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Call for papers for the academic journal *Politique africaine*

## **Disillusioned tomorrows ? "Authoritarian restorations"**

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"Authoritarian restoration". The term is commonly invoked, yet rarely defined. Is this a sign that it is merely an expression, not claiming to any use but a loose use? The scenario of "authoritarian restoration" has long mainly referred to the so-called "suspended transitions" or "illusory democratizations" that many sub-Saharan countries experienced in the 1990s. It has been brought up to date on the occasion of the "Arab Spring". How do we account for these "moments" in which authoritarian reconfigurations of power follow democratization processes? What can we do with these tomorrows disillusioned?

### **The authoritarian restoration as a "moment"**

The crucial challenge of this special issue is to counter pitfalls of democratic teleology as well as those of an equally harmful authoritarian teleology. Building on the perspective of "*eventful* sociology" developed by William H. Sewell, we consider authoritarian restoration as a "moment" in which one or more events occur and significantly transform the structures "by forming and giving power to new groups of actors, or by empowering previously existing groups"<sup>14</sup>. This perspective invites us to think how change happens "within" restoration. It dispels the false impression that restoration would only consist in the mere reinstatement of the previously existing order. Talking about restoration conveys the idea, intentionally or not, that the events would not alter significantly the persistent stability of social structures upon which the authoritarian order is based. Restoration would only be the end of an illusory interlude of change, and the visible return of unchanged structures or deeper "driving processes", which events could not but affect superficially.

The *eventful* sociological perspective provides with another understanding of moments of authoritarian restoration. It involves three assumptions. First, the temporal sequence in which facts happen is important in order to interpret sociologically social processes at work. First, the analysis should take the form of a causal narrative that reconstructs trajectories and inflections over time, without presupposing when the "moment" ends. Second, this approach considers that the different registers of causality (structures, conjunctures, contingent events) are interwoven rather than separate. In this regard, it should for instance leave open the question of whether the arrival in power of new actors does or does not change the tenacious structures of the authoritarian order, or whether the grip of previous incumbents on power prevents or not any transformation of these structures. Special attention should be paid, too, to how events can profoundly and quickly alter categories of perception and judgment, thereby redefining the rules of

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<sup>14</sup> William H. Sewell « Trois temporalités : vers une sociologie événementielle », in M. Grossetti, M. Bessin, C. Bidart, *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l'événement*, Paris, La Découverte, 2009, p. 140.

the social and political game, the value of social resources, the legitimate status of actors, etc., therefore modifying the logic of causality. Third, in order to properly understand how these events reconfigure social relationships, we should take seriously the conflicting ways in which events are retrospectively re-appropriated, commented, and socially constructed as constituting an authoritarian restoration or not. As we argue here, the authoritarian restoration is a moment of intense clashes between conflicting perceptions of what is happening, clashes in which cleavages crystallize.

***In short, our major proposition is to consider "authoritarian restorations" as moments in which multiple changes occur that can deeply affect social political and cultural structures, without predefined historical orientation. Misleading impressions that the previous order merely returns or that an exceptional parenthesis is just closed often hides these changes.***

The *eventfull* sociological perspective also paves the way for comparing societies of the North and the South of the Sahara. In no case do we claim to identify constant and generalizable causal mechanisms that would explain, in a nomological and experimental illusion, the success or failure of revolutions or democratization processes. ***The eventfull sociological perspective rather invites us to produce heuristic narratives that help identify analogies. Hence giving meaning to details, which otherwise could be considered insignificant.*** It is in this aim that we call here to analyze heterogeneous historical situations through the prism of moments of authoritarian restorations, and building upon detailed empirical descriptions.

From this point of view, can the "Arab Springs" and the 1990s sub-Saharan African "National Conferences" be compared? Does the focus on moments of authoritarian restorations enable us to better understand such varied sequences as, for example, the "democratic experiment" <sup>15</sup> in Algeria (1988-1992), the "Dead cities" operations in Cameroon (1991) <sup>16</sup>, "the post-Zongo" period in Burkina Faso (1998-2002) <sup>17</sup>, or the abortion of civil government in Mauritania (2007-2008) <sup>18</sup> ?

