

**Looking back at the African Lefts.
Call for papers for the Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique.**

1°) Abstract: This call for papers from *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique* focuses on left-wing activism in Africa, particularly that which can be considered as revolutionary, underpinned by anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, from the 1960s, with access to independence, to the 1990s, with the implementation of a multi-party system and the imposition of structural adjustment policies. The aim is to shed light on histories that are often overlooked in academic literature, because they were often lived underground, during the long periods when post-colonial states prohibited multipartyism de facto or de jure. Priority will therefore be given to studies that provide new elements or develop an innovative approach to existing knowledge, whether in contemporary African political history or Africanist political science.

2°) Argument

a) Presentation of the historiographical context and terms of the issue

In the contemporary period, whether through citizens' movements (such as Y'en a marre or FRAPP in Senegal, Lucha in Congo-RDC, Balai citoyen in Burkina-Faso, M- 62 in Niger, etc.) or pan-African parties (Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa, Ousmane Sonko's Patriotes Africains du Sénégal pour le Travail, l'Éthique et la Fraternité (PASTEF) in Senegal), new political forces have emerged which, despite their heterogeneity, are nonetheless part of the anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist heritage of left-wing movements to which this issue of RHC is dedicated. This current situation may prompt us to look back at the history of these African lefts.

In this respect, it appears, at first sight, that Africa still occupies a limited place in the literature that deals on a global scale with the history of leftist movements or the phenomena of protest and dissent that have fuelled their existence and development (a few chapters are to be found in: Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons and Sophie Quinn-Judge, 2017 or in: Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young and Joanna Waley-Cohen, 2019). Nevertheless, since the 1970s, in the wake of decolonization, attention has focused on the various ideologies claiming for socialism, which were widespread on the African continent at the time, from the different variants of "African socialism" to that of "scientific socialism" referring to the theories of Marx and Lenin (Bénot, 1972). Among the latter, regimes claiming to be Marxist-Leninist have sometimes been described as Afromarxist (Arnold Hughes, 1992) or Afrocommunist (Ottaway & Ottaway, 1986).

Other works, from the most classic to the most recent, have examined the relationship between pan-Africanist currents and communist organizations (Padmore, 1958; Adi, 2013; Adi, 2018). Beyond these historical cleavages, in recent years an inventory has begun to be made of those lefts that can be described as radical or revolutionary, which have claimed a challenge to situations of neocolonialism or imperialist domination, whether for North Africa (Laura Feliu & Ferran Izquierdo-Brichs, 2019) or Africa south of the Sahara (Bianchini, Sylla & Zeilig, 2023). However, while there is a new interest in this galaxy of African leftists, until now we have perhaps focused more on event sequences such as May 1968 (Gueye, 2017) or heroic figures associated closely or loosely, with the various currents of the African left (Bouamama, 2017), or even more often on singular charismatic figures such as Sankara (Jaffré, 2007).

Defining the notion of the left in Africa is not an easy task. A prior remark is that unlike on other continents, few political actors have assumed to be of the opposite pole to the left, which means that the category of the left appears to be very all-encompassing, and that we therefore need to pluralize this notion. Furthermore, it seems necessary to give it a specific content in contrast with the standard definitions of political science (see e.g.: Parenteau & Parenteau, 2023) by including, in particular, positioning in relation to external relations of domination: colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism (Bianchini, 2018). The plural nature of African lefts also reflects differences in the trajectories of decolonization, as well as subsequent differences in the cleavages structuring the political arenas of post-colonial regimes, and the degree of openness (or closure) of the polity (with the development of single-party regimes and military regimes). There is also the question of the nature of actors' politicization: is it "imported" or, on the contrary, "endogenous" (or at least endogenized)?

This issue also refers to the influence of socialist or communist ideologies, in particular Marxism in its various schools and branches, and the ability of intellectuals and revolutionary organizations to Africanize this Marxism, the name of Amilcar Cabral being often cited as a successful example of adaptation in this respect.

The establishment of "revolutionary" regimes, either at independence (Sekou Touré's Guinea), or later in the 1970s (Congo Brazzaville or Benin), or even in the 1980s (Burkina Faso) is also to be taken into account. Through these different examples, the question of the relationship (cooperation or conflict?) with revolutionary or progressive military regimes has often been raised (Beckman, 1986).

Existing literature has focused mainly on these revolutionary regimes and the charismatic figures who led them, but we can also have a glimpse at the histories of left-wing dissidence that often appeared in the political process of these regimes.

b) Historical period:

While resistance to colonial domination has always existed in Africa, if we consider the period from the 1920s to the 1990s with the fall of the Berlin Wall, three major historical phases in the development of left-wing currents in Africa are to be distinguished:

- 1) the pioneering activists of the 1920s-1930s linked to the international communist movement and the pan-Africanist movements with L. Senghor T. Garang Kouyate, Wallace-Johnson etc. (Dewitte, 1985; Derrick, 2008);
- 2) radical nationalist movements from the 1940s to independence, such as the Union des populations du Cameroun (Joseph, 1986; Deltombe, Domergue & Tsatsitsa, 2011) or the Sawaba in Niger (Van Valrawen, 2017);
- 3) revolutionary activism from an anti-imperialist perspective, also part of the Global Sixties, which, for Africa, began in the 1960s, notably in the Congo (Martens 1985, Monaville, 2022) and continued into the 1970s and early 1980s.

