

African youth movements put to the test of citizenship, democracy and development

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Abstract : *Y'en a marre* (Senegal), *Filimbi* and *Lucha* (Democratic Republic of Congo), *Balai citoyen* (Burkina Faso), *Tournons la page* (Burundi), *SOFAS* (Mali), *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* (Guinea) and *Ça suffit comme ça* (Gabon) are Africa's new dissident and citizenship movements. Led by young people from diverse social backgrounds, these movements have become major political and social players in public life in Africa, breaking away from traditional ideologies and the classical political class. They are at the heart of the social and historical dynamics running through the continent's countries. For a long time socially excluded, then confronted with the exhaustion of the post-colonial state model and the extreme precariousness of their living conditions, young people are today increasingly multiplying the forms of civic engagement, dialogue and reconciliation in the political arena and in the development processes of their respective countries. The importance of this increased role for youth movements can be illustrated by the numerous mobilizations around the issues of democratic changeover, climate change, the high cost of living, improved purchasing power, the plundering of national resources, the contestation of the European presence on the continent and the denunciation of its negative effects through the CFA franc currency and extroverted development. Young people no longer hesitate to act retroactively to deconstruct their culture and identity, using linguistic figures close to the cultures of their respective working-class backgrounds and based on values centered on pan-Africanism, the African renaissance, the continent's growing independence and references to historical leaders such as Thomas Sankara, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba and Cheikh Anta Diop. They take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new information and communication technologies (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube), not only to interact with each other, but also to make themselves known to the outside world, bypassing the various obstacles placed in their path by those in power. The data analysed here come from a literature review and a qualitative survey of youth citizen movements.

Keywords: citizenship, democracy, development, social movements, youth.

1. Introduction

Y'en a marre (Senegal), *Filimbi* and *Lucha* (Democratic Republic of Congo), *Balai citoyen* (Burkina Faso), *Tournons la page* (Burundi), *SOFAS* (Mali), *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* (Guinea) and *Ça suffit comme ça* (Gabon) are Africa's new dissident movements for indocility and citizenship. Led by young people from

diverse social backgrounds, these movements have become major political and social players in public life in Africa, breaking away from traditional ideologies and the classical political class. They are at the heart of the social and historical dynamics running through the continent's countries. For a long time socially excluded, then confronted with the exhaustion of the post-colonial state model and the extreme precariousness of their living conditions, young people are today increasingly multiplying the forms of civic engagement, dialogue and

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2. Brief synthesis of research on youth movements in Africa

Scientific interest in the analysis of youth civic movements in Africa is in its infancy. What stands out in research on the dynamics of youth civic engagement is the fragmented nature of the studies devoted to them. Much of the literature is made up of press articles more concerned with recounting the conditions of birth of these movements, the scope of their discourse, their one-off mobilizations and, above all, the reactions of the regimes in place. Researchers interested in these movements have often favored a national focus. Since their emergence, these movements have attracted the attention of the media and researchers, many of whom have been fascinated by their unprecedented nature and their role in political changeovers, particularly in Senegal, Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo. A series of studies on these movements have been carried out since their birth: *Y'en a marre* for Dimé (2017) and Touré (2017), *Balai citoyen* for Touré (2017), *Filimbi* and *Lucha* for Kapagama (2017). Other researchers have also taken an interest in these movements, mainly taken individually: *Y'en a marre* (Fouquet, 2017; Dalberto, 2011;

Munyaneza, 2016; Havard, 2013; Klupper, 2017; Guèye, 2013; Haeringer, 2012; Savané, Sarr and Makébé, 2012; Sy, 2012; Dieng, 2015), *Balai citoyen* (Bonnetcase, 2015; Frere and Englebert, 2015; Gorovei, 2015; Hagberg; Kibora, Ouattara; Konkobo, 2015; Gjerlufsen, 2017). The dynamics of citizen mobilization have also been addressed from the broader perspective of social and alter-globalization movements with pioneering work by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) through to more recent publications (Sylla, 2014; Bruijn and Both, 2017; Simeant, 2013).