These situations, among others, present an analogy: they appear as ***"moments" of foreclosure of varied processes of pluralistic political effervescence.***

By pluralistic political effervescence, we mean processes that strongly vary in time (ranging from few weeks to several years) and nature. They can be popular uprisings, sufficiently important to disrupt the stability of ruling oligarchies; they can also be situations in which ruling elites are being replaced by former opponents, a multi-party system is being orchestrated, and political expressions of dissent outpour in public spaces. More generally, processes of pluralistic effervescence are not tied up with a specific institutional change that would be the same in every contexts – transition to multi-party system, electoral transparency, media liberalization, etc.; neither are these processes bound to a radical alteration of power relations – like a change in power, inability of the regime to repress dissent, etc. Rather, they are characterized by the shared belief that something different is happening, something that is subjectively perceived as

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<sup>15</sup> M. Aït-Aoudia, *L'expérience démocratique en Algérie*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> The signification of the « Dead cities » operations is still strongly debated among historians and political scientists in Cameroon, as explained by M.-E. Pommerolle (« La démobilisation collective au Cameroun : entre régime postautoritaire et militantisme extraverti. », *Critique internationale*, 3/2008, n°40, p. 73-94 ; A. Mbembe, « Crise de légitimité, restauration autoritaire et déliquescence de l'État », in P. Geschiere, P. Konings, *Itinéraires d'accumulation au Cameroun*, Paris, Karthala, p. 345-373).

<sup>17</sup> M. Hilgers, J. Mazzocchetti, « L'après-Zongo : entre ouverture politique et fermeture des possibles », *Politique africaine*, 2006/1, n° 101, p. 5-18. □

<sup>18</sup> Z. Ould Ahmed Salem, « La démocratisation en Mauritanie. Une « illusio » postcoloniale ? », *Politique africaine* 3/1999, n° 75, p. 131-146 ; R. Ciavolella, M. Fresia, « Entre démocratisation et coups d'État. Hégémonie et subalternité en Mauritanie », *Politique africaine* 2/2009, n°114, p. 5-23.

an event<sup>19</sup>, and which necessarily depends on each specific configuration. Situations of pluralistic effervescence will therefore be understood as situations of *conjunctural illusio*. The latter is defined as "a collective belief in the game"<sup>20</sup>, which is not produced by the internal routine of a given social field (as in Bourdieu's definition of the *illusio*) but by the fluidity of the situation that precisely disrupts routines.

Papers are expected to deal with the "moments" when this dynamic of belief breaks down and when pluralistic effervescence deflates. The foreclosure of *conjunctural illusio* can occur in several ways. For example, it can occur due to the illegal intervention of military actors, to the autonomy of security apparatuses, to former ruling elites' attempts to take back power, or to exceptional rule changes that undermine the actors' "belief in the game". Obviously, more or less bloody repression plays a prominent role in the foreclosure process. But it is also the perception of an immutable political economy, reproducing the "historical lines of social inequality"<sup>21</sup>, which weighs heavily on people's hopes and undermines the *illusio* that new possibilities are opened.

These situations have in common to be perceived by some players and observers as an actual or latent restoration of authoritarian modes of control that hinder any devolution of power. We assume, more precisely, that these situations, as varied as they are, are characterized by two paradoxes that underpin their singularity as a "moment". The first paradox is that the shared feeling of fatality and closure of possibilities does not actually bring to an end the on-going dynamics of "potentialities" and conflictualities. The second paradox is that the restoration of an unalterable facade - which gives the impression that the order is back - masks multiple movements and repositioning of actors and dynamics that shape this order. In view of this, papers will organize around these two axes.

