

Politique africaine

CALL FOR PAPERS

Maintaining Everyday Order in Africa

Coordinated by

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Questions around policing have been the subject of recent publications in a number of issues of French-speaking journals. Issue 29 of *Participations*, which was dedicated to “citizens’ participation in maintaining order” adopted an international comparative approach. The consideration given to three African case studies – Uganda, Malawi and Nigeria – in a review that is usually labelled as “Western” is part of a trend towards the multiplication of research on policing since the beginning of the 2000s, with notable publications such as *Police in Africa* (Beek *et al.*, 2017).

This call is part of this dynamic, proposing a focus on policing that designates the set of social practices that seek to maintain order and constrain behaviour without linking it to a specific organisation (Manning, Van Maanen, 1978; Bayley, 1985). Many actors grant themselves these prerogatives: the so-called neo-traditional hunters (such as the well-known examples of the Dozos, and the Kamajors), self-defence groups (Koglwego or Mai, among others), community policing

initiatives, the expression of which has been reappropriated in many English-speaking African countries, so-called “popular” police forces such as in Sudan, vigilance committees, private security groups (security guards, etc.), self-justice practices, and even certain militia groups in other contexts. To these many groups we would add state police forces, which often remain a centralised institution, including in federal systems. It has been decided to study these social groups in this issue through their coercive practices, and to question their effects in policed spaces (Pratten, Sen, 2007, p. 6).

Research on non-state security groups has multiplied since the 2000s, and with it have come efforts to categorise initiatives that initially appeared to be outside state control. Many words and expressions have been used to character these initiatives, including vigilantism, self-defence and popular justice. While popular justice can be defined as the direct involvement of citizens in the process of judging and punishment, the definition of vigilantism and self-defence remains blurred. The former often has a pejorative connotation, except in Nigeria, where it has been reappropriated by the state to apply to legal security groups (Fourchard, 2008). For lack of a definition, vigilantism, which is a word that was initially borrowed from another historical and cultural context in the United States (Abrahams, 1987), has come to describe a highly heterogeneous set of social groups that grant themselves policing and justice prerogatives and protest against the state monopoly of violence. Self-defence can also be associated equally with ethno-nationalist mobilisations, for instance the O’odua People’s Congress in south-western Nigeria (Akinyele, 2001), with the settler militias in North Africa who supported the French Army and were responsible for repressing anti-colonial mobilisations and with spaces with ties to the revolutionary left, such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution during the Sankarist revolution, which took over certain policing and popular justice functions. During the 1990s, the term “community policing” was coined, adding further complexity to the existing categories. This last term reflects the transnationalisation of reforms aimed at restructuring state police forces, which are seen as being too remote from the needs of the population, and to be losing their legitimacy. In many cases, it justifies the mobilisation of citizens by the state to strengthen police action.

The question of the relations between these groups and the state continues to form the basis of the majority of research questions on policing in Africa, to illustrate either their absorption into the state or their disappearance. We aim to go beyond this dichotomy to show, in the wake of numerous previous works, that these categories of vigilantism or community policing, which were formerly constructed to designate phenomena that were perceived as being distinct, should be understood as being more within the same continuum than opposed to each other. The social groups that take responsibility for maintaining order are characterised by their changing nature and their contingent relations with the state, oscillating between contestation and state co-optation (Fourchard, 2018). In addition, mob justice practices such as lynching or the collective punishment of an individual who is considered to be deviant are often inspired by state and bureaucratic registers, while state-legalised police forces sometimes resort to repertoires of action that are traditionally associated with vigilantism (Cooper-Knock, Owen, 2015). This is, in fact, more closely related to the classic division of police work within a hierarchical police structure (Bonelli, Lemaire, Proteau, 2021; Grassin, 2021) and to the now well-documented phenomenon of the multilateralisation of police functions (Fourchard, 2018). The issue is therefore to question the continuum between state and non-state actors.

Although the literature on vigilantism in Africa has had the very great significance of looking at the complex relationships these groups have with the state, we would like to approach them through their practices and their role in (re)producing social hierarchies. Leaving aside the question of these groups’ relations with the state, coercive practices are seen as the set of practices

and organised actions that aim to constrain behaviour in order to maintain order. The term “maintaining order” is often a confusing one because of its general, all-encompassing connotation. By “maintaining order”, we mean the practices that seek to create and/or maintain social (rich/poor), political (state/protesting groups), racialised, gendered (men/women) and sexual hierarchies. Thus, the practices of patrolling, surveillance of public spaces and controlling places of production (factories, ports, places where natural resources are extracted or industrial infrastructures), and rackets/extortion, identity checks, corporal punishment, development of a system of punishment, denunciation and intimidation will be at the heart of the analysis. Our review issue will not, therefore, merely be limited to deployments of violence that might be considered to be “spectacular”, with the staging of physical punishment, which are seen as a feature of vigilantism (Favarel-Garrigues, Gayer, 2016).

We consider that the bureaucratic organisation of these groups (Da Cunha Dupuy, 2021) or the proximity of the registers of action that are sometimes to with social work contribute to the establishment – or maintenance – of a form of social hierarchy. Indeed, many local actors of order assimilate their coercive practices with social work, or else it is the police themselves who use mechanisms of social redistribution, thereby blurring the boundaries between coercion and social services (Revilla, 2021). The definition of coercive practices is therefore not limited to the use of direct and visible physical violence. Our ambition is to open up the black box of coercion, its practical organisation and its deployment, and to document with precision what is sometimes kept in the domain of secrecy and the hidden, but which nonetheless plays a preponderant role in shaping conduct. The purpose of this dossier is to shed light on the mechanisms of routinisation, diffusion and naturalisation of coercion on a daily basis; this will lead us to consider all the practices of these groups, whether they are considered to be violent or not. An analysis of the deployment of coercive practices also means raising the question of their incorporation and subjectivation.