The work of Christian Bouquet (2016) on the effect of urbanity in the structuring of political movements in general, and citizen movements in particular, is particularly noteworthy. He analyzes the importance of youth in conurbations compared to rural areas, and the effects of urban status in the feeling and experience of crises and various problems that structure the bulk of movements' demands. In a brief reflection on citizen movements in Africa, which he considers to be "UFOs" in the African public sphere, Boniface Munyaneza (2016) highlights some of the difficulties they encounter in carrying out their activities. Philippe Menkoué (2016) gives a brief presentation of the 4 social movements under study, as well as other movements in Africa: *SOFAS* in Mali, *Tournons la page* in Burundi and *Ça suffit comme ça* in Gabon. The authors of a collective work published by the Groupe de Recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité/GRIP (Kupper et al., 2016) paint a portrait of the four main movements studied, *Y'en a marre*, *Balai citoyen*, *Filimbi* and *Lucha*. While this book has the merit of providing a cartography of each of these movements, it lacks relevant analyses based on empirical field data, apart from the fact that the authors had to meet a few actors who provided them with the information essential to their reflections. David Vigneron (2016) focuses, in an analytical note, on the particularity, the logics of generational tensions of citizen movements whose precisely *Y'en a marre* from Senegal and *Balai Citoyen* from Burkina Faso, were at the basis of the alternations in these two West African countries. Habibou Bangré (2016), for his part, focused his analysis on two movements in the DRC (*Lucha* and *Filimbi*) to identify what might be considered the logics of tension at the root of the two movements, in a context of incessant attempts by the ruling power to stifle their actions. Concerned to go beyond these reflections, some of which have been expressed by journalists and others by senior civil servants and international development agents, the present study is the result of in-depth field investigations of the two movements. Its ambition is to produce

evidence-based data to analyze the logics, underpinnings, meanings, language practices, organizational strategies, links and networks of citizen engagement movements in Africa.

3. Understanding citizen movements through the prism of the sociology of social movements: structures, framing, actions and organizations

Juvenile social movements are the order of the day. They are attracting increasing attention from researchers (McAdam & al., 1998, Revillard. 2003, Mathieu 2004, Tall & al. 2015). Several recent works propose to strengthen knowledge on the nature and structuring of citizen social movements in Africa (Dieng 2015, Arnaud 2016, Gorovei 2016, Meister 2017). A significant proportion of the analyses focus on the cases of *Y'en a Marre* in Senegal, *Balai Citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Lucha* (Lutte pour le Changement) and *Filimbi* (whistle in Swahili) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These movements are cited as emblematic figures of citizen engagement in Africa. They retain the particularity of targeting young people, of having taken shape mainly in urban environments (Vigneron 2016) and are distinguished from traditional social movements (trade union organizations, student movements, ...) by their growing involvement in social, economic, political alternation and public governance issues. To highlight these movements, we need to pay particular attention to their definition as vectors of contestation and socio-political mobilization. If a social movement can be considered as a form of collective action, protest or demand, carried out by several individuals, in a concerted and intentional manner, with a precise end in view (Neveu 2002), *Y'en a marre* in Senegal, *Filimbi* and *Lucha* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Tournons la page* in Burundi, *SOFAS* in Mali, *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* in Guinea, *Ça suffit comme ça* in Gabon are undoubtedly youth movements that seek to collectively express and defend demands and claims (respect for the constitution, reopening of legal cases, protection of the common good, support for the hunt for ill-gotten gains, cleaning up public life, changing society) in the face of a repressive authority, the State, considered to hold the power to bring these claims to fruition as a political power. As social movements, *Y'en a marre* in Senegal, *Filimbi* and *Lucha* in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *Balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Tournons la page* in Burundi, *SOFAS* in Mali, *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* in Guinea and *Ça suffit comme ça* in Gabon

