Stefan Berger • Holger Nehring
Editors

The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective

A Survey

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Stefan Berger
Ruhr University Bochum
Bochum, Germany

Holger Nehring
University of Stirling
Stirling, United Kingdom

Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements
ISBN 978-1-137-30425-4 (hardback) ISBN 978-1-137-30426-1 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-137-30427-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-30427-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016960746

Cover icons created by T1| William Jean; Cesar Reynoso; Rflor; Mike Jewett from the Noun Project

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

CHAPTER 8

Social Movements in Africa

Andreas Eckert

A Neglected Field

The theme of 'Social Movements' does not—and never did—rank high among those issues that historians of Africa would consider crucial.[1] Already a quick glance at the relevant literature does not only confirm this impression, but also reveals that much of the quantitatively rather meagre social and cultural studies literature on social movements in Africa suffers from historical short-windedness. Thus, writing an overview about the *history* of social movements in Africa is mainly an exercise in producing whipped cream out of skimmed milk. On the other hand, there was a recent (but rather short-lived) interest in current social movements in Africa largeley fuelled by the so-called Arab Spring. The events in Northern Africa and the Arab world led to a changed perception of political resistance in these countries, but also in sub-Saharan Africa. Western media and political commentators suddenly no longer called for an almost apolitical 'civil society' meant to stabilize the state, but started to appreciate social

[1] Just note that there is no reference to 'social movements' in the index of a recently published authoritative handbook on African history (John Parker & Richard Reid (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

A. Eckert (✉)
Department of African Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

S. Berger, H. Nehring (eds.), *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-30427-8_8

movements that aim at bringing down their respective governments.[2] One of the questions asked in this context was: 'Will the Arab Uprising Spread to Sub-Saharan Africa?'[3] However, those who began to take interest in social movements in Africa had to realize that the study of this topic so far is a neglected field of research in African studies and social sciences. Not only does Africa remain largely absent from social science research using a social movement perspective. Social movement theory largely focuses on socio-political movements in Europe, North and South America. 'In the absence of historically grounded empirical research', some authors recently lamented, 'social movements in these societies [of the global South] and the struggles that underpin them are not infrequently reduced to caricature'. Most of the research, they go on, 'denies the complexity of social formations in the South, and, ignoring any prospect of agency, portrays their members as the hapless victims of tyrannical rulers and traditional culture or the passive recipients of Northern-led actions'.[4]

In addition to that, the literature on social movement theory has so far hardly been explored within African studies, even though a growing number of empirical studies are dealing with different forms of civil action and political mobilization in current African contexts. This is especially true for the case of the Republic of South Africa. Scholars have explored the struggle against apartheid as well as a broad range of movements in post-apartheid South Africa against privatization and liberalization of basic social services or discrimination related to sexual identity, for land rights or gender equality.[5] Still, especially compared to Latin American Studies where labour unions,

[2] See Nikolai Brandes and Bettina Engels, 'Social Movements in Africa', *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 11 (2011), pp. 1–15, here: p. 1.

[3] This was a headline in Nairobi's *Daily Nation*, 8 September 2011, cited in ibid.

[4] Lisa Thompson and Chris Tapscott, 'Introduction: Mobilization and Social Movements in the South—The Challenges of Inclusive Governance', in idem (eds), *Citizenship and Social Movements. Perspectives from the Global South* (London: Zed Books, 2010), pp. 1–32, here: p. 1.

[5] Brandes and Engels, 'Social Movements', p. 2. Examples of this literature include Karl von Holdt, 'Social Movement Unionism: the Case of South Africa', *Work, Employment & Society* 2 (2002), pp. 283–304; Rebecca Pointer, 'Questioning the Representation of South Africa's "New Social Movements": A Case Study of the Mandela Park Anti-Eviction Campaign', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 4 (2004), pp. 271–294; Kimberly Lanegran, 'South Africa's Civic Association Movement: ANC's Ally or Society's "Watchdog"? Shifting Social Movement–Political Party Relation', *African Studies Review* 2 (1995), pp. 101–126; Peter Alexander, 'Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests: a Preliminary Analysis', *Review of African Political Economy* 123 (2010), pp. 25–40.

landless workers' movements or feminist movements are central terrains of both empirical and theoretical investigation,[6] social movements in Africa, as Brandes and Engels summarize the state of the art, 'largely remain under-researched and under-theorized'[7]—and, one could add, under-historicized.

Social Movements as Civil Society?

A rough periodization of the history of social movements in post-colonial Africa would start with the first three decades of independence (1960s to 1980s) which can be seen as a period when liberation movements held state power—and then often transformed themselves into repressive and authoritarian governments that quickly established one-party states. In the early 1990s a wind of change blew through Africa, multi-party systems were introduced, and enormous democratic hopes were put on the respective 'civil societies'. A third period followed, during which numerous civil society groups were co-opted by international agencies and donors such as the World Bank. These groups then often turned into professional development agencies.[8]

Social movements in Africa are often analysed in the framework of civil society. The concept of 'civil society' appeared prominently in the field of African studies at a time when the failure of African states and their elites to deliver services regarded as essential for a 'modern' state such as health services, education and infrastructure became apparent.[9] 'Civil society' then appeared as a 'deus ex machina' that was very much inspired by North American structures and institutions. In the eyes of scholars and development practitioners, civil society not only represented spaces of political opposition and autonomy, but was also conceptualized as the most promising 'agent of modernization'. The success of civil societies in

[6] See Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protests: Latin American Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Gary Prevost et al. (eds), *Social Movements and Leftist Governments in Latin America. Confrontation or Co-optation?* (London: Zed Boooks, 2012); Richard Stahler-Sholk et al. (eds), *Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Resistance, Power, and Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

[7] Brandes and Engels, 'Social Movements', p. 2.

[8] Ibid., p. 4. This development is apparent in Ebenezer Obadare (ed.), *The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa* (Berlin: Springer, 2014).

[9] It is crucial to note that this failure is closely linked to the effects of the oil crisis of 1973/1974 and the politics of IMF and World Bank which banked on the miracles of the market, not on the state. See Frederick Cooper, 'Writing the History of Development', *Journal of Modern European History* 1 (2010), pp. 5–23.

engaging authoritarian states in Eastern Europe even furthered the idea of African civil societies as alternatives to the apparently weak and at the same time authoritarian African states.[10] The pursuit of civil society throughout the African continent, the political scientist Crawford Young stressed in the early 1990s, is a 'drama of redemption whose potential nobility commands our admiration'.[11]

The perspective on African civil society as the *locus sine qua non* for progressive politics changed: A few years later civil society was no longer understood as an a priori space of homogenous political opposition, but as a rather unpredictable factor shaped by conflicting and even politically conservative interests based, for example, on gender, ethnic identities and class. Some authors emphasized that civil society also constituted an arena in which states and other powerful actors intervene to influence the political agendas of organized groups with the intention of defusing opposition.[12] Two dynamics between civil society and the state came to the forefront of the debate: Firstly, social services continued to be dismantled in the neo-liberal wave after 1989 while authoritarian rule did not go away even after the introduction of multi-party systems. This further motivated some political actors to digress from state institutions. Civil society became conceptualized as a shelter for disadvantaged social strata that turned away from the state instead of confronting it. Often supported by Northern NGOs, grassroots organizations started to organize their own supply with social services and thereby structurally replaced and supported the state. Secondly, the idea of participation in governance issues allowed for the conceptualization of civil society organizations as independent organs for the control of the government, as intermediate structure between the state and local populations or as multipliers of ideas of human and civil rights or

[10] The debates of the late 1980s and 1990s are represented by René Lemarchand, 'Uncivil States and Civil Societies. How Illusion became Reality', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2 (1992), pp. 177–191; John W. Harbeson et al. (eds), *Civil Society and the State in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Robert Fatton Jr., 'Africa in the Age of Democratization. The Civil Limitations of Civil Society', *African Studies Review* 3 (1996), pp. 67–99; Maxwell Owusu, 'Domesticating Democracy: Culture, Civil Society and Constitutionalism in Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1 (1997), pp. 120–152; Michael Bratton, 'Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa', *World Politics* 3 (1989), pp. 407–430.

[11] Crawford Young, 'In Search of Civil Society', in Harbeson et al. (eds), *Civil Society*, pp. 33–50, p. 48.

[12] See Julie Hearn, 'The "Uses and Abuses" of Civil Society in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 28 (2001), pp. 43–53.

rule of law.[13] The focus of external donors shifting away from the state to civil societies went often hand in hand with a new emphasis on decentralization. This created unintended consequences. In order to benefit from development aid, it became crucial to stress the belonging to a specific group or locality. The effect was that in many places struggles emerged over the question of who was entitled to be 'autochthonous' and thus could profit from a development project.[14]

In short, in Africa as in other places, 'civil society' evoked for a while 'a polythetic clutch of signs. An all-purpose placeholder, it captures otherwise inchoate—as yet unnamed and unnameable—popular aspirations, moral concerns, sites and spaces of practices; likewise, it bespeaks a scholarly effort to recalibrate worn-out methodological tools, and to find a positive politics, amid conceptual confusion.'[15] From a decade or so ago, however, 'civil society' has lost its attraction both as a political saviour and as an analytical concept.

In the sparse scholarly production on social movements in Africa two central questions have emerged over the last two decades. The first addresses the ambivalent relationship of African social movements towards the colonial and post-colonial state, while the second focuses on the relation of social movements towards external actors and the related issue of the risk being controlled by donors and international NGOs. In the introduction to a volume published by the Dakar-based think tank 'Council for the Development of Social Movements and Democracy' (CODESRIA), Mahmood Mamdani warned against the conflation of social movements with civil society, and criticized most (Western) scholars for reproducing an allegedly universal idea of 'civil society' that is deeply rooted in the false dualism of tradition and modernity emerging from modernization theory.[16] This volume, rarely referred to in the European debates, remained on

[13] Brandes and Engels, 'Social Movements', p. 8. See Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, 'Local Powers and a Distant State in Rural Central African Republic', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3 (1997), pp. 441–468; Aili Mari Tripp, *Changing the Rules. The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[14] See Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging. Autochthony, Citizenship and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[15] John L. Comaroff/Jean Comaroff, 'Introduction', in idem (eds), *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa. Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 1–43, here: p. 3.

