

African Socialism/Socialism in Africa

Paris, April, 7-9, 2016

Call for papers

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It is high time to give Africa its rightful place in the global historiography of socialism and to socialism its right place in the history of Africa.

Historians of socialism systematically forget Africa. Yet many African states professed “African” or scientific socialism, many African political actors used the theoretical toolbox drawn from the Marxist tradition. It offered support for the political advancement of colonial populations and the building of post-colonial States. The USSR, China, Cuba, offered ready-to-use models. Some states even tried to invent their own forms of African socialism, adapted to the specific conditions of Africa and true to its theoretical roots.

The conference will consider all African countries – North and South, East and West.. Africa - and aims to be strongly interdisciplinary. It will promote a broad understanding of the word “socialism”, following a flexible approach.

The conference shall focus on three main topics, even if it is recommended that they be articulate with each other.

I – Corpus of sources

We encourage the authors to focus on the following questions:

- *Statements of principle and emblems*: Constitutions, charters, statements of principle, congresses, official press, Socialist International memberships, are all textual spaces to declare socialist principles. But the texts are not the only place of expression for socialist statements: statuary, toponymy, and multiple other artistic expressions also participated in the work of defining socialism. Statues of Marx, Engels, Lenin or Stalin have been erected, streets or squares have been given names fed by the socialist Pantheon.
- *African socialist corpus*: Some texts from leaders in power or from opponents have set doctrinal markers, or have been used as official doctrine. It will be interesting to study not only what they express but how they were produced, their dissemination and also the way they were used by the readers.
- *The circulation of texts and images*: Which Marxist books circulated most widely in Africa ?
- *Learning to become a socialist*: Marxist training existed in several countries, and radio and theater also played a role in socialist education. In France itself the members of the « Parti africain de l'indépendance » (African party of Independence – PAI) had to be trained at the Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes (CERM- Center of Marxist studies and research) and at the Université nouvelle (New University)

That brings others crucial questions, closely linked to the corpus.

- *The question of the intellectual origins of African socialisms*. Attention will also be given to the question of the training of African thinkers of socialism, socialisms and of the top hierarchy of those regimes claiming to be socialist: schools, studies, youth networks etc. What inspired Nkrumah “Consciencism”, or Massemba-Débat “Bantu socialism” ? There were diverse influences: Marxism, colonial Agrarianism, social Christianity, the non-alignment, the cultural revolutions, political and esthetical avant-gardes. Furthermore, it could be very interesting to have a closer look at Maoism in Africa : why was it so successful? What kind of intellectual, emotional or strategic relations existed with China? The relation with the Cuban experience shall also be explored.
- *The concepts in play*: it is well known that a part of the discussions has focused on the class question (Are there classes in Africa? In particular, was there a workers' class developed enough to be a vanguard? etc.) but there are also many others conceptual configurations that could be questioned : the articulation between socialism and nationalism/internationalism/panafricanism, socialism and secularism, socialism and religion, socialism and modes of production, socialism and racism, socialism and gender, and so on.

II- The “real socialisms”

The idea will be to analyze state practices and their relationship with socialism. It could be interesting also to draw comparisons with the countries endorsing “real socialism”, such as USSR, China or Cuba.

Even if the point is not to define a list of criteria allowing to define the specificity of an “African” socialist practice, here are some possible directions of research to be considered :

- Planning: it could be interesting to compare plans, to look at experts such as Bettelheim or Samir Amin who have participated to their elaboration, and to raise the question of models.
- The stratification of economy, the practice of nationalization
- Agrarian reforms
- The creation of cooperatives

All this shall be studied with an eye to the interplay between socialist state practices, institutions and organization and specific social groups with a vested interest in them (new or former elites? lineages? etc)

- Single-party systems: it is possible to distinguish two types of single-party regimes, even if this classification must be nuanced and refined: first, the mass parties, where everybody has a membership card, and second, the soviet-style vanguard party. What were the social roots of these parties?
- International relations: internationalism and the framing of the relationship with the « brethren people », the international avant-gardes (esthetic and political)
- Transformation and renewal of the leadership
- Revolutions: cultural, “active” ...

III- Socialist Oppositions

To which extent oppositions that claim to be socialist did adopt a socialist outlook and program? Anti-colonial and post-colonial oppositions will be considered here. Were there socialist strategies of opposition, or specific Marxist or communist strategies? Communist parties were generally banned around or after the independences of African countries. What were their strategies of resistance? Clandestine parties after the independences such as the Parti Africain de l’indépendance must receive a closer look.

In Conclusion

Are the typologies describing the various doctrinal modalities of socialism in the « West » relevant also for the African case?

Utopian socialism (the prism is wide: from a kind of scientific socialism inspired by Saint-Simon, to religious forms of socialism with Lamennais *via* the community experiences of Owen, the federalist and cooperative system of Proudhon, and so on); scientific

socialism; social-democracy; revisionist socialism... Shall these categories be questioned and rethought anew from the perspective of African socialisms, or is it necessary to mobilize completely different categories?

Last but not least, we must ask the question of the contemporary heritages of those socialisms.

Proposals should include the following pieces of information

- o Full name of the author/s
- o Full contact details of the first author (address, telephone, e-mail)
- o Institutional affiliation
- o Title of the paper
- o A summary of 5000 characters including spaces.
- o Bibliographical elements (3- 5 references)

This should be sent to the following address before September 30, 2015:
Socialismeafricain@gmail.com

The contributions may be in French or in English

Conference dates : April 7, 8,9, 2016

The scientific committee will vote on the proposals before November 15, 2015 and its decision will be announced very quickly.