XenAfPol

The politics of xenophobic exclusion in Africa: mobilisations, local orders and violence

XenAfPol is a three-year research programme funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr) that will run until December 2013. Focused on the politics of xenophobic mobilisation in Africa, it consists in a series of individual case studies organised around a common research framework across four African countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. Laurent Fourchard from CNRS/FNSP Research Unit LAM (Les Afriques dans le Monde, Institute of Political Science, Bordeaux, France) is the project Principal Coordinator. Aurelia Segatti, from the African Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand, assists him in the administrative & scientific coordination and coordinates the South African, Kenyan and Congolese legs of the programme LAM is the main institutional coordinator. Financial partners of the programme are the French Institute of South Africa (Johannesburg) and the French Institute of Research in Africa (Ibadan, Nigeria). Scientific partners providing staff and intellectual input are the Centre of Governance and Human Rights, at the Department of Politics and International Studies, King's College (Cambridge University); the Centre of African Studies (University of Oxford); the African Centre for Migration & Society (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa); Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Kinshasa, DRC; Departments of History / University of Lagos and Jos (Nigeria); Working Group on Governance in Africa (BWGGA)/ University of Bayreuth (Germany).

1. General context

Over the last two decades, major political changes have transformed daily life in many African societies. While the so-called 1990s democratic transitions have not ended the various forms of authoritarian practices which survive in many countries, they have nonetheless opened space for a flurry of political parties, civil society organisations, religious movements and NGOs. With decentralisation and the general decline of central state power, local governments have gradually acquired unprecedented responsibilities and resources. Their ascendance and seemingly endless (and mostly externally-driven) State reforms have created complicated and often conflicting overlaps between spheres and levels of government. The political economy of the continent has dramatically changed too. Paradoxically, its economic marginalisation since the end of the colonial period has reinforced its economic dependence on aid: with arguably the South African exception, African states and economies are more and more dependent on international donors, African migrants' remittances and the export of oil, gas and minerals. The last decade of economic growth has not been sufficient to lift the continent out of the poverty trap. The struggle over the control of resources has thus been exacerbated within this context of relative (and absolute) deprivation and increasing political competition. As rural agriculture further declines in the face of drought and desertification, conflicts for remaining—often urban—resources are only likely to heighten.

As the African population continues to grow and move, the continent's societies have seen increasing social, cultural, linguistic and economic heterogeneity. Cities and metropolitan areas have now reached a crossroads where local authorities have little effective control over the socio-economic processes which they have been charged to manage. These phenomena may be related to the globalisation of economies and political regional integration processes as well as new local mobilisations around access to resources and political voice. The various waves of rural exodus

towards capital cities in particular resulted in profound and now well documented forms of urban transformation. More recent voluntary and forced movements and forms of inclusion and exclusion going along with them contribute to a rapidly evolving redistribution of power and space that is at once highly visible but yet poorly understood. These forms of exclusion are more apparent in large cities but are also present in rural areas. What makes this particularly visible today in several countries across the continent is the fact that exclusion has taken the form of violent attacks targeting more specifically foreigners or groups identified as ethnic, political, or religious outsiders. This project aims to document these phenomena in two specific areas: that of the changing social dynamics at work in the continent between hosts and strangers, nationals and foreigners and that of the role of the State in managing cultural diversity and socio-economic differentiation.

1.1 Context and economic and social challenges

While colonial powers across the continent imposed strict and often racist controls over mobilities towards and within cities, greater freedom of movement and settlement has not necessarily relieved urban areas of the segregationist, exclusive settlement patterns generated by past policies.. Episodes of organised and somewhat violent State constraint over mobility and urbanisation are well known such as for instance Frelimo's Operation Production in Maputo, massive deportation of West Africans from Nigeria or South Africa's massive removals from cities under apartheid and current deportation policy to neighbouring countries. Since the demise of colonial and post-colonial harsh authoritarian orders, various forms of popular mobilisation against those identified as outsiders have emerged. Among the flurry of such mobilisations, there has been a distinct questioning of the legitimacy of certain categories of residents to enjoy certain rights and benefit from certain resources. This has led to redefining boundaries between insiders and outsiders, sometimes in extremely violent terms across countries (Ivory Coast since the late 1990s, Kenya 2007; South Africa 2008). In other instances, the outcome of such exclusionary discourses and mobilisations have only affected specific cities and parts of countries such as the Kivus and Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1991 and 1993 or in some Nigerian cities or states (especially since the return of a civilian regime in 1999). While some of these episodes of violence have concentrated much media coverage and scholarly attention, they have rarely been considered in their full historical and political ramifications as moments of crisis in longer-term continuums of exclusionary policies and practices. This is what this project proposes to do through a set of case studies in a selection of four countries that will more specifically interrogate the nature and role played by the local dimension of these politics of exclusion in relation with broader institutional and structural dynamics.

1.2 Positioning the project

This research project seeks to distinguish itself from several different trends in the study of African societies which have produced a rich and diverse literature in the recent years. First, in tackling xenophobic[1] forms of exclusion (from their inception down to violent occurrences or demobilisation), it intends to move away from the study of violent groups seeking to overtake power either nationally or regionally, and the approaches in terms of economies of war and armed conflicts which go along with these (Foucher 2007, Marchal, Hassner 2003, Messiant 2008, de Waal 2007, Banégas 2006, Marriage 2006, Cramer 2006) or for an econometric approach (Collier, Sambanis 2005). Some have also more specifically focused on the (re)emergence of militia groups and how democratisation processes had opened space for these groups either as political auxiliaries in

electoral campaigns in particular or as local security forces (Maupeu 2002, Anderson 2005, Burs, Jensen 2004). While these are also concerned with issues of legitimacy and claims on space, they focus mostly on constituted and fairly formalised groups and situations of durable conflicts. We are interested in different situations that are potentially anterior to the ones described in the literature above or may be disconnected from them.