[16] See Mahmood Mamdani, 'Introduction', in idem and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (eds), *African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1995), pp. 1–34.

its own for a long time. Two recent publications both raise the question whether social movements in Africa are to be understood as global phenomena or if these African movements differ fundamentally from those in Europe or the Americas. In other words: What is African about African social movements, and to what extent they were shaped by external actors, concepts and norms? Miles Larmer is convinced that

> social movements actually existing in Africa are unavoidably hybrid in nature, utilizing and adapting Western ideas, funding, forms or organization and methods of activism. Consequently, the enduring influence of universalist models that have their origins in the West, and the profound inequalities and power relations between Western agencies and African social movements, should be part of the analysis of social movements.[17]

There can be little doubt indeed that international, and in particular 'Western', actors, ideas and norms exercise substantial influence on African social movements and struggles. However, it is often ignored that there are social movements in Africa that reflect 'Western' ideas to a much lesser extent. Consequently, these movements are hardly recognized as social movements from a Western—neither academic nor activist—perspective. This ignorance particularly applies to Muslim organizations in Africa which often have their own media and centres of debate at their disposal, which play important roles in a variety of social movements.[18] So far, Western scholars and activists have tended to privilege Westernized intellectuals as their counterparts and objects of study for both ideological and more pragmatic reasons, such as the accessibility of the European languages in

[17] Miles Larmer, 'Social Movement Struggles in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy* 125 (2010) (Special issue on Social movement struggles in Africa), pp. 251–262, here: p. 257. The other volume addressing related questions is Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (eds), *Movers and Shakers: Social Movements in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[18] It is telling that the scholarship discussing social movements in the context of Islam and contemporary Muslim societies does not consider sub-Saharan Africa. See Quinatn Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islam Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). One has to add that Islam studies is still largely neglecting the theme of social movements. For one of the few case studies that employs a focus on Muslim social movements in Africa see Benjamin Soares, 'An Islamic Social Movement in Contemporary West Africa: NASFAT of Nigeria', in Ellis and Van Kessel, *Movers*, pp. 178–196.

which these intellectuals communicated.[19] Many scholars of Africa avoid a straightforward definition of social movements and opt instead for a list of different organizations and activities—NGOs, civil society organizations, self-defined social movements, strikes and riots, the mob and the crowd—in order to circumscribe the phenomenon.[20]

How do the data we have on contemporary social movements in Africa—most of these data in fact referring to South Africa—relate to the general debates that have emerged in the study of social movements? In this regard, two assertions seem to be particularly crucial:[21] first, that the central point of social struggles for a more human development has shifted from the arena of production to that of consumption; and second, that struggles concerning identity are replacing ones mainly oriented towards material issues, especially in post-industrial societies. Looking at the evidence from Africa, it is true that social struggles, again especially in South Africa, have expanded into the arena of identity politics. However, movements concerned with relations of production continue to exist and remain crucial to the sustainability of struggles concerning consumption. Thus while identity movements and struggles are increasing, material issues are as relevant to these struggles as they were to earlier social movements. Habib and Okupu-Mensah stress that the main feature of social movements in Africa is that they are 'an avenue for marginalized people and those concerned about their possibility to impact material distribution and social exclusion and to claim a certain degree of influence and power over the state itself'.[22] In this capacity, they are also vital for a functioning democracy in African states, especially in those with only one dominant political party. But it does not necessarily ensue that social movements are inherently democratic.

[19] There is much research on (the history of) Muslim intellectuals that is never discussed in the framework of social movements. See e.g. Benjamin Soares and René Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

[20] Larmer, 'Social Movement Struggles', p. 252.

[21] See Adam Habib and Paul Opoku-Mensah, 'Speaking to Global Debates through a National and Continental Lens: South African and African Social Movements in Comparative Perspective', in Ellis and van Kessel, *Movers*, pp. 44–62.

[22] Ibid., p. 59. See also Ebrima Sall, 'Social Movements in the Renegotiation of the Bases for Citizenship in West Africa', *Current Sociology* 4 (2004), pp. 595–614.

The Late Colonial Labour Movements

At least for historians it is a kind of truism to state that contemporary social movements in Africa—and elsewhere—can only be understood against the background of the historical and social-political surroundings they emerged from. Social movements in Africa, however, do not seem to have much of a history. This has to do with the fact that labour movements, for instance, are usually not discussed in the framework of social movements. A telling example for this observation is the rich and multi-layered historiography of the South African labour movements, which rarely refers to social movement approaches.[23] This equally applies to the history of labour movements in the decolonization period. Labour movements in Africa began to play an important role in the period immediately after the Second World War, when colonial governments in Africa were anxious to find a new basis of legitimacy and control, while social and political movements in Africa were asserting themselves with new vigour. These two processes shaped one another: while African movements sought to turn the government's need for order and economic growth into claims of entitlements and representation, officials had to rethink their policies in the face of new African challenges. The African historiography of the 1960s to 80s that developed a certain interest in labour history too easily subsumed labour movements under the nationalist question. But in fact labour movements and nationalist movements stood in—often creative—tensions to each other.[24]

When did the labour question become an important issue in colonial politics? And when did labour unrest and strikes cease to be simply local events and become issues that shaped both colony and metropolis? According to Fred Cooper, 'labour' became an important issue in colonial Africa in the 1930s. And since then, he argues, workers, and especially the more 'advanced' varieties—dock and railway workers, copper and tin miners, substantial agriculturalists such as Ghana cocoa farmers, organized in labour unions and farming co-operatives—largely forced the pace of decolonization. Cooper goes so far as to argue that colonial policy is best

[23] See Bill Freund, 'Labour Studies and Labour History in South Africa: Perspectives from the Apartheid Era and After', *International Review of Social History* 3 (2013), pp. 493–519.

[24] The key text for the history of labour and labour movements in the decolonization period is Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question and French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The following paragraphs are based on this study, which is crucial for the understanding of the central place of labour movements in Africa in the decade after the Second World War.

assessed by its relation to African labour. Key issues flow from this through their presence or absence: class, the changing economy, race and gender as socially defining categories. In its pre-war heyday, Cooper argues that colonialism, even when administered by relatively democratic governments in the home context, evaluated its African subjects essentially as primitive and ineffably 'different' tribesmen belonging to patriarchal and rural societies. The conservation of an apparently tribal Africa in combination with the extraction of unskilled seasonal or casual labour was common wisdom. The debates of the day were about the necessity for forced labour and the extent to which Africa was becoming diseased and depopulated due to the colonial demand for labour. Dynamism in this system was more or less exclusively confined to white settlers or some Levantine and Asian traders.

These assumptions began to be challenged in the 1930s, first by minority voices and then, in the years after the Second World War, on a broader front. This had various causes, not least the realization that the continuation of pre-war policies would lead to semi-stagnation in a world where development became the mantra of the day. The suddenly manifest capacity of African workers to organize and throw a spanner in the works of the extractive economy was, however, also of fundamental importance. Arguments mounted that African workers needed to be treated as workers, not as Africans. They could be permitted to form trade unions, but, critically, this was also a strategy of containment and boundedness. The colonial state also tried to conceptualize structures that would allow for a stable 'detribalized' urban working class in towns focused on a European family model. 'By the mid to late 1940s,' Cooper writes, 'influential officials wanted Africa to have a working class, to separate an identifiable group of people from the backwardness of rural Africa, attach its members to particular jobs and career ladders and over time make them into a predictable and productive collectivity.'[25] In his book, Cooper devotes much time to the careful analysis of particular strikes, conflicts and policy watersheds where these issues were repeatedly hammered out. It should be added here, that strikes in cities and mine towns between the 1930s and 1950s up to the 1970s constituted a kind of empirical centrepiece of African labour historiography. Most historians roughly distinguish three types of urban unrest: (1) general strikes which involved workers, the urban poor and, partially, other groups such as market women; (2) strikes of workers in key industries, for instance mining workers in the Zambian copper fields, or railway workers in French West Africa; (3)

[25] Cooper, *Decolonization*, p. 14.

uprisings of a 'cross-section' of the urban population, when, for example in Douala in September 1945, poor urban, workers organized in trade unions, and squatters joined in protests against the French administration.

Cooper convincingly shows that this early component of modernization theory applied to Africa was even more of a fantasy in the realm of real possibilities than the approach of the pre-war system to traditional African societies. Such change soon proved to be neither affordable nor politically manageable. Dualist policies which tried to draw a ring around a section of Africans who might prove to be able to modernize broke down rapidly. To some extent, African labour organizers turned the new discourse to their own advantage by making claims desired by their followers while African politicians found the resulting impotence of colonial administrators opportune. Colonial rulers decided that the contradictions that were increasingly apparent would best be resolved by African politicians rather than by them; the expenditures entailed by reform strategies were not worth engendering. Cooper therefore places the labour question squarely at the heart of the explanation for the precipitous character of the decolonization in Africa. He argues that major shifts in approach are especially dramatic and clear in French West Africa, where elements of destructive compulsion were still firmly in place in the 1930s but where the impulse towards modernization and assimilation quickly became so much stronger.

There is an ironic charm—but also a kind of Pyrrhic victory—in the African success in defeating European developmentalist logic. Cooper views the Europeans' decision to accept unionist demands that African labourers should be treated on the same basis as their European counterparts as a mutual failure to comprehend African social reality. It was a consequential failure, since the cost of providing European-scale wages and benefits under African economic conditions could not be borne by either colonial or post-colonial regimes. European governments were thus encouraged to withdraw from Africa, while their local successors co-opted some of the labour leadership regime but rather quickly suppressed the unions as an autonomous force. An interesting topic for future research is, in fact, the fate of trade unions and labour movements in independent Africa.[26] There are some implicit answers in the studies of Cooper and others which need

[26] The scholarly literature on trade unions in independent Africa is very sparse. For a recent collection see Craig Phelan (ed.), *Trade Unions in West Africa. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2011). One of the few newer books on labour in post-colonial Africa (beyond South Africa) is Lynn Schler et al. (eds), *Rethinking Labour in Africa, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2011).

further evaluation: First, the colonial state, through its policies of registration and welfarism that were only directed towards certain sectors of the economy, succeeded in breaking the unity of the working class before the end of the colonial period. Hence independent African states inherited an already fragmented and weakened working class. Second, many workers considered 'stabilized' in fact were then able to maintain links with rural areas, and this still continues. This ensured a certain, continuously shrinking, level of security outside the job. Thus, jobs have been less crucially important for basic survival than for European or American workers and militancy has suffered. Third, the period of effective strikes in Africa in the final decades of colonialism was coterminous with a period of general economic expansion, whereas the economic contraction that independent African states have experienced, especially after the oil crisis of 1973/1974, has given workers naturally worried about their position in a faltering economy little opportunity to strike.

Another observation deriving from Cooper's work is how important the labour question in fact was for the decision of European powers to leave Africa. There is good reason to think that Cooper tends to exaggerate the significance of both the colonial authorities and African subjects in determining the stages and outcomes of the decolonization process. The decisive power over African affairs ultimately lay at higher levels of European public and private sectors, reacting to their own perceptions of Africa's role in the international economy. It was the crises of the Depression and post-Second World War eras, rather than colonialist understandings of what were still very small African urban populations and African working classes, that drove the modernization and development policies analysed by Cooper. It was also the recognition, by the mid-1950s, of Africa's irrelevance to the reinvigorated European and global economies that made the cost of misconceptions about managing newly growing African cities and African workers so unacceptable.[27]

The range of social movements in Africa is potentially huge: from loser groups such as some neighbourhood, women's or youth groups and more or less spontaneous protests to well organized and highly institutionalized forms such as trade unions. Some socially based movements such as the labour movement in French West Africa in the late 1940s and 50s, mobilization against apartheid, the campaign against blood diamonds, and the women's movement in Liberia, had a major effect on Africa's recent

[27] See Ralph A. Austen, Africa and Globalization: Colonialism, Decolonization and the Postcolonial Malaise, *Journal of Global History* 3 (2006), pp. 403–408.

history. Yet the most influential theories concerning social movements worldwide have paid little heed to Africa, basing themselves more often on cases drawn from other continents. Thus it would be crucial for a more global perspective on social movements to include evidence from Africa, while Africanists working on social and political activism should link their work more systematically to theories on social movements derived from the North Atlantic realm and Latin America. In Africa, as elsewhere, social movements are by no means recent phenomena, and much work is needed to historicize recent developments in the realm of politics and notions of political and social protest and integrate them into longer histories. A very promising starting point for such an endeavour could be the history of labour associations and trade unions and an analysis of their activities both in their concrete historical settings and in their global entanglements. In this context, it will be essential to look not only at the wage labour sector, but to include those activities which are usually lumped under the vast and imprecise category of the 'informal sector'.

Further Readings

This article argues that social movements have been largely neglected in the field of African studies, especially concerning their historical dimensions. Consequently, the number of relevant studies is limited. A few collective volumes and special journal issues provide useful introductions, but mainly or exclusively focus on social movements in independent Africa, with an emphasis on developments after 1990. The volume *African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy*, edited by Mahmood Mamdani and Ernest Wamba-dia Wamba and published in 1995 by the Dakar-based think tank CODESRIA, warns against the conflation of social movements with civil society, and argues that social movements in Africa may include initiatives such as NGOs that are non-governmental and formally apolitical, but may equally comprise initiatives that are explicitly anti-governmental and overtly political. The editors further argue that no distinction should be made between 'political' and 'social' movement.

