

Politique africaine

CALL FOR PAPERS

Social power and (post)colonial racial boundaries: Indian, Arabian, and Western communities in Africa

Coordinated by
Hélène Quashie (LARTES-IFAN, IMAF, ICM)

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This special issue examines the past and current presence of communities in Africa, originating from the Indian, Arabian, European and North American subcontinents. Their historicity and specificity offer a new angle for analysing the organization of African societies. This special issue focuses on the way class, race and gender structure, transform or push back the differentiations between Self and Other beyond the various configurations of these social networks. Since colonisation, they have been intertwined in several aspects of the economic and political dynamics of African societies. Rather than defining the social groups involved, this issue analyses how their boundaries shape them and their systems of relations (Poutignat, Streiff-Fenart, 1995) to explore permanence and transformation.

Social sciences have principally studied mobility and migration related to Africa through population flows from Africa to Europe and North America (Quiminal, 1991; Ebin, 1993; Timera, 1996; Gueye, 2001; Tandian, 2007; Mary, 2010; Dia, 2015) or through the circulations of Africans within Africa (Goldschmidt, 2002; Bredeloup, Pliez, 2005; Daum, Dougnon, 2009; Timera, 2011). African countries are then understood from the standpoint of economic, intellectual and political emigration. Since the early 2000s, because of Africa's attractiveness in South-South circulations, scholars have studied the settlement of new incomers, in particular from China (Bredeloup, Bertoncello, 2006; Marfaing, Thiel, 2013; Rajaoson, 2013). Although this academic shift presents Africa as a land of immigration, it only focuses on recent population flows from specific regions of the Global South.

For centuries, however, Africa has been a continent of immigration for populations originating from other countries and regions of the world who have contributed to informing the organization of its societies. Paradoxically, their presence remains under-studied, despite the fact that it casts a different light on the productions and negotiations of otherness, on the modes of socialization and on the local structure of economic and political systems. The aim of this special issue is therefore to explore the ways in which the presence of communities from the Indian, Arabian, European and North American

subcontinents has intervened in African policies and social dynamics. These groups have interacted with each other for centuries, as they distinguish themselves from each other. This calls into question several aspects of postcoloniality in Africa in a number of different ways.

Context

Seasonal movements from the Arabian and Indian subcontinents have been well documented (Adam, 2009; Adjemian, 2012; Charnay, 2017) in East and Southern Africa since at least the 8th century. They shaped social and political systems which were plural and redefined according to regions, times and governance - such as those of Swahili communities (Coret, 2019). These movements also organised social microcosms based on origin. For instance, Indians and Pakistanis in East and Southern Africa, and Lebanese in West Africa aggregated on the basis of a shared identity (Labaki, 1993; Taraf-Najib, 1997; Leichtman, 2013; El Chab, 2019).

The history of these social groups has intersected with that of European coloniality since the 18th century. Their socio-political relations with the authorities in colonial metropolises and with Europeans in Africa have resulted in the formation of a distinct status, as well as in competition with colonial settlers or intermediation with local societies (Oonk, 2006; Kaarsholm, 2016; El Chab, 2016). In addition, unlike the Europeans, actors from the Indian and Arabic subcontinents have linked their presence in Africa to family, business and religious networks, reinforced by mobility. These actors have become increasingly prominent in the secondary and tertiary industries: textile, food, production of paper and plastic, real estate, wholesale enterprises, hotels, catering and construction. They have also invested in professional activities such as medicine, law and artistic production, thereby experiencing upward social mobility. Through their professions and sociability, they have established relations within and outside African societies, and also accessed African, European and North American citizenship (Leichtman, 2005; El Chab, 2016).

These communities welcome new incomers into Africa who may sometimes be from different countries (more recently Syrians, Moroccans, Saudis and Iranians residents, who socialize with Lebanese ones). Their members mostly enjoy a monopolistic position in the local economic market and circulate within Africa. They are limited in number but are not always members of the elites. These particularities shape social, racial and gendered differentiations between groups and between individuals within African societies. Depending on the country of residency, marriage may provide an illustration of social prescriptions and barriers (Adam, 2009; El Chab, 2019) or that of mix raced networks. These groups experience transnationalism (Schiller et al. 1992) through dual or triple citizenship and several different national identities (Leichtman, 2005, 2010; Fouéré, 2010; El Chab, 2016). Some actors engage with local political life; others introduce themselves as African nationals when they are abroad. Most do not think about returning to their purported countries of origin. Their residency within African societies therefore reveals plural belonging, ambiguous grounding and social boundaries that are both permanent and changing. In these communities, identity labels such as "African", "Arabian", "Lebanese", "Indian", "Pakistani", "European" or "North American" do not reflect homogenous significations: their social production often depends on contexts and interactions.