reflect an intentional act-ensemble, marked by the explicit project of mobilizing in concert to make demands and defend a cause, whether national or of collective interest. What they have in common, as we'll come back to later, is that they maintain a minimum degree of organization that enables them not only to recruit and motivate participants, but also to accumulate material, social, political and symbolic resources that will be invested in collective action (Tall, et al. 2015). In political science, the generic concept of "resource mobilizations" has given rise to a whole series of extensions that describe precisely how these social movements of citizen engagement organize, amass resources and structure mobilization in different sectors of society in the three countries studied. The organizational resources of these movements thus make it possible to mobilize and raise public awareness (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, Rimondi, L., 2015, Meister, S., 2017, Gorovei, D., 2016).

Among the research on these youth citizen movements, there is a marked share that questions their origins and motivations (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, Dimé 2017). A conceptual framework proposed by Ted Gurr (1970) in explaining mobilizations, such as *Y'en a marre* in Senegal, *Filimbi* and *Lucha* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Tournons la page* in Burundi, *SOFAS* in Mali, *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* in Guinea, *Ça suffit comme ça* in Gabon, relates to the notion of "relative frustration". For Gurr (1970), there is a direct causal link between an individual's situation and his or her commitment to action: it is the individual's frustration, his or her dissatisfaction, that motivates him or her to join collective action. This is the case of the citizens' movements studied here, whose deliberate common objective is to transform the social, political and economic structures of Burundian, Guinean, Gabonese, Senegalese, Burkinabe and Congolese society (Gorovei 2016, Sivya 2017). Returning to the events that presided over the birth of *Balai citoyen*, this respondent notes that: "*Le Balai is a movement that was born in a rather particular context. Firstly, as you know, in 1987, Thomas Sankara was assassinated by Blaise Compaoré, who took power. The first years of his reign were marked by violence, killings and intimidation, and then came 1990-1991, when there was a semblance of democratic openness and a multi-party system. During this period, there was no organized opposition capable of changing things, and so we lived in this somewhat autocratic situation until the Arab Spring in 2000-2011, a reality that inspired us a great deal. Then there was Y'en a marre in Senegal, which had a big influence on us. A lot of Balai members already had a militant life, like Smokey and Sam's K le Jah, who fought in their own way as artists. As for us, we were often involved in the anti-globalization*

movement. Some of us were active in the student movement. Some were lawyers, some were in the unions that were fighting, like Maitre Guy Hervé Kam, one of the Balai spokesmen, and some were elders like the Abdoulaye Diallos. These people decided to create a framework that could work for alternation, because the unions were at times a little soft and had a Marxist-Leninist logic. Given the experience in Tunisia and Senegal, the young people said to themselves, enough is enough, we need to get organized too, to create a citizens' movement that will bring something new, and the objective must be the departure of Blaise Compaoré. There were several clandestine meetings until there was a first press conference at the Centre de presse Norbert Zongo, until the birth of Balai in July-August 2013" (Balai citoyen interview extract).

At the same time, extensions of work that tend to fall within the framework of the "political opportunity structure" model (Tarrow 1994) have focused on demonstrating the influence of the political context on social mobilizations (Revillard 2003, Mathieu 2004, Touré 2017). The concept of "political opportunity structure" thus aims to show that the triggering and unfolding of mobilizations are influenced by the opportunities presented to them, depending on the political context (Le Saout 1999, Rimondi 2015, Sivya 2017). Following Neveu (2002), we can identify some of the basic components of this structure of political opportunities, namely the degree of openness or closure of the political system, the state of alliances within the political field, the relays available to protesting groups within the political-administrative system, and the type of response provided by the political system (Neveu 2002). Depending on the country studied, these opportunities can influence the launch, progress and success of social movements.