It took 14 more years for the next relevant volume on social movements to see the light of day: Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (eds), *Movers and Shakers: Social Movements in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) comprises eight case studies covering a wide range of social movements and underlining their great diversity. One of the insights of the volume is that movements in Africa never did fit into the sketch of a neat chronological succession from working-class to middle-class activism, and that recently,

especially in Southern Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe), trade unions and labour movements played a crucial role. Two special journal issues further summarize the state of the art and conclude that social movements remain largely under-researched and under-theorized: Nikolai Brandes and Bettina Engels (eds), *Social Movements in Africa* (*Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 20 (2011)); and Miles Larmer et al. (eds), *Social Movement Struggles in Africa* (*Review of African Political Economy* 37 (125), (2010)). One recent monograph attempts to put social movements at the centre of contemporary African history and argues with fervour that social movements—defined as popular movements of the working class, the poor, and other oppressed and marginalized sections of African society—have played a central role in shaping Africa's history since independence: Peter Dwyer and Leo Zeilig, *African Struggles Today: Social Movements since Independence* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012).

There is a growing number of case studies on contemporary social movements in Africa, especially on South Africa. Steve Robbins, *From Revolutions to Rights in South Africa. Social Movements, NGOs & Popular Politics after Apartheid* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2008) shows that innovative and NGO–social movement collaborations in post-Apartheid South Africa mainly developed in the political margins, beyond national organizations such as COSATU, one of the most politically influential and largest social movements in South Africa. Ercüment Celik, *Street Traders. A Bridge Between Trade Unions and Social Movements in Contemporary South Africa* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2010) adopts a rather optimistic tone in arguing that the mobilization of street traders' struggles brought together social movements with trade unions, emphatically signalling the potential reactivation of social movement unionism in South Africa. General volumes on social movements such as Lisa Thompson and Chris Tapscott (eds), *Citizenship and Social Movements. Perspectives from the Global South* (London: Zed Books, 2010) include African examples, again mainly from South Africa. There are also some instructive comparative studies including South Africa, most notably Gay W. Seidman, *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970–1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). And one may refer to a number of articles that focus on specific movements in different parts of Africa, albeit usually without substantial contextualization within broader theories of social movements. See e.g. Aili Mari Tripp, 'The Politics of Autonomy and Cooptation in Africa: The Case of the Uganda Women's Movements', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1 (2001), pp. 101–128.

Finally, some studies recently employed a longer historical perspective on social movements in Africa and included the late colonial period, but remained on a rather general level. See Miles Larmer, 'Historicizing Activism in Late Colonial and Post-Colonial Sub-Saharan Africa', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (2015), pp. 67–89; Peter Dwyer et al., 'An Epoch of Uprisings: Social Movements in Africa since 1945', *Socialist History Journal* 40 (2012), pp. 1–23. There is some excellent work on labour and labour movements in late colonial Africa, most notably Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society. The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), but again there is very little systematic discussion of social movement theory and approaches. This also applies to an excellent case study of a strike in West Africa a few years after the Second World War that shows the complexity of strike activities and the various layers of workers' movements: Frederick Cooper, '"Our Strike"': Equality, Anticolonial Politics and the 1947–1948 Railway Strike in French West Africa, *Journal of African History* 1 (1996), pp. 81–118.

Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien Nr. 20/2011, 11. Jg., 1-15.

Social movements in Africa

Nikolai Brandes & Bettina Engels[1]

Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco: since early 2011, television news worldwide has shown people protesting against their governments on a nearly daily basis. Not only is the frequency of media reports on the protests new, but also that the demonstrations are explicitly presented as political movements. When tens of thousands of people marched in numerous cities (such as Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, Douala in Cameroon, or Port-au-Prince in Haiti) around the globe against the high costs of living in 2008, their protests were called 'food riots' and put in the socio-economic frame of hunger and poverty. This is not to say that socio-economic grievances were not behind the 2008 demonstrations – but those 'food riots' equally aimed at bringing down governments and initiating political change, and high prices might also have been a trigger of what is now called the 'Arab spring'. We currently observe that political resistance is perceived as something positive: media and 'Western' politics do no longer call for an almost apolitical 'civil society' but appreciate social movements that aim at bringing down their respective governments. We argue that in some respect, there is a new quality in how African social movements are presented in 'Western' media and politics: Recently, trying to bring down governments is presented in positive ways whereas in the years before, social movements were supposed to be a 'civil society' almost stabilizing the state. Speculations circulate that the current protests will not stop in Northern Africa and the Middle East: "Will the Arab Uprising Spread to Sub Saharan Africa?", Nairobi's *Daily Nation* headlines[2], referring to Zimbabwe, Uganda and Senegal.

Nevertheless, the study of African social movements so far is a neglected field of research in African Studies and Social Sciences. Not only does Africa

[1] We would like to thank Birgit Englert and the editors of Stichproben for their constant support and helpful feedback during the compilation of this edition of Stichproben, and Hannah Franzki and Nikki Grout for their valuable and insightful comments on this introduction.

[2] Daily Nation, 8 September 2011

remain largely absent from social science research using a social movement perspective. Social movement theory largely focuses on socio-political movements in Europe, North- and South America (cf. Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1998; Della Porta/Diani 1999). In addition the social movement theory literature has so far hardly been explored within African studies, even though a growing number of empirical studies are dealing with different forms of civil action and political mobilization in African contexts.[3] Especially compared to Latin American Studies where labour unions, landless workers' movements or feminist movements are central terrains of both empirical and theoretical investigation (cf. Eckstein 1989; Escobar/Alvarez 1992), social movements in Africa largely remain under-researched and under-theorised. This is particularly true for African studies in German speaking countries, where any attempt to take a critical inventory in this respect is missing. However, to some extent the neglect of a social movement perspective applies to African Studies more generally.

Though social movements are now also recognized by 'Western' academics, politics and media as actors of social and political change in Africa, there are few recent studies in the social sciences on the subject. For this reason, our aim is to explore how far current social movements in sub-Saharan Africa are actors that take a critical stance towards social and political domination. Which social movements shape the political landscape of contemporary African societies? What are the strategies they use to intervene in social debates and influence politics? How do social movements in Africa mobilize, given the context of ongoing resource scarcity? Finally, in which ways do African social movements participate in global alliances?

Research on social movements is closely linked to the empirical phenomena studied in Europe and Northern America: 'old' social movements, notably workers movements and unionism; civil rights movements (in particular the US Black Power Movement); and the so-called 'new social movements' emerging in the 1980s such as movements against nuclear power, for gender

[3] Cf. Klopp/Orina 2002; Leslie 2006; Polet 2007; Halim 2009; Harsch 2009; Odion-Akhaine 2009. A particularly well studied case is the Republic of South Africa. Scholars have explored the struggle against Apartheid (van Kessel 2000) as well as a broad range of movements in post-Apartheid South Africa: against privatisation and liberalisation of basic social services (e.g. water and health services) or discrimination related to sexual identity; for land rights or gender equality (cf. Bond 1999; Ballard et al. 2005; Alexander 2010; Celik 2010).

equality, for sexual identity rights, and others. Starting from the 1960s, social movement studies were funded upon Mancur Olson's 'logic of collective action' (Olson 1965) and tried to explain why people participate in public protest even though 'free riding' seems to be more rational for them. Building upon the assumption of rationalist logics of action, resource mobilization theory argues that protest depend on which material, ideal and personnel resources can be mobilized (McCarthy/Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). Charles Tilly was among the first to shift the focus from pure mobilization to the political system social movements act in (Tilly 1978; cf. Kitschelt 1986). Accordingly, political-structural conditions (for instance, institutional openness, ability and will for repression) explain why protest does or does not occur. The focus thereby is on formal political institutions and structures. Scholars from different theoretical perspectives agree that social movements and protest basically come from social, political and economic grievances. But grievances as such do not necessarily result in collective action. Whereas the first studies, focussing on the costs and benefits of protest participation and on political opportunity structures, aimed at explaining why people join social movements and protests, from the 1980s on, researchers have started to ask why some issues seem to be more suitable for protest than others and tried to explain the dynamics of mobilization (rather than the simple reason why people do or do not protest). They argue that 'framing' – how grievances are interpreted – is a decisive factor of protest and mobilization (McAdam 2001; Snow 2004; Polletta/Ho 2006). Thus far, there is hardly any research combining social movement theory and the study of protest in Africa.[4]

Social movements in the African context: an upcoming field of research?

The hitherto most influential book on social movements in Africa in general is a volume edited by Mahmood Mamdani and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (Mamdani/Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995). 'African Studies in Social Movements and Democracy' was published by CODESRIA[5] in 1995 and only sparsely referred to in the European debate. Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba

[4] Some authors in this issue try to bridge the gap and critically assess how far social movement theory can help to develop a better understanding of contemporary political contention in Africa (cf. contributions by Alex Veit and Elísio Macamo).

[5] The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, see www.codesria.org

aimed at revealing how theories and debates within African studies ignore social movements. They argue that scholars reproduce an allegedly universal idea of 'civil society' that is deeply rooted the dualism of tradition and modernity emerging from modernisation theory. Only recently have European scholars started to look at African social movements both from the perspective of African and social movement studies. The volume edited by Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (Ellis/van Kessel 2009b) comprises eight case studies, mostly on Anglophone African states (Nigeria, Malawi, South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone; Mauretania and Somalia with Arabic respectively Somali as the official language are the only exceptions). Ellis and van Kessel do not start with a definition of social movements based on the literature. Their idea is rather to look at different examples of African movements in order to compare empirical findings with existing theoretical perspectives afterwards. Ellis and van Kessel raise the general question of whether social movements are to be understood as a global phenomenon or whether African movements rather do fundamentally differ from those in Europe or the Americas.

In 2010, the *Review of African Political Economy* published a special issue on 'Social movement struggles in Africa' (Vol. 37, Iss. 125). This issue is complementary to Ellis' and van Kessels edited volume as it presents several case studies mostly from French speaking countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and the DRC. The articles were first presented at a conference held in Paris in early 2010. Interestingly, this conference was not explicitly on social movements – at least, the name did not suggest it: '*lutter dans les Afrique*'[6] ('*struggles in the Africas*'). Applying a broad concept of African social movements including trade unions, religious organizations and NGOs, ROAPE's editor Miles Larmer argues that at all times, social movements in Africa have been firmly influenced by external, notably 'Western' actors, concepts and norms.

> [S]ocial movements actually existing in Africa are unavoidably hybrid in nature, utilising and adapting Western ideas, funding, forms of organisation and methods of activism. Consequently, the enduring influence of universalist models that have their origins in the West, and the profound inequalities and power relations between Western agencies

[6] Cf. also *Genèses* No. 4/2010 (81), Banégas et al. 2010

and African social movements, should be part of the analysis of social movements (Larmer 2010: 257; vgl. Pommerolle/Siméant 2008).

Ellis and van Kessel argue equally that financial dependency from external donors, directly or indirectly via local NGOs, is a characteristic feature of several social movements in Africa (Ellis/van Kessel 2009a). Researchers and activist frequently discuss this influence controversially.

We agree with Larmer that, without doubt, international and in particular 'Western' actors, ideas and norms do influence African social movements and struggles. Beyond that, we stress two aspects: first, social movements do exist in Africa which less reflect 'Western' ideas – and that, therefore, they are hardly recognized as social movements from a Western perspective, neither academic nor activist. These are, for instance, religious organizations such as the *Nasr Allah al-Fatih Society of Nigeria*, described by Benjamin Soares (Soares 2009) or ethno-nationalist movements as portrayed by Kehinde Olayode in this issue. Second, rather than seeing African movements one-sidedly shaped by global and 'Western' influences, we emphasize that histories and concepts of 'Africa' and 'the West' are inseparably interlinked and interwoven (cf. Randeria 1999). We can only imagine 'African' social movements by necessarily comparing them to an imagined Northern/Western counterpart; at the same time, these 'Western' actors, scholars, concepts, ideas and norms only become 'Western' through the polarized construction of 'the West and the rest', as Stuart Hall put it (Hall 1992), meaning that they are defined against an 'Oriental' or 'African' Other.

