

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Project
and Symposium

Revolutionary Left in Sub-Saharan Africa
(1960s and 1970s) -
a political and social history to be written

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES AND TIMETABLE

Contributors are invited to e-mail a proposal in the form of an abstract (in English or in French) not exceeding **5,000 characters** to: revleftafrica@rosalux.org by no later than **1 March 2019**.

Proposals will be reviewed and, on 31 March 2019, selected contributors will be invited to write their contributions of between **30,000 and 60,000 characters** for submission by **15 September 2019** at the latest.

A symposium is scheduled to be held in Dakar on **31.10.-1.11.2019**.

Background

The reason for this symposium stems from the following observation: while the Revolutionary Leftist movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe, the United States, Latin America and elsewhere have been the subject of abundant literature, similar movements that emerged during this period in Africa are still unknown. There are two main reasons for this ignorance: firstly, it is an underground history with actors operating in hiding, and secondly, it is also a long-concealed history, either because of defeat (political and sometimes military), or of a certain form of self-censorship due to the subsequent reconversion of former revolutionary actors within the ruling elite or other reasons of "disavowal" of this left-wing activist past.

The symposium is therefore meant to help reveal the invisible, forgotten and retrospectively compressed history of these left-wing movements in order to better appreciate the role they played in this period's political power relationships, in the broad

sense, within post-colonial African States. Beyond the political scope, it will attempt to assess their influence within the process for the "modernization of men", according to Pierre Fougereyrollas' formula about Senegal, in other words, the post-colonial societal genesis.

From the 1960s onwards, and especially during the following decade, the dynamics of this Revolutionary Left developed, on the occasion of certain insurrectional events that sometimes led to changes of government, or to the advent of so-called revolutionary regimes, or those professing Marxism or Marxism-Leninism (Congo, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Benin etc.). For this reason, this politicization trend could not be completely overlooked.

Thus, the issue of Revolutionary Left-wing movements has been addressed contiguously by two types of writings:

- those that studied the revolutionary regimes of the 1970s, most of which were

published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, influenced by international geopolitics (East-West cleavage and then the rivalry within the "communist" camp between the USSR model and the Chinese model) on the external level and focusing internally on the "reality" of socialism established by these regimes (see for example the term "Marxoids" applied to the Kerekou regime);

- then on May 1968 in Africa and the Global Sixties, published in recent years, to show that Africa has been part of this broad movement of anti-systemic protest which often tends to be limited to Western countries.

However, the intrinsic history of these "anti-systemic" left-wing movements has yet to be written¹, probably because the history and sociology of revolutions tend to focus mainly on revolutions that have marked world history, primarily the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. However, it is also expected that lessons could be learnt from revolutionary movements that have not achieved their goals, in classical terms, of overthrowing governments. Moreover, it can always be considered that even the most emblematic revolutions in world history have also had their share of losers, who would have preferred this revolutionary process to take a different direction, when it took a "Thermidorian" path to use an expression inspired by the French Revolution.

To return to the African continent, at first sight, these left-wing forces were in continuity with the anti-colonialist struggles that preceded the recognition of African independence.

¹ Apart from the two previous categories of writings from the academic field, there are also a number of testimonial and commemorative works by former militants who want to ensure that this militant story does not definitively sink into oblivion.

However, they were also confronted with "neo-colonial" African regimes, i.e. supported or even maintained by Western powers. In the case of territories colonized by France, the conflictual nature of this decolonization has been marked by episodes of "confiscation" of independence as part of a "French-African" group ('Françafrique'), which sometimes led to attempts at armed opposition, as in Cameroon with the UPC or in Niger with the Sawaba.

A while later, in the context of the Global Sixties of worldwide protest, where the center of gravity of the "world revolution" seemed to shift further south, a new "Left" occasionally emerged and ideologically distanced itself from the "old" anti-colonialist Left that sprang from the struggles for independence, which were sometimes overwhelmed by this rising generation who ultimately criticized it for not being "revolutionary" enough or for being willing to compromise with the regimes in place.

Considerations

Contributions should therefore take stock of these different ideological positions claiming to be close to different orientations of international or "geopolitical" Marxism:

- on the one hand, allegiance to pro-USSR "orthodoxy" for parties such as PAI in Senegal or G-80 in Niger,
- on the other hand, reference to Mao's China for the Kahidines in Mauritania or And Jëf in Senegal, or Enver Hodja's Albania for the Voltaic Revolutionary Communist Party (PCRV), or the Communist Party of Dahomey (PCD) without forgetting the case of Trotskyist groups that were sometimes able to establish themselves like in Senegal (GOR) or pan-Africanism (see, for example, the case of RND founded by Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal or MOJA in Liberia), or
- any radical ideology that can be categorized as leftist, while linking it to the effective strategies of these different

groups or organizations, most of them underground or based abroad.