Addressing the question of coercion through practices and the everyday rather than organisations and their relations with the state helps produce a more detailed historical analysis of the boundaries that actors of order attempt to draw between them in order to legitimise their action in a competitive space. Historical contributions will be particularly appreciated as a means of understanding the mechanisms of naturalisation and the incorporation of certain coercive practices and their circulation from one social space to another. This effort at historicisation makes it possible not to give in to the sirens of internationalised discourses that make community policing an ideological novelty; the colonial period, for example, was characterised by the mass participation of a broad constellation of local actors and intermediaries with whom the colonial administrations had to deal (Blanchard, 2012).

To study how a social hierarchy is shaped by the multiplication of policing practices, three axes will be proposed in this issue. You will be asked to study dimensions that are still barely mentioned in the current research on these subjects: the internal organisation of groups that are categorised as either non-state actors or police, which refers to the practices and hierarchies embraced by these groups (axis 1); the mechanisms of routinisation and naturalisation of coercive practices (axis 2); and finally, the modes of resistance to coercion, which also inform us about how these coercive practices are received and the imaginaries they carry (axis 3).

Axis 1: The internal organisation of coercion

There are few works that offer information on the internal division of labour within these groups. Indeed, we postulate that these initiatives follow important logics of social hierarchy, which can be based on existing modes of domination within society (birthright, patriarchy, social classes, etc.), or conversely that they subvert. You are also asked to provide a sociological analysis of the profiles empowered to organise the constraints at a practical level. Particular attention will be paid to contributions dealing with the distribution of tasks within so-called non-state groups or a police station, the methods for dividing labour (who should exercise violence? What skills are valued? What is social climbing within these groups?), or the sharing of financial gains from extortion or the commodification of a security service. The performance of these tasks must be correlated with the social positions occupied by the actors: who is in charge of tasks that are considered to be dishonourable, such as the enforcement of punishment or the role of an informant, which is often associated with “spying”? Who are the people who keep the activities that are viewed as prestigious for themselves, such as investigation or its dramatisation?

Axis 2: Grasping “low noise” coercion

Here, we are calling for a shift in approach from the often spectacular uses of force characterised by the resurgence of conflicts on the continent, which sometimes makes us assimilate violence and coercion too rapidly. The sociology of the police has long shown that coercion often takes place in every interaction, and the occurrence of force is rare (Bitter, 1967; Jobard, 2012). Coercion therefore consists more in “making people believe” in the imminence of physical constraint than its systematic use. Therefore, much of the work of coercion relies more on an ability to “see things” than only being able to intervene through the use of force (Göpfert, 2016). The influence of coercion on behaviour is therefore a subject for analysis whose methodological approaches still remain to be shaped. For this reason, contributions that question how to “grasp” coercive practices and differentiate them from other registers of coercion such as violence and force will be welcomed. Authoritarian configurations can be particularly heuristic when it comes to questioning coercive practices that often do not say their name explicitly. Who among the researchers working in these situations has never felt the surveillance, suspicion and control, however impalpable it may be, and has sometimes fallen into a state of more or less intense paranoia? Political surveillance is also one of the important themes to be addressed, both in terms of methodological issues and its impact on subjectivation. In short, this dossier aims to objectify the invisible nature of coercion. The emphasis placed on the invasion of everyday life by coercion therefore (re-)proposes the question of how to discipline social space. To what extent and in what ways is coercion on individuals incorporated? How does the insertion of day-to-day policing practices translate? Does one end up assimilating surveillance of one's neighbours as a form of “good morality”? Is association with a self-defence group a virile and prestigious act? In other words, the effects of the naturalisation of coercion by individuals and their incorporation into the definition of identities – what Michel Foucault calls subjectivation – might be questioned and debated by the various contributions.

Axis 3: Resistance to coercion

While coercion is omnipresent in daily life and is difficult to objectivise, resistance can also nevertheless arise. The mobilisations against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, which was known for its violent arbitrariness, in Nigeria in 2020, which sparked one of the largest protest movements

since the 1990s, illustrates the sometimes fragile naturalisation of coercive practices. This file will pay particular attention to contributions that analyse daily negotiations, the ways of escaping the control of these groups and the most visible modes of resistance, such as public denunciation, looting of materials and demonstrations. The Sudanese Revolution of December 2018 is another example that shows how a police institution can be challenged by attacks on police stations or direct attacks on police officers, a phenomenon that is not new either in Sudan or elsewhere, however (Favarel-Garrigues, Gayer, 2021). One central dimension should not be overlooked: resistance sometimes comes from within the institutions themselves. The Sudanese example demonstrated this once again when the leaders of the military junta in power in Khartoum worried about disobedience from within the ranks of the police ('ayin, 16 January 2022). The history of police strikes, which has been little documented until now (Berridge, 2011), might constitute a stimulating study of resistance to coercion.

Contributions should be based on original empirical material. Paper proposals should be sent to romane.dacunhadupuy@sciencespo.fr and lucie.revilla@cnrs.fr. They are due by 15 June 2022 in the form of a one page abstract, in French or English, presenting the objectives, hypotheses and empirical materials to be examined. The first versions of the selected papers should be submitted by early November.

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