This Stichproben issue aims at continuing the debate on social movements in Africa that was started by Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba in the 1990s and re-started in contemporary times by Ellis and van Kessel as well as the ROAPE issue. Several important questions still remain to be discussed, including the ambivalent relationship of African social movements towards the colonial and post-colonial state and vis-à-vis external actors, including the risk of being controlled by donors and international NGOs.

Contemporary social movements – in Africa as elsewhere – can only be understood against the background of the historical and social-political surroundings they emerged from. Regarding the historical emergence of macro-economic structures, Larmer distinguishes four historical periods of social movement struggles in Africa: nationalism and liberation struggles in the 1950s and 60s, suppression and incorporation from 1960-75, economic

crisis and structural adjustment from 1975-89, and pro-democracy movements from 1990-2010. Unlike Larmer, we focus on the dimension of power and (state) domination and identify four (slightly different) overlapping historical phases that are relevant for the understanding of social movements in contemporary Africa. In doing so, we do not deny that local and regional contexts are shaped by a very specific historicity and by no means that Africa 'as a whole' could be ascribed a uniform history. However we do assume that some historical macro trends can be identified that are relevant at least for several African countries. The four historical phases we identify are the following: firstly, the phase of colonization and decolonization: anti-colonial liberation movements are historically relevant social movements. Secondly, in several countries a period followed when liberation movements held state power – and often performed much more repressively than a lot of supporters locally and internationally had hoped. Thirdly, in the early 1990s a phase of political system transformation started in numerous states, and enormous democratic hopes were put on the respective 'civil societies'. A fourth period followed, its characteristic being the co-optation of 'civil societies' by international agencies and donors such as the World Bank. In this period, for instance, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans emerged and a number of civil society actors transformed themselves into professional development agencies. These agencies partly substitute the state insofar as they fulfil tasks that state agencies are supposed to carry out. For most people (in Africa as elsewhere), one of the state's main tasks is to guarantee access to basic social services, notably health and education. Without reproducing neoliberal allegations of 'state failure', from a basic social service provision perspective, the coverage of several states in Africa is limited. In numerous cases, the state happens to be authoritarian and aggressive.[7] However, for social movements in Africa, their relationship vis-à-vis the state is a core question.

Civil society and social movements

In our view, the term 'social movements' provides a different approach to societal developments than the term 'civil society' does. Although both can

[7] Needless to say, that both features – limited basic social services and authoritarian states – are not to be observed exclusively in Africa but in all historical and spatial contexts around the globe.

help to describe the same empirical realities, actors, and organizations, they make it possible to look at them from different angles. As the term 'civil society' is much more prevalent in African Studies today, we will briefly recapitulate the changing connotations of this contested concept. This helps us to distinguish our approach to social movements from present-day mainstream approaches to African politics that often rely on a constricted understanding of civil societies.

After the decline of single party rule in Eastern and Central Europe, a process often associated with the successful impact of 'civil society', African Studies in the early 1990s were characterised by highly controversial perspectives on the outlooks and potentials of civil societies in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the height of this debate was limited to a few years. As in literature on civil societies in general, most of the literature on African civil societies follows a basic conceptual differentiation. The term 'civil society' refers to several concepts. In a rather descriptive way, it refers to a societal sphere between state institutions and familial structures. At the same time – and in a more normative way – it pictures either dynamics which countervail a total appropriation of a society by a state or the site of production of hegemonial discourses which provide a resource of legitimacy for state power.[8]

When first appearing prominently within the field of African Studies in the mid-1980s, the term 'civil society' was mainly used to identify spaces of political opposition and autonomy. Influenced by the success of civil societies in engaging authoritarian states in Eastern Europe, several authors conceptualized African civil societies as defenders against the monopolisation of society by the state. Jean-François Bayart describes how throughout the 1980s grassroots organizations tried to establish independent spaces against the postcolonial African "Policeystaat" (Bayart 1986). Crawford Young caricatured this later as the juxtaposition of "a veritably satanic state" and an "angelic civil society" (Young 1994: 47). In the following years, this binary conception of a totalitarian state and a rather monolithic civil society fighting over rooms for manoeuvre was pushed aside by approaches that

[8] Mamdani underlines the difference between the last two currents and distinguishes "society centrists", which undertake the fostering of civil societies against society's appropriation by the state, and "state centrists", which imagine the state as an autonomous sphere of universal representation of interests and as an outcome of conflicts within civil society (Mamdani 1995).

highlighted their interdependency. The early 1990s were characterised by a change of perspective from the state to society as the main sphere of political negotiation, where the "state-in-society" (Migdal 2003) became one player amongst others (Kunz 1995: 183). As a result, civil society was no longer understood as an *a priori* space of homogenous political opposition, but as a rather unpredictable factor (Fatton 1992) intrinsically infused by conflicting and even politically conservative interests based on sex, ethnic identities, social class, etc. However, several authors started to focus on political negotiations based on these differences as a resource of legitimacy for state politics (Harbeson 1994).

At the same time, the good governance-paradigm began to offer new programmatic perspectives for the duties of civil societies. The idea of the state as a set of neutral institutions that just need sound administration (a transparent budget, rule of law, fight against corruption etc.) went along with structural adjustment programmes and privatisations that allowed the implantation of former state responsibilities within the wider society. Broad societal participation in governance issues turned into a major point of reference for the debate on civil society and raised awareness of two dynamics between civil society and the state: Firstly, ongoing authoritarian structures and the dismantling of public social services motivated some political actors to digress from state institutions. Civil society became conceptualised as a shelter for disadvantaged social stratums that turn away from the state instead of confronting it. Often supported by Northern NGOs, grassroots organizations started to organize their own supply with social services and thereby structurally replaced and supported the state. Secondly, the idea of participation in governance issues allowed for the conceptualisation of civil society organizations as independent organs for the control of the government, as intermediate structure between the state and local populations or as multiplicators of ideas of human and civil rights or rule of law (Chazan 1994; Gyimah-Boadi 1996).[9]

[9] The good governance paradigm of a state with neutral interests faced heavy criticism. According to Robert Fatton, this concept ignores class differences that render a balance of interests through a universal participation of all citizens in state issues impossible. Liberal democracy could not be implemented in Africa as the simultaneous introduction of market economies and privatizations stabilized ruling classes instead of opening up new opportunities for the socially disadvantaged (Fatton 1992, 1995).

Approaches that frame civil society actors as stakeholders of an opposition to governments or as independent movers of powerful political discourses have been in decline over the last decade. Although civil societies continue to be analysed as a major factor in democratization processes, they seem to be programmatically understood as fulfilling a rather complementary function within the state by providing legitimacy and social services. State building tends to come first, democracy second (cf. Ottaway 2003).[10] This understanding correlates with developments in Africa since the 1990s. Supported by bi- and multilateral donors, many old and new sub-Saharan civil society actors turned into professional service providers and consultancies.

Social movements can be defined as "interlocking networks of groups, social networks and individuals, and the connection between them is a shared collective identity that tries to prevent societal change by non-institutionalized tactics" (van Stekelenburg/Klandermans 2009: 20f; cf. Della Porta/Diani 1999). Bearing this in mind, the literature on civil societies did often deal with actors that could equally be described as social movements. However, we do not simply want to replace one term by another. Instead, we want to distinguish our approach to the actors under study from the currently predominating discourse on civil society as a service provider or as a resource of state legitimacy. As opposed to this predominant meaning that the term has gained over the last twenty years, we want to turn the analytical focus back on the actors. We feel that with the ongoing focus on the integration of civil society actors into the projected good governance structures, a broader perspective on their political demands, organizational structures, modes of mobilization, 'collective identities' or 'non-institutionalized tactics' has been lost. With our conceptual choice of the term social movements, we want to highlight a shift towards a perspective that does justice to these factors.[11] Furthermore, a social movements approach can go beyond the common civil society approach in order to underline the critical or – possibly – emancipatory stance social actors take to-

[10] Mamdani sees a risk in an overly positive perception of the state. Through the good governance project, the quest for more state efficiency would have become more popular than the one for more democracy (Mamdani 1995)

[11] However, if we (as researchers) do recognize social movements or civil societies, this is undoubtedly subject to scholarly trends. We thus underline that we understand both concepts as analytical (and normative) perspectives that could both be applied to the same historical phases.

wards dominant political relations. It reveals how they demand more democratic participation in the formation of societal activities and state policies or take them into their own hands.

About this issue

The range of social movements is huge: from looser groups such as some neighbourhood, women's or youth groups and more or less spontaneous protests to well organized and highly institutionalized forms such as trade unions. As a matter of course, one journal issue can only represent a very small section of the highly diverse reality of social movements in contemporary Africa. Nevertheless, examples of at least some of the core actors are portrayed in this issue such as trade unions (Danièle Obono) and women's movements (Andrea Kaufmann). Other, no less important ones such as students' movements are missing. A core question is in how far social movements qua definition have to be emancipatory in their aims – and how the emancipatory potential should be defined. With regard to the emancipatory potential of social movements, case studies in this issue include movements by socially marginalized people, namely slave descendants (Lotte Pelckmans and Eric Hahonou). They also raise the question in how far ethnonationalist movements can be seen as being emancipatory (Kehinde Olayode). All empirical cases analysed in this issue show that the state is the core point of reference for social movements: all movements presented here address the state in one way or another. For instance, democracy movements try to hinder presidential third terms (Boniface Dulani); women's movements demand the legal persecution of sexualized violence. Case study examples come from more or less all regional and linguistic areas of sub-Saharan Africa: Nigeria, Liberia and Mali in Western Africa, Mozambique and Angola, Malawi and Namibia, and the DRC. Given the fact that the Republic of South Africa is the only country whose social movements have been widely studied in existing literature, in this special issue, we deliberately do not focus on RSA. In addition to single and comparative case studies, two articles aim at advancing the theoretical debate on social movements in Africa.

The first one is *Alex Veit*'s contribution on 'direct internationalised rule'. Starting from the example of demobilized militia fighters in the DRC who partly organized themselves in an association trying to bring their request forward to international organizations, Veit analyses the relationship be-

tween international authorities (such as UN agencies) and individuals (such as the former combatants in DRC). In order to theoretically capture these relations, he scrutinizes approaches from social movement theory, global governance, and governmentality studies. He concludes that "a political sociology of contestation of internationalized rule needs to carve out the overlapping aspects of studies of contention and everyday resistance".

In contrast, *Elísio Macamo* argues that the concept of social movements "may prove inadequate to a study of contestation in African settings". For Macamo, the social movements research programme suffers from an all too dominant relation to European experiences and from the tendency to frame any form of social contestation as political protest. As an alternative to this concept which "packages contestation into a normative frame of reference that lends normative and teleological legitimacy to protest", he defends the use of the term 'social criticism' to avoid passing judgement on the societal relevance of contestation.

The first case study article is a study of Nigerian trade unions. *Danièle Obono* analyses the role labour unions have played in Nigerian politics since the 1990s. Trade unions, she argues, function at the same time as producers of compromise between social actors and the state and as actors of contentious politics.

Boniface Dulani presents the case of Democracy Movements in Malawi, Namibia, Uganda and Zambia. Based on the analysis of political struggles to implement presidential term limits in these countries, he underlines several conditions which contribute to these movements' success or failure. Dulani sums up his findings in a catalogue that might prove to be useful when looking at other Democracy Movements, too.