Conceptual investigation also turns to the various dimensions of the activity of framing situations and to the different operations of reality construction implemented by social movement organizations to legitimize themselves (Siméan 2014, Tall et al., 2015; Sivya 2017). We thus distinguish frame transformation, frame connection and frame extension. These framing operations also constitute one of the sources of engagement because, by constructing a shared definition of the situation, and transmitting it to the public, they make it possible to "mobilize the consensus" around the cause and prompt action (Sommier 2001, Dieng 2015, Rimondi 2015, Meister 2017). This means that a social movement therefore requires "meaning-making work". The biographical dimensions of engagement are therefore explored, and the focus is on different figures of "mobilization entrepreneurs". *Y'en a marre* in Senegal,

Filimbi and *Lucha* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Balai citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Tournons la page* in Burundi, *SOFAS* in Mali, *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* in Guinea and *Ça suffit comme ça* in Gabon bring together young people from a variety of backgrounds: associative, academic, artistic and cultural. Different segments of the population are targeted, in particular young people from working-class neighborhoods "who work in the informal sector, in commerce, students, the middle classes, teachers, civil servants" (*Balai citoyen interview extract*). This wealth of experience makes it possible to cross the perspectives of socio-professional sectors that may be more or less distant, but whose relationship is built around a common project: the restoration of constitutional order and the need for political change in the Democratic Republic of Congo, better economic governance and access to basic social services in Burkina Faso and Senegal, among others.

4. Emergence, structuring and scope of youth movements in Africa

In most African countries, young people have always been at the forefront of socio-political protest and mobilization. They have been the standard-bearers of opposition movements to express their revolt and rejection of a socio-political order that may be perceived as unjust, oppressive or violent. African youth therefore has a long tradition of dissent and indocility, the roots of which go back to the colonial period (Mamdani, Mkandawire and Wamba dia Wamba, 1988; Mbembe, 1992; Akor, 2012; Radi, 2017; Levy and Feltran, 2014; Siméant, 2013). During the period of single-party domination, as well as in the 90s, corresponding to the democratic opening, it made its demographic weight and thirst for change and freedom felt by spearheading popular insubordination operations that were often violently repressed by the regimes in place. This dynamic of mobilization has never faded, as it has always succeeded in conquering areas of freedom, even under the most repressive regimes.

This protest has been driven by movements that have played, and continue to play, a major socio-political role in terms of demands for greater democracy, freedom and the handling of youth issues, as well as in the fight against bad governance and economic exploitation (e.g., mobilization against the CFA franc currency, against economic partnership agreements with the European Union). These movements, which seek to arouse, stir up, capture and instrumentalize youthful anger against

political regimes, include: *Y'en a marre* (Senegal), *Filimbi* and *Lucha* (in the Democratic Republic of Congo), *Balai citoyen* (Burkina Faso), *Tournons la page* (Burundi), *SOFAS* (Mali), *Stop à la mauvaise gouvernance* (Guinea), *Ça suffit comme ça* (Gabon).

These movements seem to be laying the foundations for a "trans-African" form of citizen mobilization that exploits the opportunities offered by information technology. The activists behind them, who have gained considerable media popularity, describe themselves as the standard-bearers of a "new committed African youth²". They see themselves as the mouthpieces of a "Facebook, sms and twitter" generation, making strategic, unbridled and confusing use of social networks during periods of popular mobilization. Focusing specifically on the *Lucha*, founded in 2012, Serge Sivya mentions that the movement was born out of the initiative of a group of young people revolted by an uncertain situation. The author, who is an active member of the movement, evokes the political and social context that prevailed at the time of the social mobilization in Goma: precarious employment, unemployment, alienation, bad governance, corruption, obsolete education system. The aim of the movement, he believes, is to make citizens more aware of their rights and more demanding of those in power, so that the latter feel responsible and accountable (Sivya 2017: 41). Along the same lines, Habibou Bangré writes that the *Lucha* movement "has set itself the mission of denouncing the living conditions of the majority of the 65 million or so Congolese who live in great misery despite the mineral wealth in the East" (Bangré 2016:8). In this interview, we read "*La Lucha was effectively and actively born on May 1^{er} 2012 because that's when the first action was taken. La Lucha was created essentially for actions to raise awareness, raise consciousness, mobilize the population, build collective intelligence. Its aim is to establish a new Congo as theorized by Lumumba, a Congo where citizens live in dignity, social justice, prosperity and well-being. The movement is doing well. The movement began in Goma, a town 2,000 kilometers from the capital, Kinshasa. But today the movement is in the capital and in strategic towns across the country. In several cities, we are now in almost 6 provinces out of 14 cities to be precise.*" (*Lucha interview extract*).