With regard to these ideological issues, contributors are expected to be able to identify references to revolutionary theories and experiences outside Africa but also to highlight, where they have existed, attempts to "indigenize" this universalist referent.

Beyond an event-driven, ideological and organizational history that will have to be reconstructed with the available written (leaflets, brochures) and oral (testimonies of former activists) sources, there is a need to clarify the social base (or social bases) of these political movements:

- were they limited to the intelligentsia in cities (or even the capital)?, or
- did they sometimes manage to establish themselves locally among peasant or urban popular populations?

So what conclusions can be drawn from attempts to "integrate the masses", to use the language of the slogan of the Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en France (FEANF) launched in the 1960s? More specifically, we could examine the interactions between these Left-wing movements and social movements, particularly students who have often been the vectors of this revolutionary politicization, but also workers (through the influence of revolutionary militants of trade unions) or youth or women's movements. In this respect, we could also focus on the linkage between the underground activities of political organizations and the more "open" game within these mass movements.

In connection with the militarization of the political game, one can take stock of guerrilla attempts, including when they proved to be resounding failures, as was the case in Senegal with the PAI in 1964 or in Congo with Ange Diawara's JMNR in 1972. Similarly, in some countries, the relationship between this

radical left and certain "progressive" or even "revolutionary" soldiers is an interesting subject since it was established in a number of situations in which these soldiers have had the support of certain fractions of the Left, to take over State power (Sudan in 1969-71, Ethiopia in 1974-77, Burkina Faso in 1983-87). Moreover, apart from these situations in which political power relations end up by being militarized, it may be appropriate to examine strategies to build counter powers for the regime in place, by setting up a "revolutionary" or at least "autonomous" trade unionism, for example, or other associative forms that are not subservient to the ruling party (see in the case of Burkina Faso, the establishment of CGT-B or MBDHP in the 1980s).

Finally, beyond the organizational attempts, there may also have been attempts motivated by an anti-imperialist sentiment to reject symbols of Western culture and promote a national or African culture (see the manifesto of the Senegalese Cultural Front published in 1977). In this perspective, one can also bring up the issue of hegemony and, in particular, the confrontation/coexistence with religious authorities, which may have been a problem in the case of radical movements that have sometimes been exposed to stigmatization - "communism" equals "atheism" – meant to discredit their action (see the case of the Communist Party of Sudan).

Beyond the framework of the post-colonial states in formation, the links between the development of these left-wing movements and the international context can also be examined through contacts with other militant forces and the solidarity expressed for other "causes", in favour of other organizations of the revolutionary Left in Africa, or the latest national liberation movements in the struggle against Portuguese colonialism or the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa and, beyond the African continent, radical movements like the Black Panthers or armed struggle movements like the Palestinian fedayeen. In the same vein, it might be

essential to highlight the role of "Diaspora" activists (students among others) in order to understand the efforts deployed to effectively implement such solidarity.

Finally, one might wonder what the legacy of this revolutionary Left beyond the geopolitical upheavals of the 1990s is. Should we consider that the fall of the Berlin Wall has definitively relegated into the "dustbins of history", these Left-wing movements, which often profess Marxism, assimilated in this case to "real socialism" of Eastern countries. However, one cannot ignore that in many African societies, the multi-party system (including 'civil society organizations') emerging at that time was, to a large extent, built by actors from this revolutionary Left.

Even if the symposium fails to assess the politics of the Left in post-colonial Africa, the issue of the material and ideological dependence towards the Eastern Block or/and relevance of Marxist ideas for Africa and the South cannot be ignored, as some postcolonial theorists do, as their points of view may in turn be questioned. Besides, how the leftist activists tried to adapt their ideology and political action to the post-Cold War situation and the neoliberal agenda in the 1990's is also relevant.

To conclude, the political and societal legacy of this radical Left can also be discussed, bearing in mind that sometimes, as was seen in recent years, it is through memorial activities that we start accessing knowledge about a history that has yet to be written².

² In addition to the participation of researchers this symposium is open to former actors of this revolutionary left who will be able to intervene in the discussions or even intervene during a round table which will be specifically organized for them.

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