The case analysed by *Lotte Pelckmans* and *Eric Hahonou* is an important feature in Western African politics, though nearly unknown in the European public: social movements of slave descendants. The legacies of slavery are not a matter of the past but still relevant in African social and political life. The authors present in detail the case of an emancipatory movement engaged in Malian identity politics on behalf of former Kel Tamasheq (Tuareg) slaves. They show how contemporary anti-slavery movements mobilize, what they claim and how they succeed or fail to achieve their aims. Comparing it to similar movements in several other West African states (Niger, Benin, Mauretania), Pelckmans and Hahonou argue that anti-slavery movements differ from other struggles such as 'food riots', women's or

peasant's movements. Movements of slave descendants pursue ideological aims related to citizenship and identity that are closely linked to material issues. The specificity of African anti-slavery movements, they suggest, is that they address ideological and material issues simultaneously.

Kehinde Olayode examines four ethno-nationalist organizsations in different parts of Nigeria. In particular, he explores these groups' influence on national politics and attempts to answer the question in how far they enhance popular participation. Ethno-nationalist movements, he argues, differ in many respects from 'conventional' civil society groups. Their roots are cultural ones, though since the early 1990s, they have started to engage in political struggles. They use human rights rhetoric in a highly selective way, and they mobilize on the grass roots level based on identity frameworks of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Mobilizsation based on ethno-nationalist identities is a characteristic feature of Nigerian politics also discussed as 'the national question'. Olayode concludes that "the inability of the various groups to resolve or agree on some of the issues related to the 'national question' is primarily responsible for the fragmentation of social movements in Nigeria along ethno-regional lines."

Andrea Kaufmann presents an example of women's movements. The case of Liberia is a particular one insofar as Liberian women's groups have played an important role in the peace movement that contributed to the end of the longstanding civil war. Nowadays, eight years after the war ended, women's organizations engage in post-conflict issues such as ending gender based violence or improving their communities' living conditions. In her anthropological study, Kaufmann describes the West Point Women, a women's organization in a quarter of Monrovia. She shows that the women primarily address the state which they keep responsible for social and economic grievances. Therefore, Kaufmann argues, women's groups are vital actors promoting social change on the local level and beyond.

Some of the papers in this issue have been presented at the 4th European Conference on Africans Studies in Uppsala, 15-18 June 2010. Those contributions to the ECAS double session 'social movements in Africa' that are not present in this journal can be found either at the conference website[12] or have been published elsewhere (van Kessel 2009; Daniel 2011).

[12] www.nai.uu.se/ecas-4/panels/41-60/panel-60/

Bibliography:

Alexander, Peter 2010. Rebellion of the poor: South Africa's service delivery protests: a preliminary analysis. In: Review of African Political Economy, 37:123, 25-40.

Ballard, Richard/Adam Habib/Imraan Valodia/Elke Zuern 2005. Globalization, marginalization and contemporary social movements in South Africa. In: African Affairs, 104:417, 615-634.

Banégas, Richard/Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle/Johanna Siméant 2010. Lutter dans les Afriques. In: Genèses, 4/2010 (81), 2-4.

Bayart, Jean-François 1986. "Civil Society in Africa", in: Chabal, Patrick (Ed.), Political Domination in Africa. Reflections on the Limits of Power, Cambrige: Cambridge University Press, pp. 109-125.

Bond, Patrick 1999. Globalization, Pharmaceutical Pricing, and South African Health Policy: Managing Confrontation with U.S. Firms and Politicians. In: International Journal of Health Services, 29:4, 765-792.

Celik, Ercüment 2010. Street Traders. A Bridge Between Trade Unions and Social Movements in Contemporary South Africa, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Chazan, Naomi 1994. "Engaging the State. Associational Life in Sub-Saharan Africa", in: Migdal, Joel S./Atul Kohli/Vivienne Shue (Eds.), State Power and Social Forces, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 255-289.

Daniel, Antje 2011. "Frauenorganisationen in der Post-Konflikt-Situation in Kenia im Spannungsfeld zwischen neuen und tradierten Handlungsräumen", in: Engels, Bettina/Corinna Gayer (Eds.), Geschlechterverhältnisse, Frieden und Konflikt. Feministische Denkanstöße für die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 113-133.

Della Porta, Donatella/Mario Diani (eds.) 1999. Social movements: An introduction, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Eckstein, Susan (ed.) 1989. Power and popular protest: Latin American social movements, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel 2009a. "Introduction: African social movements or social movements in Africa?" in: Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel (Eds.), Movers and shakers. Social movements in Africa, Leiden: Brill, 1-16.

Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel (eds.) 2009b. Movers and shakers: social movements in Africa, Leiden: Brill.

Escobar, Arturo/Sonia E. Alvarez (eds.) 1992. The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy, Boulder: Westview

Fatton, Robert 1992. Predatory rule. State and civil society in Africa, Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Fatton, Robert 1995. Africa in the age of democratization. The civic limitations of civil society. In: African Studies Review, 38:2, 67-99.

Gyimah-Boadi, Emmanuel 1996. Civil Society in Africa. In: Journal of Democracy, 7:2, 118-132.

Hall, Stuart 1992. "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power", in: Hall, Stuart/Bram Gieben (Eds.), Formations of Modernity, Cambridge u.a.: Polity Press, 275-330.

Harbeson, John 1994. "Civil Society and Political Renaissance in Africa", in: Harbeson, John/Donald Rothschild/Naomi Chazan (Eds.), Civil society and the state in Africa, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1-30.

Jenkins, J. Craig 1983. Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements. In: Annual Review of Sociology, 9, 527-553

Kitschelt, Herbert P. 1986. Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies. In: British Journal of Political Science, 16:1, 57-85.

Kunz, Frank 1995. Civil Society in Africa. In: Journal of Modern African Studies, 33:1, 181-187.

Larmer, Miles 2010. Social movement struggles in Africa. In: Review of African Political Economy, 37:125, 251-262.

Mamdani, Mahmood 1995. "A critique of the state and civil society paradigm in africanist studies", in: Mamdani, Mahmood/Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (Eds.), African studies in social movements and democracy, Dakar: Codesria, 602-616.

Mamdani, Mahmood/Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba (eds.) 1995. African studies in social movements and democracy, Dakar: Codesria.

McAdam 2001. Dynamics of Contention, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, John D./Mayer N. Zald 1977. Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory. In: The American Journal of Sociology, 82:6, 1212-1241.

Migdal, Joel S. 2003. State in society: studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Olson, Mancur 1965. The Logic of Collective Action. Public Goods and the Theory of Groups: Harvard University Press.

Ottaway, Marina 2003. African Priorities. Democracy isn't the Place to Start. In: International Herald Tribune, May 23.

Polletta, Francesca/M. Kai Ho 2006. "Frames and Their Consequences." in: Goodin, Robert E./Charles Tilly (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis, Oxford: Oxford UP, 187-209.

Pommerolle, Marie-Emmanuelle/Johanna Siméant 2008. Un autre monde à Nairobi: le Forum social mondial 2007, entre extraversions et causes africaines, Paris: Karthala.

Randeria, Shalini 1999. "Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne", in: Rüsen, Jörn/Hanna Leitgeb/Norbert Jegelka (Eds.), Zukunftsentwürfe. Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 87-96.

Snow, David A. 2004. "Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields", in: Snow, David A./Sarah A. Soule/Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.), The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 380-412.

Soares, Benjamin 2009. "An Islamic social movement in contemporary West Africa: NASFAT of Nigeria", in: Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel (Eds.), Movers and Shakers. Social Movements in Africa, Leiden: Brill, 178-196.

Tarrow, Sidney G. 1998. Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics, Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP.

Tilly, Charles 1978. From Mobilization to Revolution, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

van Kessel, Ineke 2000. "Beyond Our Wildest Dreams". The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa, Charlottesville University Press of Virginia.

van Kessel, Ineke 2009. "The United Democratic Front's legacy in South Africa: Mission accomplished or vison betrayed?" in: Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel (Eds.), Movers and Shakers: Social Movements in Africa, Leiden: Brill, 197-220.

van Stekelenburg, Jacqueline/Bert Klandermans 2009. "Social movement theory: Past, present, and prospects", in: Ellis, Stephen/Ineke van Kessel (Eds.), Movers and shakers: social movements in Africa, Leiden: Brill, 17-43.

Young, Crawford 1994. "In Search of Civil Society", in: Harbeson, John/Donald Rothschild/Naomi Chazan (Eds.), Civil society and the state in Africa, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 33-50.

Journal of African History, 37 (1996), pp. 81–118

'OUR STRIKE': EQUALITY, ANTICOLONIAL POLITICS AND THE 1947–48 RAILWAY STRIKE IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA

BY FREDERICK COOPER
University of Michigan

THE strike of African railway workers which began in October 1947 was an event of epic dimensions: it involved 20,000 workers and their families, shut down most rail traffic throughout all of French West Africa, and lasted, in most regions, for five and a half months. As if the historical event were not large enough, it has been engraved in the consciousness of West Africans and others by the novel of Ousmanne Sembene, *God's Bits of Wood*. Sembene dramatizes a powerful strike effort weakened by the impersonal approach of trade unionists, by the seductions of French education, and by the greed of local élites. The strike is redeemed by its transformation into a truly popular movement dynamized by women, climaxing in a women's march on Dakar led by someone from the margins of society and leading to a coming together of African community against the forces of colonialism.

Sembene's novel both complicates the task of the historian and lends it importance: the written epic may influence oral testimony, yet the fictional account enhances the sense of participants that their actions shaped history. When a group of Senegalese graduate students and I went to the railway junction of Thiès to begin a project of collecting testimonies, some informants expressed resentment of Sembene for turning 'our strike' into his novel.[1] What needs most to be unpacked is the connection of the labor movement to the independence struggle: the two were both complementary

[1] The quoted phrase comes from an interview with Amadou Bouta Gueye, 9 Aug. 1994, Thiès. Oumar NDiaye, interviewed the same day, made much the same point. These interviews were part of a workshop and field studies program conducted in August 1994, by Dr Babacar Fall of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, and the present author. A series of training sessions for graduate students was led by Dr Robert Korstad of the Center for Documentary Studies of Duke University, and I accompanied groups of students who interviewed eyewitnesses in Dakar and Thiès. The students participating in these interviews included Aminata Diena, Makhali NDaiye, Oumar Gueye, Alioune Ba, Biram NDour, and Ouseynou NDaiye. I am particularly grateful to Ms Diena for setting up the Thiès interviews and to Mr M. NDaiye, Mr Ba, and Mr Gueye for organizing the Dakar interviews. This workshop in turn was inspired by a visit that Dr Fall and I made to Thiès in July 1990, in which a graduate student working with Dr Fall, Mor Sene, took us to interview two important witnesses to the 1947–8 events. Mr Sene has himself contributed to the historiography of the strike in his master's thesis, 'La grève des cheminots du Dakar-Niger, 1947–1948' (Mémoire de maîtrise, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1986–7). Following the 1994 workshop, students in Dakar will conduct interviews as part of their research on their own theses and dissertations, and will contribute tapes to an archive of contemporary oral history under the supervision of Dr Fall. Tapes of interviews cited here are preserved at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. My collaboration with Dr Fall in the study of African labor history over the last nine years has been a deeply

and in tension with one another. My goal in this article is both to re-examine the question of how to locate the railway strike in the history of post-World War II West Africa and to point to questions that need further research, for the very extensive nature of this social movement – embracing the colonies of Senegal, the Soudan, Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Dahomey and intersecting a wide range of local contexts, communities, and political struggles – means that it contains many histories and requires the attention of many historians. The research begun in Senegal gets at only some of these histories, and time is running out on the lives and memories of the people involved.

