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Africa

Mobilizations against the established order in Angola and Nigeria

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In October 2020, starting on the sixtieth anniversary of its independence (1 October 1960), Nigeria experienced almost two weeks of mobilization of the movement against police violence, #EndSARS, made up mostly of young people. While in Angola, after a demonstration against corruption in October, on the very day of the 45th anniversary of independence (11 November 2020), young people took to the streets, demonstrating once again their anger over their social relegation. These mobilizations can be considered as the most recent balance sheets of the post-colonial decades by a new generation in these two states.

Nigeria's 60th anniversary of independence took place amid the gloomy mood created by SARS-CoV-2. But that would change in the following days, following the latest scandal concerning the special police brigade responsible for fighting organized crime, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), who have over the years become constant practitioners of the violation of human rights and even of a certain gangsterism (from the extortion of objects from individuals who have crossed their path to summary executions, including acts of torture and ransom demands). The summary execution (filmed) two days after the said anniversary subsequently reactivated the demand for its outright dissolution, #EndSARS. With a fairly popular mobilization - mainly young people who apparently constitute the favoured target of SARS - occupying the streets on 8 October, beyond Abuja (the federal capital) and Lagos (the economic capital). Gays and lesbians participated, despite the pervasive homophobia, with the Feminist Coalition being central in the organization of solidarity, despite the phallocracy, also pervasive. [1] The authorities claimed that they had listened to the demand for dissolution, along with four others including increased wages for police officers. This did not however lead to a demobilization of the demonstrators, on the one hand because they feared being duped once again: the replacement of the SARS by SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) being considered as a simple facelift. On the other hand, the denunciation of police violence was also linked to the denunciation of the social violence inflicted on the majority of the population, expressed by placards also demanding “#end unemployment, #end commercialization of education, #end hunger, #end lack of free medical care”. [2]

Nigeria is the leading African economy in terms of gross domestic product, the leading African producer of oil (mainly by the world giants in the sector: Chevron, Exxon, Shell, Total) – which accounts for 94% of export earnings – and is very extractivist and extrovert, deemed economically dynamic also for the growth of its capitalists (millionaires and billionaires in dollars). However, it is characterized at the same time by a very high rate of poverty (70% of the population of around 210 million is considered as living under the poverty threshold) and unemployment (27.1%, 53% of them young), with 13 million children, above all girls, not attending school, its child trafficking “baby factories”, its supply to the international market in female prostitution and so on. A situation that has worsened with the drop in crude oil prices since 2014 and the drop in demand caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the world economy. And after increasing VAT, the government (with a debt corresponding to 48% of GDP), having made agreements with the international financial institutions (the IMF, the World Bank, even the African Development Bank), in September, complied with the neoliberal injunction to end the subsidies for electricity and fuel. The negative consequences on the budgets of the popular classes - the modest increase in the minimum wage achieved last year has not been applied in nearly a third of the states of the federation - through the repercussion of this rise in prices, for example on foodstuffs and transport, led to spontaneous movements of disapproval in the popular neighbourhoods.

This prompted the main trade union federations (Nigerian Labour Congress, Trade Union Congress) to call for an indefinite strike. But, subsequently, “Technically the strike has been ‘suspended’ for two weeks” the day before the date set (28 September 2020) by the union leadership. [3] That is, a few days before the unforeseen #EndSARS mobilization. In addition, the government had previously been granted the suspension of the strike of doctors in the public sector (unionized with the National Association of Residents Doctors, 40% of doctors, demanding, among

other things, the payment of salary arrears dating from of 2014-2016). Public health has been one of the main victims of budget cuts as has public education, where the Academic Staff Union of Universities has maintained its paralyzing strike since March at public universities. Nigerian government sees this strike as promoting the massive participation of students in #EndSARS mobilizations. Yet, said an academic, “all we are asking for is a fair treatment as teachers [...]. We are not asking for outrageous amounts of gratuities but something that places us above the poverty line”. [4] At the end of September, the Coalition for Revolution (CORE) called for a national demonstration on 1 October 2020, denouncing, among other things, “anti-people policies”, “extra-judicial killings”, and “poorly thought-out foreign loans that would burden and enslave future generations”. [5]

The #EndSARS mobilization in several Nigerian states thus takes place, certainly in an international context of the fight against police violence in the United States and in France, but also and above all in a local social context of resistance actions against neoliberal aggression by the popular classes. The occupation by demonstrators for two weeks of the Lekki motorway toll booth in Lagos is not devoid of symbolism as Lekki is a business city, a free trade zone. Also, the main figures of Nigerian capitalism have been singled out for attempting to divide and put an end to the movement by soliciting support from certain media individuals for the passage from the SARS to SWAT, so that business can resume its usual course. [6] The philanthrocapitalist foundations (MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Foundation), responsible for the gilding of the chains of capitalist domination, have also been active. But without success, the mobilization continued. [7]

