

## STICHPROBEN

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Call for Papers:

### SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA

The study of African social movements remains a neglected field of research in at least two respects. On the one hand, Africa remains largely absent from research using a social movement perspective. Indeed, social movement theory largely focuses on socio-political movements in Europe, North- and South America. On the other, the social movement theory literature has so far hardly been taken up from within African studies, even though there is a growing number of empirical studies dealing with different forms of civil action and political mobilisation in an African contexts. As a result, social movements in Africa remain under researched and under theorised, in particular compared to Latin American Studies where labour unions, landless workers' movements or feminist movements are central objects of both empirical and theoretical investigation. This is particularly true for African studies in German speaking countries, but to some extent the neglect of a social movement perspective applies to African Studies more generally.

The concept of 'social movements' differs from the related concept of 'civil society' – the dominant research perspective on non-state socio-political action and mobilisation in African studies today. In the context of a deeply embedded structural crisis of the state, statehood and governance and the promotion of 'good governance' by multilateral actors such as the World Bank as a response to the crisis, a specific notion of civil society was embraced as an at least partial solutions to Africa's crisis of governance by different stakeholders – such as African NGOs, donor countries and multilateral agencies as well as academics. This perspective on civil society emphasized the role of civil society actors in terms of service delivery and as such suggested that civil society potentially or actually plays a complements, or, in the context of state failure and state collapse, compensates service delivery by state actors. In fact, since the 1990s a plethora of 'civil society' actors in sub-Saharan Africa

turned into professional service providers and consultant agencies – a process assisted by many bi- and multilateral donors. In addition, the good governance perspective also stresses the role of civil society actors as critics of government, which is seen as functional for achieving good governance and improve service delivery by public institutions and accountability of the state civil society is thus implicitly also seen in playing an important role in guaranteeing the overall legitimacy of the state.

Against the predominant understanding of civil society as functional element of good governance which ultimately casts civil society as apolitical, this special issue on social movements in Africa will focus on the political dimension of civil society - the politics of mobilisation, claims-making and interest representation. In so doing, we suggest to focus on political actors that stand in opposition to the state and express themselves explicitly in a ways critical of the current political situation, whether on the national, local or supranational level. These actors refuse to secure 'good governance' and legitimate state power through service provision. And their social and political criticism is more fundamental than just a functional feedback. In this special issue we are thus interested in the political role of civil society actors, notably as critics of governments and other powerful actors. We prefer the term 'social movement' over that of 'civil society' for two reasons. First, we wish to distance ourselves from the predominant understanding of civil society as a service provider and a resource of state legitimacy. Second, we wish to focus on social actors mobilising around specific issues. In our conception, social movements are actors that take a critical stand towards dominant political relations. They demand more democratic participation in state policies or take them into their own hands.

In social movement research, four theoretical approaches can be distinguished. The social context structures approach argues that processes of social change and crises are crucial for the emergence of protest. Another perspective focuses on opportunity structures: political-structural conditions (for instance, institutional openness, ability and political will for repression) explain why protest does or does not occur. Building upon the assumption of rationalist logics of action, resource mobilisation theory argues that protest depend on which material, ideal and personnel resources can be mobilised. According to the fourth approach, framing is the decisive factor for protest. Framing is linked to existing social problems as deprivation and inequality. Whether they are realised and result in protest depends on how they are presented.

This being said, our aim is to explore how far current social movements in sub-Saharan Africa are actors situating themselves in a critical position vis-à-vis social and political domination. Which social movements do shape the political landscape of contemporary African societies? Which are the strategies they use to intervene in social debates and politics? Which opportunity structures favour or hinder African social movements to be successful? How do social movements in Africa mobilise, given the context of ongoing resource scarcity? Finally, in which ways do African social movements participate in global alliances?

For this issue, we welcome empirical case studies (single cases and comparative studies) as well as to theoretical perspectives on social movement research in Africa.

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Please send your proposal of about 500 words and some information about yourself as an attachment in MS Word or PDF form to the editors:

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It is preferable that articles are written in English, but articles in French or German will also be considered.

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