The development of colonial cities has facilitated the formation of European communities in Africa and eventually their presence in various fields, including trades, the army, universities and churches. The Europeans' relative success has encouraged Canadians' and Americans' immigration. Politics after Independences did not restrict these migrations (Cruise O'Brien, 1972; Grossetti, 1986; Dozon, 2003; Rubbers, 2009; Peraldi, Terrazzoni, 2016; Smith, 2019), although employment and working conditions changed (Metaxides, 2010; Akesson, 2016; Dos Santos, 2016; Quashie, 2016a, 2016b). Still, social scientists have carried out few studies on the social consequences and transformations resulting from the ongoing Western presence in Africa – often because the duration of these actors' stays is perceived as being brief, or because of the small size of their communities, which has in reality been

underestimated, as has been the case in other regions of the Global South (Fabiano *et al.* 2019). However, the mining industry, international trade, construction, cooperation, international aid, the arts, the media, consular administration, healthcare, tourism, teaching and research are all professional sectors that have structured communities and social belonging. They also facilitate professional bridges, circulations in Africa and access to various administrative positions (such as intern, volunteer, employee, consultant, expatriate, independent professional or entrepreneur).

Despite the multiple trajectories of their actors and the internal differences based on nationality, language and social competition, Western communities often occupy high positions in the African economic sector, while their professional and cultural activities are locally anchored. These dynamics are the result of historical and regional contexts and of specific spheres of socialisation (Rubbers, 2007) which foster *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1980) and mechanisms of economic, racial and symbolic distinction (Pierre, 2012; Quashie, 2015; Hurni, 2019).

The social categorisations that emerge from this process might include actors from African societies who are acquainted with Western communities. They are not always local elites; some are binational; others were members of diasporas in Europe and North America who “returned” to Africa. Locally, these actors may be assigned to the social attributes of whiteness (Diawara, 1994; Papinot, 1998; Pierre, 2012; Quashie, 2015; Horne, 2019; Sambou, 2020; Traore, 2020), which echoes similar categorisations within African diasporas in the Global North based on the ways in which actors socialise (Telep, 2018; Brun, 2019). Indeed, the social representations and imaginaries relating to Western communities in African societies structure practices and classifications that are framed by history, North-South migrations and the current globalisation. They reflect the colonial situation and its power dynamics (Mamdani, 2004) without being completely identical. Identity labels such as “European”, “North American”, “White” and “African” have then become more complex in these communities, and they also reveal ambiguous social production. In addition, Western communities in Africa have always included “mixed couples” (Rubbers, 2007; Tisseau, 2010; Geoffrion, 2016; Despres, 2017; Blum, Rillon, 2018; Dragani, 2018), as well as mixed-race descendants. This emphasises not only social barriers but also fluctuating boundaries, and it puts into perspective the relations between local societies and mixed families from the slave trade and colonisation, and mixed families linked to the recent migrations from the Global North.

The actors in these different communities are often given labels in local languages (such as *naar*, *karan*, *wahindi*, *fôté*, *toubab*, *yovo*, *oyinbo*, *toubabuw*, *mundele*, *obroni* or *mzungu*). All these terms highlight the idea of foreignness or “half-foreignness”, one that is reinforced by the languages these actors speak in their everyday lives, as well as by their limited demographic number. This idea may persist even if they were born in Africa, are descended from a second or third generation who has settled there or have multiple citizenship, including the local one. Politics or grassroots movements of discontent may also target them sometimes. In return, an ambivalent and subtle xenophobia may emerge towards residents they define as “Africans”. However, these boundaries between Self and Other do not prevent economic, political and emotional ties. Through different ways of socializing, some actors even navigate between these social worlds and blur the identity labels. These paradoxes lead to an exploration of how these communities build confluence, distinctions and hierarchies among them and among actors who do not share the same status and privileges. In a broader sense, they question the “politics of race” in postcolonial Africa (Pierre, 2012).

There are several axes that enable us to question the social production of otherness in (post)colonial Africa through the social dynamics of these communities, and through the economic and political issues they put at stake. At the crossroads of class, race and gender analysis, the contributions to this special issue will revisit notions such as “minority”, “foreigner”, “diaspora” through the circulations, residency, representations and relations with nation-states that structure these communities. All but exhaustive, the following list suggests a number of essential research axes that highlight specific

spheres of socialisation – sometimes determined historically – in which communities interact with each other, (re)delineate the boundaries that separate them and build their relations with local societies.

