to be political or militant, and not presupposing from the outset that the context determines their choices or possibilities for action in a structured way. Like work on emancipation processes in Africa, one must pay attention to mobilizations that sometimes openly claim their distance from the State apparatus and institutions and create their own conditions of possibility and organization.

In particular, phenomena of low-noise mobilizations are present in the sphere of religion. In Africa in particular, religious, political and economic actors can interact or even merge within "grey zones" where mediations accumulate and interpenetrate, as in the forms of peaceful resistance initiated by the marabouts in Senegal, or religious violence in Niger. Too often, the socio-religious interweaving leads to the highlighting of "community leaders" whose charismatic role sometimes makes them spokespersons embodying the collective (and therefore forced by it), sometimes it is mere manipulation. In addition, a focus on community leaders prevents the examination of particularly heterogeneous individual situations with regard to the rights and obligations of each individual.

The range of responsibilities of individuals towards each other contributes to their identity and their own mobilizations. An individual action for a cause is then not necessarily dictated by the influence of local leaders but rather by his subjective perception of his responsibilities (family, professional, collective, religious, etc.) and his acceptance or not of his rights and duties towards others. This involves the individual dimensions of low-noise mobilizations, embedded in a social network and norms, often implicit, such as the responsibility of microenterprise managers.

In African contexts, local solidarity can be established to meet vital needs, precisely because of the withdrawal of the State: housing, electricity, access to water, food, travel assistance, management of émigrés' money, etc. The relational reconfiguration between development associations and public authorities, for example, where local elites can be rehabilitated in a movement of civil society participation. It is difficult for these relationships to find conditions for the co-construction of public policies and they therefore oscillate between relationships of mistrust towards public authorities and subcontracting for international organizations. The list is long of popular mobilizations to face lack of resources, very far from power and institutions and very close to cultural, religious or artistic ideological forms. On the other hand, the latter can exist in a more immaterial autonomous form, i.e. without any connection with the above-mentioned needs, but also bringing, with their extra soul, a transgressive dimension of social habits.

A mobilization without ideology? The sense of right at the heart of mobilizations.

This leads us to the question of the ordinary relationship to politics. Many daily mobilizations and practices have been described as infra-political, proto-political or ordinary politics. They have the advantage of opening up the field of analysis to approaches the elements of social belief or behaviour responsible for representing the social world without first assuming a great knowledge of the political field, reserved for an elite. Thus, undecided conduct by young people or women, without any prior objectionable intention, is likely to undermine the dominant order by aggregation. However, the connections between social movements and

the solidarity economy are often groping and mark a difficulty in articulating economic practices and socio-political change.

Can we suspend any judgment and confine ourselves solely to the "crystallization of collective activities, autonomous from the State"? It is also possible to disentangle "progressive" and "conservative" tendencies... mixed. Thus, the militias of inhabitants mobilized against terrorism do not necessarily accept women, drug trafficking can contribute to building schools, corruption or clientelism feeding local communities or traditional churches politicizing to the left of popular circles.

A multifaceted and multi-site mobilization of conservative and progressive actors can also be seen in the struggles for sexual rights. Although some of this phenomenon is very visible and noisy (street demonstrations against same-sex marriage in France or against the restriction of abortion laws in Poland, calls to introduce the death penalty in Uganda), other "invisible" forms of mobilization are also widespread, such as conscientious objection by health workers against abortion, refusal by officials to perform gay marriage, or LGBT activism "in the closet". In some cases, these are individual and localized responses, in other cases, they are well orchestrated international campaigns.

This gender mix is a major theme of intersectional approaches, which seek to capture class, gender and racial oppression (now supplemented by the environmental issue) in a single movement, even if the purpose is sometimes doctrinaire and the empirical gain not always obvious. While aspirations for social justice are diverse and "groping", this does not prevent feelings of injustice from being exacerbated in an increasingly unequal world. Does the vagueness of the references ultimately prevent the strength of the mobilizations?

In summary, we will examine what kind of "low noise" mobilizations can be highlighted, whether with, without or against the state, with or without ideology. Our hope is to deepen the analysis of mobilizations by resonating various quality empirical contributions.

Calendar of events

Publication of the call for papers: 5 March 2019

Sending of communication projects (max. 5,000 characters, mentioning contact details, status and institutional affiliation): 15 May 2019

E-mail address: mobilisations_discretes@laposte.net

Selection of selected projects and information to authors: 30 June 2019

Sending of the pre-program of the conference: 15 September 2019

Sending of speakers' texts (20,000 characters max): October 15

Sending of the final program: November 2019

Colloquium: 18 (from 9am), 19 and 20 December (till 1pm)

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