### **Axis 1: Fatality and potentialities: what disillusionment does to "political utterance".**

Situations of pluralistic effervescence combine, on the one hand, "structural uncertainty"<sup>22</sup> caused by a state of fluidity which makes it difficult for actors to carry out assessments; and on the other hand, higher visibility of "private" preferences and opinions<sup>23</sup>, even though the latter are modified in the course of action. This combination hinders calculations, but, at the same time, it creates a shared confidence in the possibilities of action - a confidence that feeds demonstrations or other forms of participation.

Conversely, with the foreclosure of *conjunctural illusio*, this shared confidence in the existence of opportunities for action wanes. Moments of restoration seem to combine "structural uncertainty" and invisibility, once again, of "private" preferences and opinions. This invisibility, which is specific to the authoritarian order, is certainly bound up with the simplistic picture of opinions' distribution that is given by successful military coups or by hegemonic electoral results in favour of former incumbents. It has the effect of compromising the confidence that stakeholders could have in the fluidity of the game - and therefore in the opportunities it offers. This happens even though, sometimes, the

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<sup>19</sup> A. Bensa et E. Fassin, « Les sciences sociales face à l'événement », *Terrain*, n° 38, 2002, p.5- 20.

<sup>20</sup> P. Bourdieu, « Le champ littéraire », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, n° 89, septembre 1991, p. 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> J.-F. Bayart, « La problématique de la démocratie en Afrique noire. La Baule, et puis après ? », *Politique Africaine* 43, octobre 1991, p. 12 et suiv.

<sup>22</sup> M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques. La dynamique des mobilisations multisectorielles*, 3ème édition, Paris, Presses de Science Po, 2009, p.133.

<sup>23</sup> M. Camau, « Un printemps arabe ? L'émulation protestataire et ses limites », *L'Année du Maghreb*, VIII, 2012, p. 32. ; see also T. Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995.

situation remains objectively fluid and potentialities of action still exist. Here would reside a main feature of "tomorrows disillusioned": *the paradox of simultaneous declining trust and on-going potentialities. This paradox nourishes impressions of fatality while it produces specific ways of political expression that transform the configuration.*

Our proposal is to take seriously the emic formulations of this paradox, according to which "all that was done did not change anything" but "nothing will ever be the same again." During moments of foreclosure, what happens to the processes of freeing voices and intense deliberation that were engaged during the pluralistic effervescence sequence? How do these dynamics of political expression and the coercive contraction of dissent combine? How do these wavering moments reconfigure categories of perception and judgment about what is permitted, legitimate, fair, credible, real, or possible? Which conflicting temporalities (perceptions of the urgent need to act, or conversely, to wait...) are thus generated? How are events reinterpreted and re-appropriated to construct a narrative of what is happening and try to make sense of history? How, for example, to understand frequent projections of hopes and regrets on past leaders? Which reconfigurations are produced by repeated and multiple expressions of disillusionment? How, for example, do cynicism, "conspiracy theories" or "realism", become widespread repertoires of political expression? It is striking that these repertoires are not simply invested by dissenters or by disappointed people. They are as much used, though in various ways, by rulers, journalists, academics, international experts and foreign governments, etc. in order to produce a narrative of what is happening and therefore what may happen in the future. A powerful example is how the discourse on stability and return to calm, is imposed as the only rational option after a period of "disorder" that should obviously be closed.

How is disillusionment, whether negative (disappointment) or positive (back to "rationality"), produced? And which changes does it entail in the political configuration (repositioning of actors, constraints and opportunities for action, norms of legitimacy...) and social configuration (e.g. on emigration, marriage, education or work projects)? Which practices and scenes (activists, media, arts, community, domestic, professional, etc.) sustain this disillusionment process? How does it transform spaces of expression that flourished during the effervescence sequence (political groups, elected assemblies, street meetings, talk shows, new media, cultural and religious areas, cafes...)? How are discourses of disillusionment used to support the implementation of certain public policies? What are the consequences of it in reframing social classes and lifestyles? How does disillusionment relate to practices such as commemorations of martyrs, or to the regime's efforts to create new symbols, celebrations, images of "cheering crowds"<sup>24</sup>, i.e. an imaginary of change within restored order?