Thus, probably, the option taken - after having resorted in previous days to using henchmen against the demonstrators, without succeeding in breaking the mobilization - of shooting at the demonstrators, at the Lekki tollbooth (about ten deaths) and elsewhere across Nigeria. The state forces have been powerless for a decade in the face of armed Islamist groups (Boko Haram and others) which violate, kidnap young girls, kill people in the North, but prove relentless in the face of peaceful demonstrators. [8] As someone recalled, “the policing system is principally designed, in its origins and its ideology, to protect the political elite at the expense of ordinary citizens. Up until a few weeks ago, the Nigerian Police was established and regulated by a 1943 colonial law. This law was itself enacted to regulate a policing system established in 1930”. [9] This is a good expression of neo-colonial post-colonialism. Hence the lack of particular sympathy with the demonstrators killed in Lekki and elsewhere shown by Nigerian president Muhammadu Buharu, although he did express his sorrow concerning the destruction and looting, by demonstrators enraged by the “Lekki massacre”, of the “inviolable” residence of the Oba (traditional king) of Lagos. [10]

Buhari’s post-massacre speech spoke of “our broad plan to lift 100 million Nigerians out of poverty in the next 10 years; the creation of N75 billion National Youth Investment Fund” [11] A plan that seems destined to remain a promise in view of the agreements concluded by the Nigerian state with the IMF, WB, and ADB for the pursuit of “*structural reforms*”. Among the said reforms, there is the privatization of ten profitable state enterprises including the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (with ten subsidiaries), central to the Nigerian gross national product. In other words, new gifts that will be made to the usual beneficiaries of neo-colonial independence in Nigeria: transnational capital and indigenous capitalists often linked to regional and central governments.

Protests in Angola

The critical commemoration of independence was more evident in Angola: young people defied the ban on demonstrations on 11 November, 2020 (the 45th anniversary of independence being wrested from Portugal by the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola/MPLA, after 13 years of a war of national liberation, followed by an Angolan civil war from 1975-2002). They thus exposed themselves to repression, the police having fired with live ammunition, leaving one person dead. For the protesters, 45 years of social injustice was too much. As in Nigeria, it was not an unprecedented protest.

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Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Angolan youth have developed the habit of expressing their discontent. This is despite the intimidation by the government of the association known as the Revolutionary Movement of Angola, often presented as social but apolitical, which called for revolution in March 2011, thus initiating the diversified dynamic known as the Revús (revolutionaries). Or the repression a few years later (2015-2016) in the form of the trial of the so-called "15 + 2" (15 men and 2 women) accused of preparing "to carry out acts aimed at undermining the order and security of the country" on the basis of a collective reading at a meeting of a book considered subversive by the regime of the then president, José Eduardo dos Santos. His replacement as head of state, João Lourenço, has not been spared by this dynamic, even with the Covid-19 health crisis and state of emergency.

With the embezzlement of public funds and the self-attribution of contracts by the rulers, poverty and unemployment have been the main subjects mobilizing young people since 2011. The demonstrators of 11 November, 2020, mainly young people, still spoke of their unemployment, their empty bellies, the hunger which was more of a daily reality to them than Covid-19. Indeed, despite GDP growth having, before the 2014 fall in crude oil prices, reached up to 20% in this country, the second biggest African oil producer (40% of GDP) - a large part of this stems from the Angolan domination of Cabinda - and 7th in the world for diamonds, the distribution of wealth here, as in Nigeria, is particularly unequal: the number of poor (sticking to the complacent threshold of US\$1.90) is very high and growing, also due to a high unemployment rate (32.7%). [12] This is, obviously, the consequence of the reality of Angola's insertion into the world capitalist economy, as an economy dominated by international capital (Chinese included) and more extractivist than Nigeria, as well as of the kleptomania of the governments, carrying out their private capitalist accumulation at the expense of the public treasury. The 38 years in power of José Eduardo Dos Santos were thus the moment of constitution and development of "La dos Santos Company" and other fortunes/enterprises of MPLA dignitaries and their nominees/associates. [13] Angolan capital has invested on all continents, with a particular preference for the former colonizing country which has led some to speak, even after 2014, of "colonization in reverse" or the "buyout of Portugal by Angola". [14]

