CALL FOR PAPERS
International Symposium
The political extremes: (dis)qualifications, (dis)positions, transfers.
3rd 4th October 2013
Université de Picardie Jules Verne - Amiens - Logis du Roy.

In the introduction of a collective book published under the direction of Annie Colovald and Brigitte Gaïti in 2006 and which is the outcome of a roundtable of the French Political Association of Political Science in 2002, they were writing: « "Fanaticism", "clash of civilizations", "irresistible rise of racism" and of "working-class authoritarianism" : so many alarmist reports of what seems to threaten today the norms, the ideals and the principles of every democracy. The use of physical violence (entering the armed struggle, terrorism, hostage-taking) and more broadly the refusal of arrangements and compromises which supported the peaceful policy rules would directly test the democratic order established ; these phenomena would find their political localization in all forms of extremism (extreme right, extreme left, Islamism, nationalism, separatism) and their social localization in groups located at the edge of the democratic world ; young suburb immigrants or the Arab countries’ Muslims, today’s unemployed or undocumented somehow replacing yesterday’s workers or farmers. » (Collovald et Gaïti, 2006)

We could add, in order to complete this synoptic overview of habitual ways of thinking about phenomena known as « extremist », the wide diffusion among political commentators and beyond them of the hypothesis of a twinning between the extremes (particularly between groups classified as « extreme left » and those classified as « extreme right») that would in fact fall under the same « totalitarianism » (Christofferson, 2009). One can notice, six years after the publication of the book, the remaining character, widespread in the political and intellectual world, of a limited analysis of « extremism » as a personality generally frustrated , authoritarian, violent, Manichaean (Ory, 2012 : 11-14). The symposium « the political extremes: (dis)qualifications, (dis)positions, transfers », open to recent research belonging to different theoretical traditions and to different disciplines (sociology, political science, social history, etc.), intends therefore to
contribute, following the book edited by A. Collovald and B. Gaïti, to the renewal of political commitments’ understanding, discourse, practices, commonly classified in a form of « extremism ».

Focusing on ethnographic observations, several studies have attempted to explain, beyond the ideologies developed by the spokesmen of these groups, the worldviews involved in activist commitment, such as the emotions that produce the actions of black blocs (Dupuis-Deri, 2007), the practices of the FN militants (Bizeul, 2003), the ways of recruitment of the PCF (Pennetier and Pudal, 2002), of maintaining and shaping activists (Siblot, 2002; Ethuin, 2003; Studer, 2003). All contributing to decompartmentalize sociology of activist commitment (Sawicki, Siméant, 2009), trying to seize how their *habitus* is shaped. Making the link with other social spaces, such as music (Roueff, 2001; Humeau, 2011), the literary field (Sapiro, 1999; Matonti, 2005), sports, school, work or family, repositioning agents in their "cultural entirety", allows to shift the way they are viewed and to re-examine the relation to politics. How the commitment of activists legitimates and updates social and political dispositions acquired outside of the political world? In what way practices, language, ways of sociability, activists’ division of labor, overlap the categories of thought that the group participates in both reproducing and legitimizing socially?

Going against essentialist and normative approaches which attribute to the phenomena called "radicals" or "extremists" proper and distinctive features (a violent "nature" for example) at the same time suitable for certain groups of attitudes fundamentally undemocratic and authoritarian, Annie Collovald and Brigitte Gaïti proposed in their book a research program inspired by interactionist and constructivist theories, endeavoring to identify the process (reversible) of radicalization of situations and rules, of groups and men - indexed on several types of temporality (temporality that transforms ways of thinking and doing is not the same as the temporality that changes "frameworks of interpretation and meaning joined to practices or representations"). Out of the theoretical tradition mobilized by them derives a special interest for "the work of labeling and its effects to construct a reality that it intends qualify" (Collovald and Gaïti, 2006: 12). Politics - "activity that consists of doing things with words" (Cohen et al., 2009: 15) - is indeed crossing categories and representations (socially and historically situated) with a “performative” character in the way that they form the political reality. Moreover, the conference is open to contributions focusing more specifically on the mechanisms of production of "the Other", violent, dangerous and threatening, as a disqualification of political groups outside the peaceful democratic game, whether an "inside enemy", and / or devices (or other) aiming to curb these threats (Collovald, 2001; Rigouste, 2009; Biard et al., 2012). The constructivist approach is not without its limitations if it merely presupposes the effectiveness of stigma. The conference intends to question the social and historical conditions of a successful identity assignment. As far as this issue is concerned, contributions that take into account the social trajectories and resources of individuals or groups and that undertake an analysis of the structure and dynamics of social spaces in which individuals or groups evolve, will be welcome (Kestel, 2012).

The case of artists and writers claiming the "avant-garde" has highlighted the phenomenon
of escalation to the "radicalism" (Boschetti, 2010). We find similar phenomena in more political universes, as shown by the study of Philippe Gottraux about the activist group Socialisme ou Barbarie (active in France in 1950-1960), which led him to forge the notion of "radical political field" (Gottraux, 1997). Which social worlds are able to convert "extremist" features into value? How have they emerged? How do they work? Under what social and historical conditions the phenomena escalating into radicalism are they likely to work more widely across the political field and / or field of ideological production? Set as an object of study the dynamics of radicalization, "pushed to extremes," also invites us, especially in the case of the study of movements or identified groups, to identify the benefits and limitations of the psychology of "groups" (Janis, 1972). Reflecting on these groups classified as "extremes" in the political field, i.e. in its margins, involves questioning more generally on the relationship they have with the "establishment", how they contribute to the construction of the political field (Dulong, 2010) and its closing mechanisms.

Apart along with these few thoughts, the symposium will be open to contributions approaching international transfers of practices or "extremist" theories, or retranslations operated under such transfers in different national or premises contexts. Contributions approaching the use of symbolic productions generally designated as "theories", or in a sense much more pejorative as "ideologies" in the life of “extremist” groups or currents, will also be retained (Belorgey, 2011), as well as those proposing to specifically question the advantages and limitations of different methodologies or concepts used to justify extremist commitments: how to study commitments that appear to the researcher or to the entire scientific community as "repulsive" (Nikolski, 2011, Avanza, 2008)? What are the benefits and limitations of ethnographic approaches, statistics, history, of the study of "extremism"? What is the heuristic relevance of the comparisons between different phenomena connected only by their stigmatization as belonging to "extremism"?

Bibliography:


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• Calendar:
- 1st June: deadline for the submission of proposals for papers.
- 15th July: sending responses after evaluation by two members of the Scientific Committee.
- 1st September: sending of the interventions supports texts to the scientific and organization committees.

• Format of proposals for papers:
- Author(s)
- Statute(s)
- Discipline(s)
- Connecting Establishment(s) and laboratory(ies)
- Address(es)
- Title of the paper
- Summary (between 3000 and 4000 characters including spaces)
- Key bibliographic references

Proposal for a communication to be sent to the following address:
colloque.extremes.politiques@gmail.com

The conference registration fee (before September 10th), covering reception, two lunches and coffee breaks will amount to:

☐ Intervening statutory (or professional): 50€
☐ Speaking PhD, doctorate or post-doc ': 25€
☐ Student: mandatory registration (no fee)