## **Axis 2: Immutability and mobilities: what the return to order changes in the authoritarian order.**

The foreclosure of pluralistic effervescence can be studied as a conflicting moment when routines and rules are being redefined and institutionalized. Building on empirical case studies, papers are expected to analyze localized processes of reformation or transformation of these routines and rules, without presupposing either that they are radically new or identical to those of the former order. Similarly, papers can examine how

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<sup>24</sup> N. Mariot, « Foules en liesse et "maréchalisme" des populations : les images des voyages officiels de Pétain montrent-elles des mouvements d'opinion ? », *Sociétés et représentations*, n°12 « Dramaturgies du politique », Automne. 2001.

the constituent components and relationships of the "historical bloc"<sup>25</sup> are reconfigured. Considering this bloc as not monolithic, it is important to study the arrangements and struggles that sustain it while it is being reshaped.

This perspective helps avoid a common mistake, which is to take it for granted that same actors, even same individuals, are actors of the same play. Below usual features of restoration moments, such as the co-optation of main opponents or symbolic gestures (release prisoners, amnesty, "gifts" to rehabilitate former elites etc.), the focus will be put on those political mobilities that are often imperceptible on the bigger picture. We thus assume that *behind the facade of restoration and beyond the impression of immutability, multiple moves and changes occur in political balances and practices. It is essential to study them to properly understand the authoritarian order in the making.* Which resources are valued in the emerging socio-political configuration? Which sociological profiles, which networks and affinity groups (sectarian, tribal, regional, professional, educational, etc.), which generations would pin the game to the detriment of others? What about, for example, public men and women's styles that the new situation makes salient, such as: the telegenic MP, the rising contractor, the successful female head of a local association, who stand for icons of the "new development"? Or as the TV preacher, and arts and sport heroes who deliver new narratives of legitimacy?

It would also be interesting to study how disputes are settled or revenges are taken in the course of restoration: how do professional segments, lying at the heart of the system (police, military), engage in more or less frontal struggles? How do historically nourished jealousies between individuals or groups inside of incumbent or opponent circles gain momentum? What alliances do such groups have to make to avoid drawbacks of the return to order? What becomes of "tribalism" given that it is often reinvented in contexts of the exacerbation of political competition? We can also usefully mention examples of "*faits accomplis*" that the pluralistic effervescence allowed and which the new regime tries, or not, to go back on. How are being renegotiated spaces of political autonomy and illegalities, which are typical of the "quiet encroachment"<sup>26</sup> (unlicensed small shops, street vendors...) and which intensified during the effervescence sequence?

Ultimately, we argue that behind the return to the authoritarian order, behind the muzzling of open political dissent and dissonant expressions, behind the façade of unanimity shaped by the restoration project, many political practices and representations remain that are not strictly put under control the political elites and do not fall within "democratization". Below the "authoritarian restoration", the challenge is to inform a moment which should be thought of as a "becoming".

## DEADLINES

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2016:** Paper proposals (max. 1 page) should be sent to Amin Allal (amin.allal@gmail.com) and Marie Vannetzel ([marie.vannetzel@gmail.com](mailto:marie.vannetzel@gmail.com))

**5 September 2016:** Accepted proposals notified to authors

**15 November 2016:** Papers submitted to the guest editors for review by the editorial board (max. length 40'000 characters, spaces and footnotes included)

Articles can be written in French or English (the journal will translate the accepted articles in French).

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<sup>25</sup> About this Gramscian concept, see R. Banégas, *La démocratie à pas de caméléon. Transition et imaginaires politiques au Bénin*, Paris, Karthala, 2003, and M. Camau, V. Geisser, *Le syndrome autoritaire. Politique en Tunisie de Bourguiba à Ben Ali*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Asef Bayat, « Un-civil society: the politics of the 'informal people' », *Third World Quarterly*, vol.18, n°1, 1997, pp.53-72.

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