Second, although it intends to use it conceptually (see below), the project distinguishes itself from the rich literature on autochthony mainly through the methodologies used which will in addition to ethnographic localised case studies also explore systematically archival and institutional data. It will include two important country case studies that have faced two opposite trends which cannot be reduced to autochthony: South Africa in which autochthony has hardly been used as a framework of analysis and Nigeria where it has become a public policy, which is by and large accepted by most Nigerians, a dimension which is yet not fully explored in the literature.

In terms of thematic areas, this project is firmly rooted in various traditions of Africanist social sciences and tightly fits into the ANR call. It questions at least three key dimensions related to the analysis of societal transformation in contemporary Africa in a diachronic perspective. First of all, we hope that the study of institutionalised and parallel forms of exclusion targeted at "alien" groups will produce material informing critically our knowledge of statecraft at the local level in particular, and question the relevance and historicity of the "democratic participatory local government" model. While this has become a leitmotiv of international cooperation and of decentralisation reforms in developing countries, we actually know little about its effectiveness and the unexpected effects of its implementation. Some authors (Dubresson A. 2005, Bénit-Gbaffou 2009) argue that it may lead to further fragmentation in already extremely divided urban or even rural contexts, either because it multiplies structures and institutions in an already institutionally saturated environment and leads to inefficiency, or because the redistributive nature of such structures lends itself to the financial and political greed of previously marginalised groups. Others have mentioned that decentralisation policies instead of forging a local democratic culture have extended dominant political party at the local level, especially in authoritarian regimes (Crook, Manor 1998, Otayek 2009). The unexpected effects of decentralisation have thus shaped very differently local political societies. This aspect fits into thematic area 2.2.4 of the ANR call on metropolisation and territorial recomposition.

The second important question that this project intends to explore deals with violence as a means of political expression and a specific strategy within broader patterns of social mobilisation. Is xenophobic violence the result of an absence of other political means of expression or a failure to use them or is it rather the legacy of a historical treatment of specific categories of population or a contamination from other sectors of society? Are there links between state policies and popular mobilisation against foreigners and outsiders? What is the degree of orchestration of this violence? Who exactly are the perpetrators? And how do they organise? Are the reasons for resorting to violence and the triggers leading to it similar or comparable between places? What sort of relations do the groups mobilising against outsiders maintain with local and other authorities? Where do they situate themselves in relation with social movements which sometimes also condone violence as a means of political protest (Landless People's Movement; Anti-Privatization Campaign; Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa)? Have these different groups (when they are actually identified as groups) demonstrated their capacity to transform political agendas substantially? The project therefore intends to contribute to the current renewed interest for social movements in Africa

(Siméant, Pommerolle 2008, Ballard, Habib & Valodia 2006, Robins 2008) and situate these forms of anti-outsider mobilisation within the broader spectrum of current social mobilisations in each of the countries under study. This is where the project addresses more specifically thematic area 2.3.1 of the ANR call on statecraft.

The third field in which this project inserts itself is that of the understanding of the spatial determinants of identity formation in diverse post-colonial societies. Precisely at a time when decentralisation reforms are premised on the idea that more devolution of power to local authorities should help smooth out territorial divides including in terms of identity and cultural claims, it seems necessary to revisit the actual links between identity formation and spatial determinants. This will in turn help us define whether the observed patterns of exclusion and violence are of the same nature or not between and even within countries. This is in line with questionings identified in thematic areas 2.1.4 and 2.4 of the ANR call on the reinvention of national, local and religious identities and on the specific role played by migrants in the production of local identities.

Both in its conceptual and methodological design, the project seeks to diversify the usual approaches to exclusion by developing urban, local or regional perspectives as well as by coming back to issues of statecraft and nuances in scales and national trajectories.

Besides the production of scholarly knowledge that intends to fill out some of the existing gaps in the understanding of xenophobic exclusion in Africa, the other ambition of this project is to produce policy-relevant research, that is research that attempts to answer questions defined by scientific agendas but that is pertinent to inform decision-makers' understanding of societal trends and enrich their final choices. In particular, in tracing the historical ruptures and continuities and their connection to contemporary trends as well as the specificities of each national and sub-national contexts, we hope to help decision-makers move away from at least three major pitfalls commonly observed in policy-making circles:

First of all, this kind of project should provide material and analyses that will militate against the kind of ready-made technical tool kits too often suggested or imposed by international organisations and donors, or sometimes sought after by national governments in designing responses to exclusionary practices2;

Secondly, its strong historical perspective should help fight against the illusion of the false novelty of xenophobic exclusion which almost systematically leads to 'new' solutions. Rather, it will encourage and document an identification of the actual triggers behind passages to violence, including the role of public policies and of successive waves of reform;

Finally, results from the project and their dissemination should help in moving away from the idea that migration and urbanisation are the negative causes behind xenophobic violence which often goes along with the other assumption that they are reversible phenomena. The hope is to draw attention to the challenges as well as the potential benefits of diversity and more specifically to the ways in which some localities have communities that manage to design their own pacific arrangements in spite of adversarial socio-economic and political conditions.

As African cities are exponentially growing and will keep doing so in the next fifty years at least, not only as an outcome of natural growth but as a result of sustained migration (United Nations

Development Programme 2009), they will also necessarily become more complex in terms of diversity and spatial distribution of resources. Their relations with their hinterlands and immediate surroundings (peri-urban areas) will also be placed under greater pressure. The case studies planned for this project should provide robust comparative elements enabling policy-makers to improve, according to their specific national trajectories, the role of and coordination between their different spheres of government in the management of this inevitable increase in diversity and adaptations to it.