As if to express a sensitivity to the growth of poverty and youth unemployment, João Lourenço had promised, as candidate and then elected president, the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs, in an economy that was already in recession (from 2016). Not only has the promise not been kept (yet), but the rise in unemployment is likely to continue. Because within the framework of an agreement with the IMF, the over-indebted Angolan government (debt is estimated at more than 110% of GDP) also undertook, in 2018, to carry out neoliberal "structural reforms", to allow economic growth driven by the private sector. Thus, for example, the privatization of 190 state-owned enterprises, especially the most profitable, including the national oil company, Sonangol, and the diamond dealer Endiama, is scheduled. This will not only benefit transnational capital, indigenous capitalists and MPLA business people (apart from the now excluded Dos Santos family), but will also be accompanied by layoffs rather than job creation. With, very likely, the loss by employees of certain rights, to attract investors. Despite an apparent sensitivity of the IMF to popular social issues and to "inclusion", so-called social budget spending cannot escape adjustment to the austerity principle, in a country where access to public health and education remains fairly limited and often of poor quality.

As for the "fight against corruption", also promised, the Lourenço regime has certainly scored points by attacking the Dos Santos Company and its political and/or business clientele. However, it is also criticized as being a settling of scores with the Dos Santos faction, turning a blind eye and ears to other actors. For example, the demonstrations of October 2020, repressed by the police, denounced the retention in his post of Lourenço's chief of staff and right-hand man, a notorious businessman alleged to have awarded himself public contracts and to have diverted public funds. Lourenço's determination to carry out neoliberal "structural reforms" (with the particular support of his wife, a former Angolan minister and former administrator at the World Bank) may reduce the misappropriation of public funds following the privatization of the geese that lay the golden eggs, though "petty corruption" will undoubtedly continue because of the pauperization of civil servants. However, this determination will not be able to solve the problems of unemployment and poverty and social injustice, which relate to the nature of the capitalist economy, chosen by the Angolan leaders.

Rejection of ruling classes

The demonstrations in both countries represent the practical, empirical rejection of the extension of this option, common to the ruling classes of these two oil-producing countries, the dream of another Angola (“a better Angola” as João Lourenço puts it), or another Nigeria (“We are more resolved to press not just for justice but for a new and better Nigeria where all citizens are safe and can thrive”). [15] Moreover, the demonstrators do not hesitate to use the language of the IFIs, advocating “good governance” as one of the objectives of their struggle - words are not lacking in importance: for the IMF and the World Bank who have propagated the expression, it is about the “good governance” of neoliberalism, neo-colonial with regard to African states in general - and claim to be without political motivation, which is quite logical. [16]

However, these movements are not homogeneous. Thus, in the Nigerian case, in the aftermath of the “Lekki massacre”, while groups of demonstrators condemned acts of destruction of public and private property, the Alliance on Surviving Covid and Beyond (ASCAB), for example, expressed the wish for a (re) energization of social struggles: “We the under-listed organisations and representatives of the organised working people give our unequivocal support to the #EndSARS protestors and mass protest movement and call on our members to join the continuing protests. We call for a conscious intervention of the working people and their organisations, and in a manner that can open the way to a structured and robust conversation within the movement and among the oppressed and resisting peoples on the way forward [...] The Government and the ruling elite are now very weak and divided. It does not know what to do. So now is the time to push forward our trade union demands. The health workers need to re-start their strikes. The teachers should organise for action around the promises made to them by Buhari. The NLC and TUC should be planning action over the fuel and electricity price increases and over full implementation of the minimum wage in all states, as well as over the brutal clamp down on the popular protests by government”. [17].

As for a certain heterogeneity of the Angolan movement, it was recently manifested by the responses given to the invitation to dialogue by João Lourenço. Protesting youth organizations responded favourably and participated on 26 October 2020, considering it an opportunity to find together with the government avenues for the resolution of the social evils motivating the mobilizations. While others see no hope of the MPLA changing its nature or abandoning its interests which are contrary to those of the Angolan people. However, both are active in the organization of the first municipal elections, hoping, no doubt, for a defeat of the MPLA and a possible popular pressure on elected officials. A position that can be beneficial to the main opposition party, UNITA, which supported the protesting youth while not in any way opposing the general orientations of collective neo-colonialism.

