Conference

Thoughts on the gendered experience of political violence in Africa

Biographical impacts, generational and family transmissions

Sciences Po Bordeaux – 3-4 October 2019

Located at the point where the history of gender and the sociology of engagement intersect, this conference will look at the effects of political violence on individual lives and how they are recorded in the memories of contemporary African societies. By studying the trajectories of "engaged" men and women in the contexts of intense conflicts – whether they are members of registered organizations or not – our aim is to understand how gender is reconstructed and reinvented in situations of violence. On the one hand, this involves studying relationships with political violence and gendered identity construction in family and militant spheres, while on the other, the challenge is to rerecord violence over a period of time in order to be able get past the event itself and explore the traces political confrontations leave on subsequent generations. The relationship between gender and political violence has seen a considerable advance in recent years[1], with works that have shattered the taboo of female violence[2] and mechanisms of using rape as a political weapon against women and men[3]. Other works have moved the focus away from the public space where political violence is displayed, and have studied their effects on individuals and their private and family lives[4]. However, in the majority of these studies, which focus on Western countries, political violence has mostly been studied in the light of experiences of wars and armed conflict. Their considerations have therefore left the more ordinary, daily expressions of acts of political violence carried out in authoritarian systems or pluralist democracies to one side. Our intention is to study the individual and community upheavals these experiences generate by looking at all situations of violence[5]. The purpose of this conference is to use various African political contexts as our starting point, and to compare mechanisms of political violence and question the borders within which it is exercised (public/private, individual/community and personal/political).

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[1] François Rouquet & Danièle Voldman, *Identités féminines et violences politiques (1936-1946)*, Les Cahiers de l'IHTP, n°31, 1995.

[2] Coline Cardi & Geneviève Pruvost (dir.), *Penser la violence des femmes*, Paris, La Découverte, 2012 ; Fanny Bugnon, *Les « Amazones de la terreur ». Sur la violence politique des femmes, de la Fraction Armée rouge à Action directe*, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2015.

[3] Raphaëlle Branche & Fabrice Virgili (dir.), *Viols en temps de guerre*, Paris, Payot, 2011.

[4] Fouchard Dominique, *Le Poids de la guerre. Les Poilus et leur famille après 1918*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013.

[5] Laurent Mucchielli & Xavier Crettiez (dir.), *Les violences politiques en Europe. Un état des lieux*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010.

Male and female perpetrators and the victims of violence will also be included at the same time.

On the one hand, we want to lift the veil from the breakdown of family and marital ties, and from the traces this violence leaves on individual trajectories and societies. To achieve this, a dialogue with other disciplines (history, sociology, political science, psychoanalysis and literature) will make it possible to analyse this issue, which is enjoying a considerable historiographical revival, in greater depth. The modalities of parentage, transmission, and family breakdowns generated by situations of violence will be explored. The term "families" must be looked at in its widest context here: it describes not only a family of parental ties (whether biological or social) but also the political family. This broad definition will enable us to look at the way in which the two relate or come together when political violence is exercised.

On the other hand, the question of experience of political violence must be looked at through the prism of gender, generations and the various stages of life. This intersectional perspective enables the research dedicated to means of political socialization and the generational transmission of militancy, and the works on the biographical and militant consequences of engagement[6], to be studied in greater detail. Finally, during the course of this conference, we want to place the biographical trajectories of militants at the heart of our analysis. A **biographical approach** will enable us to bypass the essentialist and deterministic concepts of engagement, and to underline its procedural dimension, which is made up of non-linear socialization, encounters, and flows and re-flows[7]. The links between political violence, gender, and militant careers are of fundamental importance if one is to be able to understand the system of relationship-building and the differences between the sexes in the face of engagement[8]. To what extent does political violence produce the "moral shocks" and physical humiliations that lead to radicalization, or conversely, a disengagement that varies on the basis of an individual's gender, age and family status?

The discussions will be guided by three avenues of thought:

1. The first will look at **political violence using an intersectional approach**[9], placing gender, race, class and age relationships at its heart. It will begin by studying women's political violence by women, and will therefore look at violence committed both *on* and *by* women, firstly distinguishing gendered types of violence in their general forms, and then by analysing their gender signification. The gendered division of militant work, which enables gender norms to be bypassed, can be found in numerous armed struggles: the Algerian war[10],

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[6]Julie Pagis, *Mai 68. Un pavé dans leur histoire*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2014 ; McAdam Doug, « Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer », *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 97, n°5, 1992, pp. 1211-1240.