The all-too-neat assimilation of social and political struggles is a matter of hindsight: once independence was achieved, all forms of contestation against French rulers and bosses appear to be part of a seamless pattern of ever-broadening, ever-growing struggle. Some sort of connection is not in doubt; the problem is to pry apart its complexities and ambiguities. The strikers were able to hold out for over five months because they were so well integrated into the African communities in which they lived, but their demands, if realized, would have had the effect of pulling them out of close communities into a professionally defined, non-racial body of railwaymen. The union's goal from 1946 onward was the creation of the *cadre unique*, a single scale of wages and benefits for Africans and white Frenchmen alike. Such a system would widen the gap between the life experiences of railwaymen and those of the peasants, pastoralists and merchants among whom they lived. In political terms one can argue the opposite: to the extent that the strike movement drew from anticolonial sentiments that went beyond the workplace and to the extent that the strike gave Africans a sense of empowerment in their confrontations with the French government, anti-colonial politics risked diluting the work-centered goals of the strike movement. The idea of independence would sever the French connection which was the ideological basis for the railwaymen's claims to equality of wages and benefits with French workers, while opening the union's considerable organizational achievements to co-optation by political parties whose primary concerns lay elsewhere.

In fact, the union and the major political movements of the day remained in uneasy relationship. The men who were the ultimate beneficiaries of decolonization – the Senghors and the Houphouët-Boignys – did not make the cause of the strikers their own. Senghor, more so than other party leaders, maintained contact with the union and when the strike was over moved decisively to bring its leaders into his political fold and under his eyes – a process which increased the union's influence and decreased its autonomy. For many strikers, the behavior of politicians was disillusioning, and for the union structure, the very success of the strike left potentially conflicting alternatives between becoming, as one veteran put it, the 'auxiliaries' of a political party or else focusing as a union on the kinds of claims they could make that stood a good chance of success within the framework of industrial relations emerging out of the strike. If the strike, as a popular movement,

---

gratifying one, and I would like to thank him for all the help he has given me along the way, for his comments on an earlier draft of this article and for his leadership in setting up the 1994 workshop.

gave thousands of people a sense of collective strength, the strike – as a process carried out through certain kinds of institutions – defined the terrain of contestation in a narrower way.

This article points to the kind of questions that further oral research across the strike zone will illuminate. Among documentary sources it gives particular emphasis to reports by police spies present at numerous strike meetings. They must of course be used with care, since spies have a tendency to see what their superiors want them to see. But it is clear that the strikers earned the grudging admiration of their opponents, who had clear reasons to try to learn something of what was going on among them. Taken together, available sources offer multiple points of access to an extraordinarily complex social movement.[2]

THE CONTEXT: STRIKE MOVEMENTS AND THE MODERNIZATION OF IMPERIALISM

The strike must be understood in the context of a French government anxious to find a new basis of legitimacy and control in an era when social and political movements in the colonies were asserting themselves with new vigor. These two processes shaped one another: as African movements sought to turn the government's need for order and economic growth into claims to entitlements and representation, officials had to rethink their policies in the face of new African challenges. The truly agenda-setting movement of the immediate post-war years was the Senegalese general strike of 1946. Up to that point, the French sociology of Africa admitted to only two categories, *paysans* and *évolués*. Officials hoped to achieve economic growth by eliminating forced labor, reducing the tax burden on peasants, and improving infrastructure devoted to agriculture, and to attain political stability by granting *évolués* a modest degree of participation in the governing institutions of France itself. The strike movement – beginning in the port in December 1945, extending to commercial establishments in January, and turning at mid-month into a general strike – involved everyone from African civil servants to dockworkers to market sellers (with the conspicuous exception of railwaymen). Confessing his inability to control events, the Governor General welcomed a labor expert from Paris who proceeded to make workers a focus of policy. The general strike ended as officials negotiated with individual categories of workers, granting collective bargaining agreements to each one in turn. By February the strike movement was over, and ordinary laborers had won significant wage increases; government workers were getting family allowances based on a percentage of the indemnities granted to the top ranks; unions were recognized; and wage hierarchies were expanded and bonuses granted for seniority.

[2] The spies' reports appear in the archives as 'Renseignements', often with a notation such as 'African source – good'. Most came from the Sûreté at Thiès, where the almost daily mass meetings were held, but reports from other regions are also used. Archival sources from the Archives Nationales du Sénégal include (from the Government General of Afrique Occidentale Française) series K (labor), 17 G (politics), 2 G (annual reports), and (from the government of Senegal) series D (political and administrative files). The series IGT (Inspection Générale du Travail) and AP (Affaires Politiques) are from France, Archives Nationales, Section Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence. The abbreviation 'AOF,' for Afrique Occidentale Française, occurs frequently in the notes.

Movers and Shakers

Social Movements in Africa

Edited by
Stephen Ellis
Ineke van Kessel

BRILL
LEIDEN, BOSTON
2009

Contents

1

Introduction: African social movements or social movements in Africa?

Stephen Ellis & Ineke van Kessel

This volume is the outcome of a workshop and conference held in Leiden on 23-24 October 2008 and features the papers that were presented then, but were revised prior to publication. There were lively and highly focused discussions in the workshop on the first day of the proceedings and this introduction draws heavily on those debates and insights from all the participants.

It is appropriate to begin with an explanation of the thinking behind this project and to list some of the tentative conclusions that can be drawn. We began this venture with an open mind as to whether it concerned social movements as global phenomena that, in the present case, happen to be situated on the African continent or whether, on the other hand, we are dealing with social phenomena of a sort unique to Africa and which are therefore difficult to analyze in a comparative perspective. At the outset, we were unsure of the degree to which the theoretical work that has been done on social movements in general would be relevant to the study of African societies. We deliberately avoided beginning with a definition of a social movement drawn from the existing literature, which is largely based on studies of Europe, North America and Latin America, because that would risk excluding movements in Africa that might take a different form. We kept in mind the possibility that some social movements in Africa might be largely driven by outside stimuli in the form of inducements from aid donors. However, we also had to realize that if African movements are seen from the outset as *sui generis,* then not only does comparison with movements elsewhere become difficult, it also risks perpetuating the view that everything that occurs in Africa has its own special rationale, dictated by a context so radically different as to stand beyond global comparison. It would be better, we thought, first to assemble studies of at least some movements in Africa that

could conceivably be described as social movements and only then to compare them with the existing literature.

To make this task possible, the first two chapters in this volume attempt a summary of the extensive literature that already exists on the subject of social movements. The first of these, by Jacquelien van Stekelenberg and Bert Klandermans, presents an overview of the development of social movement theory over several decades. They describe how early writers on the issue tended to view public protest as arising from impatience with more orthodox forms of interaction. When people took to the streets, this was stated or implied to be a sign of an irrational element inherent in mass action. Over time, this classic paradigm became increasingly unsatisfactory and was supplemented or replaced by analyses of the structure of social movements by writers who emphasized its political element. Social constructionist theories posed a series of questions about how individuals and groups perceive and interpret socio-political conditions, focusing on the cognitive, affective and ideational roots of contention. These theories tend to view social movements not only as a rational form of response but even as a necessary element of democracy. Many social movement theorists are themselves activists or former activists and they tend to emphasize the rational element in protest action. Some of the authors in the present volume have also played an activist role in the movement they describe, or in other social movements. Africa is quite familiar with the phenomenon of the scholar-activist, as is illustrated in the examples of Mahmood Mamdani, Jacques Delpechin and many others from all parts of the continent. In this respect at least, Africa fits quite well into the global landscape of social movements. Most recently, analysts have tended to observe the changing forms and goals of social movements in the light of globalization and the rise of information technology, which have created new possibilities for networking far beyond local neighbourhoods or even the national context.

A second theoretical chapter has been contributed by Adam Habib and Paul Opoku-Mensah and deals with the literature on contemporary social movements in South Africa and in Africa more generally, questioning how data from Africa relate to the debates that have emerged in the global academy. Habib notes that two assertions have been widely made in the literature on social movements: first, that the fulcrum of social struggles for a human development agenda has shifted from the arena of production to that of consumption, and second, that struggles concerning identity are replacing ones overtly oriented towards material issues, especially in post-industrial societies. Habib feels that a more nuanced interpretation is required, as assertions such as these are not fully satisfactory when applied to the evidence from Africa. It is true that social struggles, especially in South Africa, have expanded into the arena of consumption – perhaps unsurprisingly as South Africa, with Africa's largest economy by far, in

some ways resembles the 'developed' countries of Europe and North America more closely than other parts of Africa do. However, not only have movements concerned with relations of production continued but they remain crucial to the sustainability of struggles concerning consumption. While identity movements and struggles are increasing, material issues are as relevant to these struggles as they were to earlier social movements. Habib argues that social movements are vital in many democratizing societies in providing the substantive uncertainty that is necessary to create accountability among political elites to their marginalized citizens, thereby advancing a more sustainable human-oriented development agenda. In effect, he maintains that social movements are vital for a functioning democracy, particularly in states with only one dominant party. But it does not necessarily follow that social movements themselves are inherently democratic.

After these general introductions to the literature, eight case studies are presented. These cover a wide – but not necessarily representative – range of social movements in Africa. They include the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, Islamic social movements in southwest Nigeria, the legacy of liberation movements in South Africa, Catholic social movements in Malawi, the anti-slavery movement in Mauritania, the global campaign against blood diamonds, and women's movements in Liberia. There are also the so-called 'campus cults' in Nigeria that have emerged from the efforts by military governments to disrupt the student movement. These campus cults can thus be considered, quite literally, as an 'anti-social' movement.

We began this project, then, unwilling to apply a definition of social movements that is drawn from a literature strongly influenced by North Atlantic and Latin American data, and yet wanting to study a range of movements in Africa to see whether it was possible to discern any common threads among them. We decided that it was best to adopt a pragmatic approach that, at least at the start, was open-minded. In other words, we would bear in mind some of the provisional conclusions drawn from the literature on social movements and make use of the instruments of social movement theory, while remaining open to the possibility that not all aspects of the relevant African phenomena would necessarily fit into these theories.

Clearly certain questions of a universal nature can be asked about movements all over the world, and some crucial questions can usefully be posed regardless of geographical setting. For a long time, scholars have explored questions such as why people rebel or, perhaps more importantly, why they do not rebel.

In view of the diversity of the movements discussed in this volume, we asked our contributors to address the following issues:

African leaders make their appearance, but their actions, opinions, and words are nearly always transmitted through external sources, usually some member of the UAC management staff. Although, for example, Fieldhouse devotes considerable attention to Nigerian industrialization, he does not exploit Nigerian sources in his analysis.

The problem is that the descriptions and analyses are not subject to checks from non-imperial sources. Fieldhouse, for instance, argues that the firms adopted a defensive posture toward the rising nationalist groups and then the new independent governments, seeking to curry the favor of the African leadership. But this view is based entirely on the board minutes of the UAC: we do not learn whether the nationalists shared this view.

Occasionally Fieldhouse's generalizations propel him far beyond his world of evidence. In discussing the tensions involving the company and its critics during the depression era, Fieldhouse observes that 'generally speaking the company was not disliked by most Africans who regarded it as an inevitable and useful feature of their lives' (p. 82). From whence comes this unfootnoted statement in the absence of African source materials? Why should the small cultivator in West Africa have adopted the UAC perspective, however sensible it might have been, over the anti-UAC views of local traders, large cocoa farmers, nationalist critics, and even to judge by Fieldhouse's account, most colonial officials?

Moreover, by confining himself to the imperial archive Fieldhouse runs the risk of completely ignoring matters that were of crucial importance to West African actors. Two such matters riled the West African communities, yet receive no attention here: conditional sales and royalty payments to the United Africa Company in Nigeria. These two issues disturbed the relationships among the UAC, the colonial state, and nationalists. Yet, they find no echo in *Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization*. Whether these matters never made it into the board room or whether Fieldhouse did not regard them as meaningful is impossible to know. But the neglect of issues that were aired repeatedly in the West African press and parliaments underscores the problems of taking one's interpretative agenda solely from metropolitan records.