Axis 1

Contributions may deal with the **types of residency** that the communities under study opt for in African cities and rural areas. The main questions these contributions will address are as follows. Do these communities aggregate in specific districts on the basis of a common origin? Does this manifest a visible level of homogeneity as far as class, nationality and race are concerned? Do the available housing options shape any specific relations within and between these communities and local populations? How do members of these communities participate in residential development and urbanisation processes, and occasionally promote historical urban assets? In what ways do housing choices influence the organisation of urban infrastructures (such as medical facilities), local housing markets and land speculation? Do family and professional networks play a role in real estate ventures and inheritance? How are citizenship and local laws on nationality intertwined with the types and choices of residency and its outcomes?

Axis 2

Contributors will focus on analysing **occupations and professional activities**. Historically, Indian, Pakistani and Lebanese communities have been prominent in specific professions and positions by tapping into strong family ties for the circulation of manpower and access to skills and financial capital. Western communities have integrated, or even initiated, other fields of activity, and have also contributed to the expansion of the European and North American labour markets into African countries. Do these professional networks continue to be accessible through nationality and “origin”? Do they intersect with each other, and in what professional fields? Given that expatriate contracts are increasingly rare, how is access to employment with local contracts organised? What dynamics result from it and what are their effects on binational and local professionals? Do they diversify African labour markets?

Axis 3

Contributions will question private and/or community **education systems**. These schools fall into various categories and have different institutional backgrounds. But they can also heighten social and racial boundaries, and reinforce class homogeneity (by welcoming children of transnational elites) and identity closure (by selecting children on the basis of religion and “origin”). Studying the organisation of these schools makes it possible to see correlations between socialization, class, race and trajectories. Which categories of actors are involved in directing, managing and attending these schools? How are generational and gendered relations and the circulation of actors intertwined? These schools also guide students towards universities within and outside Africa, and shape alumni networks that help former students to return and work in specific professional fields. How does this process interact with identity construction and the evolution of certain global economic sectors?

Axis 4

Contributions will address the issue of the **religious practices** of all denominations. A number of Christian networks bring European and Lebanese communities together in Africa. These can be studied, as can the relationships with Islam within Pakistani, Arabian, European and North American networks. Is their practice embedded in that of the local religions, or is it rather under foreign influence? Does it initiate a different relationship to religion? What is the historicity, and what are the places of religious practice for these communities? What social, economic and family contexts do they frame? What understanding of local religious affiliations does it reveal? How is it perceived locally?

Axis 5

Contributions will study **leisure sites and activities**. Leisure differentiates social actors between those who can set aside free time and those who cannot. Leisure can reproduce the same networks of actors who gather at school or work, thereby reinforcing racial and economic belonging. At the same time, it can subvert social reproduction. How does leisure unveil mechanisms of distinction, confluence or diversity? Does gender play any role in these dynamics? How do leisure activities shape local markets for culture, art and tourism and the labour markets associated with them? What does it reveal about generational divides and the choices made by local youth who adopt, renew or reject certain types of leisure activity?

Axis 6

Last but not least, this special issue welcomes contributions on **political participation**. It is framed in different ways depending on the country of residency and is based on citizenship. What is the historicity of the places where politics is performed in these communities? How do official engagement and informal lobbying intersect? What do they say about actors' relations with their countries of origin and with local societies? How are relations with States and voters negotiated? What does the acquisition of multiple citizenship and its transmission imply for voters, elected officials and their communities? Working on bilateral cooperation or with international organizations is another form of political participation. How much weight does this have in local societies? What does it say about the relations with local elites and those abroad?

This special issue is open to all disciplines and welcomes contributions in French and in English built on empirical and original data. Its topic highlights the diverse questions pertaining to **epistemology** in social sciences. In order to address these questions, the researchers' reflexivity and positionality appear to be of the utmost importance for (re)thinking the production of this knowledge about Africa.

Calendar

6/12/2021: Deadline for submission of paper proposals (in French or English) to helene.quashie@free.fr and helenemv.quashie@gmail.com

17/12/2021: Notification to authors of acceptance or rejection of their proposal.

For more information on the format of articles to be submitted, see the instructions to authors: <https://polaf.hypotheses.org/soumettre-un-article/submit-to-the-journal>

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