Although it is not out of the question to address aspects concerning the first two periods, especially as the history of certain left-wing currents and parties can straddle these different periods, for example in the case of the PAI founded in 1957 in Senegal (Bianchini, 2016), that have already been the subject of a number of studies, this thematic issue focuses on the history of movements, unions and parties - whether state or oppositional - from the 1960s until the advent of multiparty politics and structural adjustment, in the 1990s. While most of these struggles asserted, more or less openly, their pan-African continental character (Boukari-Yabara 2014), this periodization refers, on another scale, both to the question of

the Cold War and the links between left-wing forces in Africa and Communist allies, as well as to the rise of the non-aligned movement.

c) Issues to consider

Within the historical framework previously outlined, the contributors could examine how these left-wing movements were able to follow the footsteps of anti-colonial struggles, for example by opposing various forms of neo-colonialism, or by using the memory of anti-colonial struggles to root their struggles within post-colonial states? And also, how they were able to develop underground and in a context of repression and monopolization of political power (in the 1960s-70s)? It would be also interesting to further address the question mentioned earlier, but make it more specific by examining the relationships - supportive or oppositional? - that these organizations or movements may have had with regimes proclaiming themselves to be “revolutionary” from a socialist, pan-African or even Marxist-Leninist perspective, from Nkrumah to Sankara, via Ethiopia (Tebebu, 2008; Zewde, 2014) or Tanzania (Tordoff & Mazrui, 1972; Melchiorre, 2020). Finally, we might also ask to what extent these left-wing forces that existed underground were able to play a role in the process of opening up and establishing multi-party systems in the 1990s (Koné, 1998). It goes without saying that this list of questions is by no means exhaustive, and is intended above all to suggest avenues for reflection.

d) Recommended approaches:

By combining social history and political history, the aim is to shed light on the existence and development of movements, parties, little or not studied either in terms of their ideologies or their practices (Blum & alii, 2018; Bianchini, Sylla & Zeilig, 2023) but also of lesser-known militant figures or even well-known people who have not been considered until then as political actors, as in the case of Cheikh Anta Diop (Boukari Yabara & Mourre, 2023).

In terms of social history, an attempt should be made to provide an overview of how these parties or movements were entrenched in society, by asking questions such as how these parties claiming to be part of the workers' movement were established in the urban and rural proletariat (Fall & alii, 2001), or the place of women in these left-wing movements (Abassade, 2021), or possibly that of other categories: “ethnic”, “racial”, “confessional” (Beckman, 2022).

Another interesting approach in terms of political history or even political sociology would be to look at the relationships between these left-wing formations and other social movements such as student movements, as in the case of Niger (Smirnova, 2015) or the youth of Congo (Kiriakou, 2019). Finally, it will always be useful to carry out an inventory and analysis of militant practices (distribution of leaflets, newspapers, training courses in various revolutionary thoughts, socio-cultural activities such as song or theater etc.) within the framework of a given country or period.

e) Other possible complementary approaches:

We could also study the links between the “political field” in which these movements have developed and other “fields” (religious, cultural, artistic etc.), following the steps of some scholars, for example, in the case of Senegal with regard to the struggles waged on the “cultural front” (Wane, 2014), or in the case of Sudan, where has documented the issue of the development of a communist party confronted with stigmatization strategies on the part of its ideological adversaries, in the case of a highly Islamized society (Himmat, 2019)

The same applies to the international dimension of these movements (relations with left-wing political movements in Europe (Blum, Di Maggio, Siracusano & Wolikow, 2021) or with immigrant communities in Europe (Dedieu, 2011) or black movements in the USA (Amandla-Johnson, 2020), relations with countries claiming to be part of the “socialist camp” (Matusevitch, 2009), the influence of other revolutionary movements from the Third World, etc.);

Finally, the question of the legacies left by these movements in subsequent decades, notably during the democratization of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Tyler Dickowitz, 2008; Bianchini, 2021) or in the post-apartheid transition (Adams, 2001) is also of interest. As a conclusion, we invite the contributors to have in mind the whole question of the echoes and/or significance that these movements and ideologies of the revolutionary lefts can still have in the current struggles being waged in Africa (Zeilig, Chukwudinma & Bradley, 2024).

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4°) Practical details:

- a) Send an abstract ranging from 400 to 600 words by February 15, 2025 (preferably in French), together with a brief CV and a bibliographical selection that will enable you to situate the author's field(s) of specialization. Please send this to both email addresses : martinmoure@hotmail.com and bianchini@gmx.fr
- b) The selection of draft articles will take place during the second half of February.
- c) Articles must be completed by July 15, for an issue to be published in early 2026.

PS: the review publishes articles in French ; English versions are accepted but will be later translated for publication in French