[7]Olivier Fillieule, « Propositions pour une analyse processuelle de l'engagement individuel », *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 51, n° 1, 2001, pp. 199-215 ; Frédéric Sawicki & Johanna Siméant, « Décloisonner la sociologie de l'engagement militant. Note critique sur quelques tendances récentes des travaux français », *Sociologie politique*, vol. 51, n°1, 2009, pp. 97-125 ; Isabelle Sommier, « Sentiments, affects et émotions dans l'engagement à haut risque », *Terrains Théories*, n° 2, 2015.

[8]Susan Geiger, « Tanganyikan Nationalism as 'Women's Work': Life Histories, Collective Biography and Changing Historiography », *The Journal of African History*, vol. 37, n°3, 1996, pp. 465-478.

[9]Kimberley W. Crenshaw, « Cartographies des marges : intersectionnalité, politique de l'identité et violences contre les femmes de couleur », *Cahiers du genre*, vol. 2, n°39, 2005, pp. 51-82.

[10]Charlotte Gobin, *Genre et engagement : devenir "porteur.e de valises" en guerre d'Algérie (1954-1966)*, thèse de doctorat en histoire contemporaine, sous la direction de Sylvie Schweitzer, Université Lyon 2-Lumière, 2017.

the Mau Mau movement in Kenya[11], the Mozambique Liberation Front[12], and Zimbabwe's liberation struggle[13]. The political violence methods of women and their place in the strategies of opposition movements or (para)state organizations such as female militias and vigilante squads will then be looked at. How are they recruited? What is the social, family and generational profile of women actors in political violence? Conversely, surveys carried out all types of violence show that the policy of terror and extermination implemented by Ethiopian soldiers has involved women in a specific way. How have the proportion of female militants and their real or imagined roles determined the intensity and forms of violence against them? How are gender-based violence (sexual and gendered violence) and political violence related[14]? By comparing the trajectories of men and women of different ages, our aim is to analyse the costs of repression and the biographical disengagement that seemed to weigh more heavily on individuals based on their gender, age or class.

2.   The aim of the second avenue of study is to develop considerations on **families under the pressure of political violence**. How has political history invited itself into families, by secret or violent routes? Importance will be given to the consequences of imprisonment on individuals and family (re-)configurations and the identities engendered. What is to be done with a husband or father who is an "Enemy of the Nation"? To what extent do absences due to men's death, imprisonment or exile enable female militants to climb the ladder of an organization? Although the moments of freedom and return is very often fervently awaited by both sides, both male and female war historians have pointed out the incomprehension and marital and family disappointments they produce[15]. Children are born during incarceration who do not know their fathers (who may also not be their biological father). How is recognition of them negotiated when the fathers leave prison? What are the effects of (sexual) violence on the militant, family and marital trajectories of male and female individuals who are imprisoned? Militants leave prison with the burden of physical and psychological torture on them. Taboos and unspoken words therefore envelop the lives of families, and are passed down through several generations: alcoholism, divorce, exile, religious investment, mental illness, and sometimes suicide, may form the traces of a past that is too hard for male and female ex-prisoners alike and those around them to bear. Finally, prison and shared suffering seem to have been a powerful moment in the political careers of a good number of militants. It helps anchor engagement and weld the group together, or, conversely, may bring about breakdowns, abandonment or transitions. Does the home become a place for "patriarchal revenge" for male militants bruised by the experience of prison?

3.   The third avenue of research looks at **processes of subjectification**. This means understanding how contexts of political violence come to nourish forms of engagement and fashion gendered militant practices, and how individual lives and gender identities have been intimately tested – or even transformed – by engagement in an extreme situation (armed struggles, clandestinity, exile, repression and torture). The aim here is to pursue the

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[11]Wambui Waiyaki Otieno, *Mau Mau's daughter : a life history*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.

[12]Dominic Dagenais, «Libération des femmes et libération nationale au Mozambique (1962-1974)», *Sextant*, n°25, 2008, p. 55-69.