In Angola, Nigeria, as elsewhere, these demonstrations against police violence, “corruption”, for social justice, can be the beginning of an awareness of the need for a global and emancipatory alternative to neo-colonialism. Whatever the local, determining peculiarities, the alternative will nevertheless be possible only starting from, at least, the combative self-organization of the popular classes, women and youth of these lands, permanent, diversified and federated - going beyond the instrumentalizations of ethnicity and religion denounced by the dynamics of #EndSARS, for example - working collectively, in the broadest and most democratic way possible, on society, the movement and its perspectives, without forgetting the African and global contexts. Despite the acceleration supposed to characterize our time, this work cannot be done in haste. The trajectory of recent popular uprisings in Africa as elsewhere in the world has shown the resilience of collective neo-colonialism, confirmed once again the strength of capitalism as a multidimensional system, and also proving authoritarian even in countries usually considered to have a democratic tradition. There is not today, in Angola and Nigeria, in Africa and elsewhere, a shortcut to self-emancipation bequeathing to future generations societies based on principles of popular sovereignty, social and gender equality, respect for freedom of expression, human dignity and differences (sexual orientation, for example), and a land in good health. This is not possible under capitalism

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[1] See Adeniyi Ademoroti, *African Arguments*, 28 October 2020, "[#EndSARS excluded queer protesters. What will it take for acceptance?](#)". "In one of the protests to #ENDSARS in Edo State, three Benin women were raped by men believed to be men protesting against the brutality of SARS. In Lagos, there were numerous stories of women being molested, harassed and even punched in the face by male protesters who explicitly said, "We will not let a woman lead us", Angel Nduka-Nwosu, *African Feminism*, 25 October 2020, "[#ENDSARS : Is a Woman's Place Really in the Revolution?](#)".

[2] Femi Aborisade, "Nigeria's movement against brutality and poverty" in Femi Aborisade and Andy Wynne, *Roape*, 27 October, 2020, "[#EndSARS : Nigeria's Mass Movement Protest](#)".

[3] Abiodun Bagmiboye, Chinedu Bosah, Democratic Socialist Movement, 29 September 2020, "[SPN \(Socialist Party of Nigeria\) Condemns Suspension of Strike by NLC and TUC Leadership](#)".

[4] See Kabiru Yusuf, *Premium Times*, 4 November 2020, "[Nigerian universities on strike for one of every five years since 1999, data shows](#)". See also the interview with the president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, Prof. Abiodun Ogunyemi, in Iyabo Lawal, *Guardian*, 29 October 2020, "[Strike will continue as long as govt withholds our salaries, says ASUU](#)".

[5] Alfred Olufemi, *Premium*, 25 September 2020, "[October 1 : #RevolutionNow organisers call for nationwide protest](#)".

[6] Dimeji Akinloye, *Business Elite Africa*, 15 October 2020, "[Dangote, Elumelu Under Fire for 'Attempting to Corner' #EndSARS Protesters](#)"; Alfred Olufemi, *Premium Times*, 15 October 2020, "[#EndSARS: Kwara Governor speaks on controversial meeting with Dangote, Wizkid, others](#)". There have also been attempts to divide the movement by instrumentalization of ethnic and religious identities. See Seye Olumide, 1 November 2020, "[Rights group urges Nigerians to reject ethnic sentiment on EndSARS protests](#)". *Guardian*.

[7] Baba Aye, "#EndSARS: rebellion, repression, resistance in Nigeria", *Amanda!*, number 73/74, December 2020, (p. 45-48), p. 46. Available on [International Viewpoint](#).

[8] *Sahara Reporters*, 30 November 2020 "[We informed Military Before The Attack But Nothing Was Done, Zabarmari Residents Say](#)".

[9] Ayo Sogunro, *Africa Arguments*, 15 October 2020, "[Why #EndSARS won't quit](#)".

[10] 22 October, 2020, "[Full speech: Buhari's address on #EndSARS protests](#)".

[11] *ibid*.

[12] According to the World Bank, "the absolute number of poor in Angola actually increased from 4.9 million to 6.7 million between 2000 and 2014, reaching over 10 million by 2018" out of a population of around 31 million. [World Bank. Angola Poverty Assessment, 24 June 2020.](#)

[13] See Estelle Maussion, "La dos Santos Company. Mainmise sur l'Angola", Paris, Karthala, 2019. Also "[Luanda Leaks](#)" by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ),

[14] See Max de Haldevang, *Quartz*, 19 January 2020 "[All the Companies tied to Isabel dos Santos](#)".

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[15] Coalition of Protest Groups, cpgnigeria.medium.com, 23 October 2020, "[A Statement from The Coalition of Protest Groups Across Lagos and Nigeria](#)".

[16] "These protests have never been politically motivated. It is not about ethnicity or tribalism. The young people across the country are demanding justice, good governance, accountability and reforms", Coalition of Protest Groups, *idem*.

[17] Extract from the statement inserted in Andy Wynne, "#EndSARS Protestors in Nigeria Need Our Solidarity", in Femi Aborisade and Andy Wynne, *op. cit.*