Princeton University ROBERT L. TIGNOR

AFRICAN LABOUR HISTORY

Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa. By FREDERICK COOPER. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvii+677; £55 (ISBN 0-521-52651-1); £19.95, paperback (ISBN 0-521-56600-2).

This extensive and ambitious new study is the culmination of a decade of research and thought. At one level, it examines the era of worker militancy and trade union formation in Africa during the 1940s and early 1950s which fed into the pressures for national independence. As such, it carries forth directly Frederick Cooper's earlier studies of labour and society in coastal Kenya, particularly *On The African Waterfront*. At the same time, this era is contextualised within a broader sweep: changing colonial policy and attitudes which, dissolving into their contradictions, led directly to African independence. To do this, while Cooper reiterates his main ideas on Kenya, he has enormously widened his palette by including material on British West and Central Africa, and especially by major new research on French West Africa, on which this book deserves to be considered a major new assessment in its own right. This sweep necessarily lends conviction to his approach and ideas.

Perhaps the most fundamental of them is that colonial policy is best assessed by the place in it of African labour. From this flow key issues through their presence or absence: class, the changing economy, race and gender as socially defining categories. In its pre-war heyday, Cooper argues that colonialism, even when administered by relatively democratic governments in the home context, evaluated its African subjects essentially as primitive and ineffably 'different' tribesmen within a partriarchial and rural mould. The conservation of an ossified tribal Africa coupled with the extraction of unskilled seasonal or casual labour was common wisdom. The debates of the day were about the necessity for forced labour and the extent to which Africa was becoming diseased and depopulated due to colonial labour demand. Dynamism in this system was confined to white settlers or energetic Levantine and Asian traders.

These assumptions began to be challenged in the 1930s, first by minority voices and then as one approaches the 1950s, on a broad front. For this there were various reasons, not least the realisation that such policies led to semi-stagnation in a world where development was more and more an imperative. The suddenly manifest capacity of African workers to organise and throw a spanner in the works of the extractive economy was, however, also of fundamental importance. Arguments mounted that African workers needed to be treated as workers, not as Africans: They could be permitted to form trade unions, critically, a strategy of containment and boundedness. The colonial state also tried to conceptualise structures that would allow for a stable, 'detribalised' urban working class in towns focused on a European family model. 'By the mid to late 1940s, influential officials wanted Africa to have a working class, to separate an identifiable group of people from the backwardness of rural Africa, attach its members to particular jobs and career ladders and over time make them into a predictable and productive collectivity' (p. 14). Cooper devotes much time to the careful analysis of particular strikes, conflicts and policy watersheds where these issues get repeatedly hammered out.

The author convincingly shows that this early component of modernisation theory applied to Africa was even more of a fantasy in the realm of real possibilities than the game park approach of the pre-war system. Such change was not affordable and not politically manageable. Dualist policies which tried to draw a ring around a section of modernisable Africans broke down rapidly. To some extent, African labour organisers turned the new discourse to their own advantage by making claims desired by their followers while African politicians found the resulting impotence of colonial administration opportune. Colonial rulers decided that the contradictions that were increasingly apparent would best be resolved by African politicians rather than by themselves; the expenditures entailed by reform strategies were not worth engendering. Cooper therefore places the labour question squarely at the heart of the explanation for the precipitate character of the decolonization of Africa. He argues that major shifts in approach are especially dramatic and clear in French West Africa where elements of destructive compulsion were still firmly in place into the 1930s but where the impulse towards modernization and assimilation quickly became so much stronger.

There is an ironic charm – but I would argue a kind of Pyrrhic victory – in the African success in defeating European developmentalist logic. African politicians continued, of course, to pursue this logic after independence. In this respect, Cooper's consideration of the contradictions of African modernization is sobering in present light. Cooper sees the coming of independence as a sort of closure, but in crucial respects the battle joined continues, as witness Mahmood Mamdani's recent *Citizen and Subject*, with results that could illuminate the past as well as vice versa.

For the material underpinnings of his approach, Cooper owes something to the work of Jacques Marseille on French colonialism. One can argue that Marseille, in

his brilliant assessment of the *économie de traité* and its relative stagnation past the 1950s, oversimplifies the story. Decolonization was actually often accompanied by economic expansion at first. While the *économie de traité* largely stagnated, the 1950s witnessed new prosperity in the expansion of base-metals mining in many parts of Africa as well as in the increasing realisation of the possibilities of capitalist forms of agricultural exploitation, depending on the injection of new technology and equipment; in Nigeria, and more dramatically Algeria, decolonization was accompanied by dramatic oil discoveries of strategic and economic significance. Moreover, there does remain a striking difference between how Britain and France structured decolonization in Africa, and planned (or failed to plan) its aftermath, which may be obscured by too much emphasis on labour as is sometimes very apparent in this book.

While this complicates the picture, it is not intended to take away from the value of what Cooper has illuminated so forcefully, however. Frederick Cooper is an historian who has in the past concentrated on *mentalité* and written impressively on African opinion and consciousness. This book does so to a much lesser degree. It is based on a very wide and impressive reading of primary archival material and in most respects belongs with the major studies of colonial policy in Africa rather than with African social history. Cooper innovates by exploring colonial values as 'discourse'. For Cooper, discourse consists of a melding of language and practise. I am not entirely clear that a discrete melding in this way, observably distinct from alternative discourses pursued at the same or another time, is not too self-contained and detached from material pressures to be methodologically convincing. Moreover, as Cooper notes, the Foucaultian notion of modern forms of control through surveillance is hardly a key to understanding late colonial society in Africa; Africans were very successful at moulding their own lives in defiance or even ignorance of attempts in this direction. If one is going to attempt Foucault, I suspect one must let that approach be pervasive rather than definitional. Far more noteworthy to me is Cooper's grasp of men and motives and politics, more old-fashioned but still incisive as a means of carving an interpretative path through the past.

Few writers these days are producing volumes of this scope and scholarship. While this is a long book, it reads quite easily. A review of this length cannot begin to note, or debate, dozens of specific illuminating points and arguments that deserve consideration along the way. There are very numerous and memorable incisive comments on both well-known and obscure individuals, organisations and events of the time. Some 150 pages of footnotes provide invaluable nuances and sidelights for future research students of this period.

University of Natal, Durban BILL FREUND

DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria. By TOYIN FALOLA. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996. Pp. xxiv + 215. £45 (ISBN 0-8130-1422-0).

As we come to the end of the century, developmentalism, one of the century's most enduring discourses and endearing dreams, has lost its seductive paradigmatic and political power, challenged as a 'meta-narrative' in the western academy by the postulations of post-something scholarship, and as practical policy by the fetish priests of free-market capitalism, and in the real world by the continuing ravages of global poverty and intensifying popular struggles against it. Times like these encourage retrospection, attempts to 'deconstruct' development as a discursive

vaal affairs, granted by a compliant government. Kruger's government clearly was unwilling to grant such leeway, but most British statesmen, including the energetic Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, were convinced that the threat of military force would elicit desired concessions. They misjudged both the fatalism of Kruger and the determination of the British High Commissioner, Lord Milner, a self-described "British Race Patriot," who disdained his Boer opponent as an obstacle to the inevitable consolidation of a Greater Britain.

Milner's attitudes and machinations come across clearly enough in this study, although the role of public opinion in Britain and of political influence in the Transvaal (other than that of Kruger himself) remain shadowy. Moreover, Smith's restrictive definition of economic interest enables him to demolish exaggerated claims of capitalist conspiracy and the omnipotence of the mining companies, but it arguably deters him from considering the interplay of less tangible, but no less significant, material and political considerations (the "unspoken assumptions," to recall James Joll's telling description). Despite its many virtues, this book falls betwixt and between: it includes too much detail for students and too much familiar material for specialists, while its ambitions to provide a novel perspective on the relevant historiography are sometimes submerged in a more traditional narrative.

FRANS COETZEE
George Washington University

FREDERICK COOPER. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa.* (African Studies Series, number 89.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1996. Pp. xvii, 677. Cloth $69.95, paper $27.95.

For those familiar with recent Africanist historiography, the main title of this book reads as somewhat of an oxymoron. Decolonization was clearly an important event but one that, in retrospect, seems quite distant (except in its disappointing consequences) from the grass roots concerns of African society. Conversely, the kind of social history that has become so prominent in recent scholarship on the African past (with Frederick Cooper as one of its most distinguished practitioners) has tended to restrict its canvas to the struggles of local communities against various forms of economic and political hegemony rather than analyzing changes in the institutions of domination themselves.

The power and problems of Cooper's very important book derive from this dilemma. For the most part, this is more a macrohistory of colonial thought and decision-making (covering a very wide range of both British and French territories) than a close study of any particular groups of Africans. The author's stated goal is to look at "political *projects* and social *projects*" [emphasis added] in a manner that "lays the groundwork for understanding how Africa ended up with the kind of independence which it for the most part got" (p. 5), i.e. those regimes that have so sadly failed to live up to the promises of liberation from European rule.

The major agents in the ensuing narrative are European administrators and planners, and their principal characteristic is a persistent inability to understand the processes over which they presumably presided. At the start of the period under discussion, their view of Africans as "primitive" or "traditional" populations blinded them to the new social formations created by the urban economy. The "modernization discourse" of the 1940s and 1950s proved to be equally unrealistic. When this approach failed, Africa was abandoned to indigenous rulers who are little more than "gatekeepers" between whatever remains of external "development" resources and internal patronage networks.

The social history in this book, as its subtitle suggests, derives from a focus on labor, although even here, Cooper mainly examines how European authorities and African union or party leaders understood the situation of African workers rather than the actual lives of these laboring communities. For both the actors in the decolonization era and subsequent historians, the definition of an African "working class" and its relationship to nationalist politics has been a matter of great controversy, and Cooper very effectively transforms the terms of this debate. He views the decision by Europeans to accept unionist demands that African laborers be treated on the same basis as their European counterparts as a mutual failure to comprehend African social reality. It was a very consequential failure, since the cost of providing European-scale wages and benefits under African economic conditions could not be borne by either colonial or postcolonial regimes. European governments were thus encouraged to withdraw from Africa, while their local successors coopted some of the labor leadership but rather quickly suppressed the unions as an autonomous force. An important segment of African society, as represented by labor movements, thus does play an important role in Cooper's story, but less as a positive shaper of its outcome than as a dilemma of both colonial definition and indigenous self-definition.

Given its emphasis on decision-making at the top, the primary documents for this study come from colonial archives and provide direct insight into how responsible Europeans perceived—or misperceived—their tasks. This approach allows Cooper to spell out his claims about the colonial origin of Africa's current difficulties, but it also raises some historiographic, or at least narrative, problems of its own. The power of Cooper's analysis comes from his characteristically sober, thorough, and yet engagingly written account of the colonialists' endeavors. This is no small accomplishment in a field where much of the scholarship fails to place colonial thinking in its historical context, either identifying with the self-contained world view of European rulers or endowing them with exaggerated hegemony over their African subjects.

The problem with this approach lies in the limitations, one might say mediocrity, of most colonial thought. Cooper is well aware of this situation, and its revelation is one of the main points of the book. However, the very decision to commit so much effort to digging up old colonialist debates makes Cooper somewhat their prisoner: he has to replay them for us at much greater length than they deserve (or at least than the attention of most readers will bear).

From my own perspective as a sometime economic historian of this era, such an account also tends to exaggerate the significance of both colonial authorities and African subjects in determining the stages and outcomes of the decolonization process. The decisive power over African affairs ultimately lay at higher levels of European public and private sectors, reacting to their own perceptions of Africa's role in the international economy. It was the crises of the Depression and post–World War II eras, rather than colonialist understandings of what were still very small African urban populations, that drove the modernization and development policies analyzed by Cooper. It was likewise recognition, by the mid-1950s, of Africa's irrelevance to the reinvigorated European and global economies that made the cost of misconceptions about managing newly growing African cities so unacceptable. Cooper draws some very insightful comparisons between tropical and South African developments during his period but fails to consider whether the white regimes to the north of this divide might also have held on a good deal longer, with different postcolonial results, if their stakes had been higher.