[13]Tanya Lyons, *Guns and Guerilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle*, Trenton, Africa World Press, 2004.

[14]Catherine Brun & Todd Shepard*, Guerre d'Algérie : le sexe outragé,* Paris, Éditions du CNRS, 2016.

[15]Fabrice Virgili, *Naître ennemi. Les enfants de couples franco-allemands nés pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, Paris, Payot, 2009 ; Bruno Cabanes & Guillaume Piketty (dir.), *Retour à l'intime au sortir de la guerre*, Paris, Tallandier, 2009.

considerations that began with works linking violence to claims of virility[16], especially among young men for whom the experience of acting in a group can become a means of assertion before older people[17] or women. For women militants, too, "high risk" commitments[18] contribute towards forging paradoxical trajectories of emancipation. Some Algerian women say that they increased their self-esteem, acquired freedom (especially of movement), and adopted a new *hexis* (by wearing trousers, keeping their hair short, and removing their veils[19]. However, participating in this violence can also lead to a weakening of the dominant concepts of masculinity and cause private traumas[20], which should be studied in the case of militants of both sexes.

By adopting a method that is both multidisciplinary (history, sociology and literature) and comparative, this conference makes empirical analysis the cornerstone of its approach. Close attention will be paid to an analysis of sources, guided by two transversal questions: identifying the sources of political violence, and studying gender-building within these materials.

Calendar

September 2018: start of call for papers

15 November 2018: deadline for receipt of paper proposals

20 December 2018: replies to paper proposals

1 September 2019: deadline for receipt of completed papers

3-4 October 2019: Conference

How to submit papers:

Proposed papers, which may be in French or English, will be 4,000 characters in length, including a brief CV and a non-exhaustive list of publications

Contact: genre.violences.politiques@gmail.com

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[16]Christelle Taraud, « La virilité en situation coloniale, de la fin du XVIIIe siècle à la Grande Guerre », dans Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine & Georges Vigarello (dir.), *Histoire de la virilité XIXe siècle/Première guerre mondiale*, tome 2, Paris, Le Seuil, 2011, pp. 331-347.

[17]Ophélie Rillon, « Abolir la gérontocratie patriarcale ! Une révolution maoïste au Mali ? », dans Ludivine Bantigny et Fanny Bugnon (dir.), *Prolétaires de tous les pays, qui lave vos chaussettes ?*, Rennes, PUR, 2017, pp. 67-76

[18]McAdam Doug, « Recruitment to High Risk Activism: the Case of Freedom Summer », American Journal of Sociology, 92, 1986, p. 64-90.

[19]Natalya Vince, Our Fighting Sisters Nation, Memory And Gender In Algeria, 1954-2012, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015; Pierre-Jean Le Foll-Luciani, « « J'aurais aimé être une bombe pour exploser ». Les militantes communistes algériennes entre assignations sexuées et subversions des rôles de genre (1944-1962) », *Le Mouvement Social*, vol. 2, n° 255, 2016, p. 35-55.

[20]Raphaëlle Branche, « La Masculinité à l'épreuve de la guerre sans nom », *Clio, Histoire, Femmes, Sociétés*, n°20, 2004, pp. 111-122.

How the conference works:

This two-day conference will be in the form of discussion workshops based on texts that will be sent no later than the beginning of May (a maximum of 40,000 characters). It is therefore of fundamental importance that all participants should have read these contributions so that the discussions can take place under the optimal conditions for exchanges and shared reflections. The working languages will be French and English.

Organizing Committee: Raphaëlle Branche (Université de Rouen-GRHIS), Maria-Benedita Basto (Université Paris 4-IMAF), Charlotte Gobin (LARHRA), Pierre Guidi (IRD-CEPED), Ophélie Rillon (CNRS-LAM).

Scientific Committee: Vincent Foucher (CNRS-LAM), Elara Bertho (CNRS-LAM), Emmanuelle Bouilly (CESSP), Stéphanie Latte-Abdallah (CERI), Fanny Bugnon (Rennes 2-TEMPORA), Christina Scheibe Wolff (Federal University of Santa Catarina), Laurent Douzou (LARHRA), Mercedes Yusta (Paris 8-LER), Anne Castaing (CNRS-THALIM)