With no organized structure like political parties or trade unions, these movements claim the status of citizens' movements eager to foster a more constructive "trans-African citizenship". However, they find it hard to move beyond the protest strategy that gave rise to them in the first place. But they have had the merit of breaking with the classic "ruling party" vs. "opposition party" bipolarity around which the political field is structured in most

African countries. The way in which they challenge the political system differs from that of the various social and revolutionary movements of the decolonization and post-independence periods. On the one hand, these movements are driven by young people from diverse social backgrounds. These young people are determined to make their voices heard in the face of powers that are insensitive to the suffering of their respective populations, and oppositions that are struggling to gain access to power and whose connections with the regimes they claim to be fighting make them doubt their desire for real change. As a result, these movements are positioning themselves as new, assertive citizens' movements, with original ways of making demands. Secondly, because these young people take advantage of and capitalize on the means offered by the new information and communication technologies, not only to interact amongst themselves, but also to make themselves known to the outside world, bypassing the various obstacles placed in their way by those in power. In this way, these young people act as a sounding board for the voiceless, positioning themselves as a new force for change, without aiming directly for power. Dominica Gorovei (Gorovei 2016) focuses on the case of the *Balais citoyen* in Burkina Faso. He locates the movement's origins in June 2013, when it took shape following marches organized by the opposition against constitutional reform targeting the Senate. The author identifies two committed musical artists at the root of the movement: rapper Smockey and reggae artist and radio host Sams'K K le Jah. Added to these is the figure of lawyer Guy Hervé Kam, President of the Center for Judicial Ethics (Gorovei 2015). Continuing his reflection, this interviewee notes that the *Balai citoyen's* objective "*is quite clear in the Balai's texts. It's a fight for a genuine rule of law, a fight for more "social justice in Burkina Faso and for a truly democratic society. Because Blaise wanted to amend Article 37 so that he could serve another term, even though his mandate ended in 2015. He couldn't run again, so he wanted to amend the constitution, and once the Balai had been born, it was already engaged in the struggle with the opposition parties who were already involved*" (*Extract from Balai citoyen interview*).

Presented as having been inspired by the Arab Springs of North Africa, these movements nevertheless reveal original characteristics. Considered to be inspired by pan-Africanist movements because of their references to leaders such as Amilcar Cabral, Patrice Lumumba and Thomas Sankara, they denounce the disastrous management practices of governments in power. In order to give a particular and original form to the processes of implementing their protests, they use linguistic figures close to the cultures of their respective popular milieus to

¹ See an article published in the newspaper *Le Monde* and signed by the leaders of the 4 movements. It is entitled "Nous sommes la nouvelle jeunesse africaine engagée", URL: http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/04/17/nous-sommes-la-nouvelle-jeunesse-africaine-engagee_4618336_3212.html#RV5fDb8lb0Skvwqz

[ous-sommes-la-nouvelle-jeunesse-africaine-engagee_4618336_3212.html#RV5fDb8lb0Skvwqz](http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/04/17/nous-sommes-la-nouvelle-jeunesse-africaine-engagee_4618336_3212.html#RV5fDb8lb0Skvwqz)
.99 accessed September 11, 2017.