It would be very wrong to conclude this review on a negative note, since even the problems raised by Cooper's attempt to link macrohistory and social history are instructive and his accounts of the issues which he addresses directly are both authoritative and valuable. Indeed, it is far easier to understand the global economic basis for African malaise than to trace its internal roots in the kind of colonial dialectic that Cooper delineates. Cooper is also right to see contemporary attempts to subject bankrupt African states to global market discipline via structural adjustment programs as a replay of late-colonial modernization errors. He is further justified in insisting on recognition of colonialism as the crucial, if often impotent, intermediary between Africa and the larger world into which it is so imperfectly integrated. His book provides a monumental account of a major stage in this mediation, even if, as Cooper himself recognizes, other forms of analysis are needed to round out the picture of decolonization, let alone deal positively with its results.

RALPH A. AUSTEN
University of Chicago

ROBERT MALLEY. *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1996. Pp. x, 323. Cloth $48.00, paper $18.00.

This book is primarily a work of intellectual history that, to provide necessary contextualization, moves frequently in and out of socioeconomic, political, and institutional history as well. It traces the gestation, apogee, and decline of third worldism, the term Robert Malley uses to define the ideology that dominated elite discourse in much of the developing world between the 1950s and the early 1980s. Malley provides a chapter of global overview of each of these phases, followed by separate chapters detailing the experience of Algeria during the same phase. As the author admits, using Algeria as the main case study does not in every case provide a perfect fit with other third world experiences, but it does so sufficiently often to justify the choice of methodology and add substance to the more abstract chapters. This is the most detailed and compelling overview I have seen of the emergence, spread, and disappearance of a discourse that underlay the ideologies of a number of developing countries and that, for about a quarter of a century, dominated much of the North-South dialogue.

Although most of the material Malley deals with is accessible to the scholarly world, he uses and recasts it in ways that are often highly original and that bring refreshingly new insights to old issues and problems. The term "third world" is the 1952 invention of French economist Alfred Sauvy, and third worldist ideology was greatly influenced by the European left. Malley nevertheless rejects the contention of many scholars that it was an artificial graft imposed by the left on the countries of the southern hemisphere. Third worldism was, in his view, the product of fecund encounters among three seemingly incompatible ideological attitudes: assimilationist, traditionalist, and socialist. At the heart of the process lies the frustration of Western-educated elites seeking acceptance and upward promotion within colonial systems structurally incapable of granting them. These elites were often in contact, directly or indirectly, with Europe's leftist intelligentsia, and that experience blended with elements of native history and culture and from the traditionalist discourse propounded by many of their less Europeanized compatriots. The most unlikely component in the mix is the third, which blends French revolutionary ideology of the awakening of the *tiers état* with Marxian paradigms of class conflict to create the oppressed, revolutionary *classe/peuple* of the south.

During its apogee, third-worldist ideology postulated the notion of historical inevitability and its link to human agency, in this case a united "people" with a single will, which is expressed by the state. Related to the latter is an image of power, which the north had previously used to oppress, but which the people's state now uses for purposes of liberation and progress. Associated with the notion of a cohesive people within each state is the concept of third-world solidarity as it seeks to reverse the power balance between north and south.

The discussion of decline addresses the questions of the validity of the underlying theses of third worldism

tight control over the direction of these outstations, a struggle over local autonomy ensued. The main issue was education: the missionary commitment to the pre-eminence of evangelism collided with the desire of the first generation of converts to provide schools for their children. During the 1920s the debate over female initiation turned the autonomy initiative into a wholesale defection from the mission and led to the creation of a network of independent churches. At the same time, small groups of *Arathi* ('prophets') found the resolution of their spiritual discontent in a movement that rejected the Western orientation of mission followers and independents as well as traditional religious practice.

In the aftermath of the mass defections of the late 1920s the missionaries and the few A.I.M. loyalists (known as *Kirore*) attempted with some success to rebuild the mission church, in the process generating a bitter and intense competition with the independents. In 1941 the A.I.M. established a local church structure; but the missionaries' domination of the new church, their hostility to Kikuyu culture and above all their continued reluctance to promote education finally alienated even the *Kirore*. In 1947 *Kirore* congregations in Kikuyuland withdrew *en masse*, taking control of their churches and schools, while maintaining a clear distinction between themselves and the previously established independent churches. In a brief conclusion, Sandgren suggests that this bitter animosity between the *Kirore* and the independents lay behind the eventual decision of the *Kirore* to give strong support to the government during the Mau Mau rebellion.

While the outline of this story is well known, by describing larger developments in terms of the experiences in individuals and local congregations Sandgren conveys in human terms the intensity of these struggles and their relationship to the broader social and political transformation of Kikuyuland. What he fails to do, however, is to provide any thorough consideration of the intellectual content of conversion and sectarianism, or indeed to connect the experiences of Kikuyu Christians to those of converts in other areas of Africa. In short, this is a study of churches rather than religion, and those hoping to find here a serious exploration of the evolution of new systems of ritual and belief in Kikuyuland will have to look elsewhere.

University of Texas at El Paso CHARLES AMBLER

DOCKWORKERS

On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa. By FREDERICK COOPER. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987. Pp. xvi+290. £25; $36.

African historiography is rich in studies exploring how, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, colonial bureaucracies used the forces at their disposal to pressure rural Africans to leave their homes and become migrant labourers. The continued importance of migrant labour as an historical theme has been reinforced by its persistence down to the present in such places as the mines of South Africa and the plantations of West Africa. That migrant workers have been paid exceedingly low wages has been justified on the grounds that they have lacked skills, thus not meriting higher wages and that, in any case, they have not 'needed' higher wages because their families have been able to provide for themselves by subsistence agriculture back in the village. These workers have been viewed as temporary sojourners at their place of employment, rural Africans perched for a limited time in non-rural settings and expected eventually to return

'home'. This perception has been – and still is – important in shaping both the work experience itself and official ideologies about labour.

Frederick Cooper, with this lucid and meticulously researched book about Mombasa dockworkers between the 1930s and the 1960s, brings his trilogy about the history of labour on the East African coast to a triumphant conclusion.[1] In so doing, he also makes a significant contribution to a topic of African history considerably less well-covered than the mobilization of labour by state and capital through mechanisms associated with labour migrancy. Specifically, his is a study of how the Kenyan colonial state sought to transform an important sector of the work force away from migrancy to stability, away from being unskilled to being skilled, and how that sector – Mombasa dockworkers – responded to these efforts.

What gives Cooper's book interest for the reader who is not a specialist in Kenyan history is his skillful placing of his study within the broader context of imperial history, an approach which will, I hope, stimulate other detailed studies along similar lines. His thesis is that, by the 1930s, colonial economies based on the use of abundant and cheap migrant labour had grown so complex that certain sectors needed to be rationalized and transformed. Strikes in Kenya (1934 and 1939), Trinidad (1935), Northern Rhodesia (1935 and 1940), and Jamaica (1938) startled British colonial officials into the realization that, if the empire were to have labour peace, government would have to accept that its mission was no longer the maintenance of a low-wage economy for the benefit of capital. The outbreak of World War II and the need to ensure increased colonial production underscored this point, especially with regard to sectors essential for the war effort, such as the Northern Rhodesian copper mines and the Mombasa docks, where the dockers could easily throttle the trade of Kenya and Uganda.

So it was that the Kenyan state, ponderously and uncertainly, moved to decasualize a labour-force on the docks that was characterized in its officials' eyes as disorderly, backward, and essentially undependable because of its links with the rural areas and 'traditional' culture. During the war years wages were increased to meet workers' demands. But money alone was not enough, and inflation during the 1940s sparked another series of colonial strikes in Africa at the end of the war, among other places, in Nigeria (1945), in Dakar and on the Witwatersrand (1946), in the Gold Coast (1947), and in Dar-es-Salaam (1948), at the very time when the metropolitan powers were eager to increase labour efficiency and stimulate colonial production.

The workers of Mombasa, organized into the African Workers Federation, also went on strike in 1947. This strike greatly disturbed officials because its leaders' rhetoric was cast in radical terms of the 'urban masses' pitted against property owners, employers, and businessmen. Although the strike was soon ended and the Federation's leaders arrested, it convinced officials to redouble their efforts to transform the disorderly, casual labour force on the Mombasa docks into a respectable, stabilized force with its links with the rural areas and African 'traditional' culture severed. Officials felt that only in this way could the workers become truly efficient since, as one official noted, 'the evils which are commonly attributed to "detribalization" can only be cured by more complete detribalization' (p. 121). The effort was to be multi-faceted. Not only were wages to be increased so as to permit workers to have their families live with them in Mombasa, but improved housing was to be built for them and greater attention was to be paid to providing them with medical treatment. Workers were registered and an officially recognized labour union along British lines – the Dockworkers'

[1] His earlier books are *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven, 1977), and *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven, 1980).

Union – was, with the state's patronage, ultimately established for the dockworkers in the mid-1950s.

Again, the process was slow and ponderous, resisted by employers and modified by the workers, but, supported by such Kenyan political leaders as Tom Mboya, it succeeded, and by the end of the colonial era the casual dockworkers had been transformed into stabilized dockworkers and the radical African Workers Federation had been replaced by the reformist Dockworkers' Union. In the process, Cooper argues, the Kenyan labour-force had been transformed, largely through state action, from a relatively homogenous one based on labour migrancy into a segmented and differentiated one in which workers in certain key sectors were stabilized and privileged and workers in other sectors were neither.

Cooper's excellent book on the final decades of colonialism reveals not only what happened in that period on the African waterfront. It also brings to mind a question that has puzzled many observers of post-colonial African politics: why the labour movement, which was viewed in the 1950s and 1960s as so centrally important in the anti-colonial political struggle, should have proved so prone to emasculation, co-optation, and marginalization by the one-party state after independence. Implicit in Cooper's study are answers. First, the colonial state, through its policies of registration and welfarism that were directed only to certain sectors of the economy, succeeded in breaking the unity of the working class before the end of the colonial period. Hence independent African states inherited an already fragmented and weakened working class. Second, many workers considered 'stabilized' in fact were able then, and have continued since, to maintain links with rural areas and 'traditional' culture that ensured a certain level of security outside the job. Thus jobs have been less crucially important for basic survival than for a European or American worker and militancy has suffered. Third, the period of effective strikes in Africa in the final decades of colonialism was coterminous with a period of general economic expansion, whereas the economic contraction that independent African states have experienced over the past twenty years has given workers naturally worried about their position in a faltering economy little opportunity to strike.

In sum, then, Frederick Cooper has written an elegant and persuasive book about Kenyan dockworkers which, transcending his subject, illuminates interesting corners of African history during the 1940s and 1950s and suggests areas for future research in the history of imperialism in Africa.

Harvard University LEROY VAIL

EAST AFRICA THROUGH SOVIET EYES

Isotoriia Kenii v Novoe i noveishee vremia [History of Kenya in modern and contemporary times]. By IRINA IVANOVNA FILATOVA. Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1985. Pp. 380.

Afrikanskie praviteli i vozhdi v Ugande : evoliutsiia traditsionnykh vlastei v usloviiakh kolonializma, 1862–1962 [African rulers and chiefs in Uganda: the evolution of traditional power under colonial conditions, 1862–1962]. By ALEKSANDR STEPANOVICH BALEZIN. Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1986. Pp. 279.

These two books were published at the very beginning of the *glasnost* era in the Soviet Union, and were presumably written in the last years of the Brezhnev regime, nowadays characterized as the period of stagnation. Since then, dramatic changes have been taking place on the Soviet academic scene, as indeed in the rest of Soviet society. These have included a strong tendency to reject theoretical