better communicate with the popular masses and get their messages across. Constantly innovating in the discursive transmission of their opinions, they are gradually gaining credibility in societies that do not always fully grasp the substance of their thoughts and the meaning of their struggle. While not structurally part of civil society, they nonetheless stand out from traditional opposition political parties, thus worrying the classic political players in their respective countries. Moda Dieng (2015) focuses his analysis on the careers of *Y'en a marre* leaders in Senegal. According to him, "the *Y'en a marre* movement was formed between January 15 and 16, 2011 in Les Parcelles Assainies (Unité 160), a neighborhood in the Dakar suburbs by five young people: Fadel Barro, Cheikh Omar Cyril Touré better known as Thiat (the last of the family), Mbessane Seck alias Kilifeu (the wise man), Simon and Alioune Sané. Most of them are rappers. Thiat and Kilifeu are members of the rap group Keur Gui (the house), while Fadel Barro (movement coordinator) and Alioune Sané are journalists. They will be joined by Malal Talla (nicknamed Fou malade) from the group Bat'hailon Blin-D and other rappers. The founders of the movement were all educated, some having even attended the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar" (Dieng 2015:83).

Clara Arnaud hypothesizes in the same vein that *Y'en a marre* was born on the initiative of young Senegalese rappers and journalists during the 2011 protests that contributed to the departure of President Abdoulaye Wade in 2012 (Arnaud 2016). He defines the movement as the relay of citizen demands that pleads for more state accountability and youth civic engagement to militate against the incessant load shedding in Dakar's suburbs. For the author, the rift between youth and the state stems from the rejection of a political class seen as corrupt (Arnaud 2016).

5. The impact of digital and smart on the breakthrough of urban youth movements

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have unquestionably transformed youth movements and their relationships with individuals. The Internet and social networks are particularly popular in Africa, especially among citizen youth movements. These young people are taking advantage of and capitalizing on the resources offered by the new information and communication technologies (cell phones, smartphones, computers), not only to interact with each other, but also to make themselves known to the outside world, bypassing the various obstacles placed in their way by those in power.

Citizens' movements express themselves extensively on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Youtube). La Lucha has a website (www.luchacongo.org), while Filimbi also has a site (www.filimbi.org) detailing their objectives, approaches and philosophies. "We use social networks a lot. We can't communicate via radio. Everything is censored by the authorities. Some radio stations that try to broadcast are also sometimes threatened. We use our Facebook page, where we share information, and our twitter page. These tools help us to mobilize" (*Lucha interview extract*). La Lucha has 10,000 followers on Twitter and has posted 7,500 tweets... Filimbi has 3,700 followers and has posted 700 tweets. Lucha and Filimbi use hashtags picked up by their supporters: #FreeLucha, #FreeFilimbi, #FreeFed, #FreeYves or #Yebela. As for Facebook, Filimbi's page (8,700 likes) is often updated, as is Lucha's, which has 20,000 likes" (Bangré 2016:13). In the case of Balai citoyen, "We mainly use Facebook. When someone attacks us, we automatically defend ourselves" (*Balai citoyen interview extract*). Because of the interactivity they create, technological tools enable young people to exchange via social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Youtube). The use of digital technologies has had an impact on democratic life in Senegal, Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of Congo, promoting three democratic alternations in these respective countries.

6. Conclusion

Unlike social movements on other continents, citizen movements in Africa are in the early stages of exploration. Our contribution thus contributes to the emergence of a new branch in the sociology of social movements, namely, the sociology of citizen movements in Africa. Its practical relevance lies in our concern not only to uncover the practices and discourses of citizen movements, but also and above all, to help these movements and their adherents to better perceive their responsibilities as historical actors in the process of transforming African societies. Concrete policy recommendations would be to mobilize these youth movements for practices and activities aimed at supporting citizenship and youth engagement in Africa.

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