

Call for Papers

Politique africaine

Religious pluralisation in Africa

A special issue edited by Maud Lasseur and Cédric Mayrargue

This call for papers of *Politique africaine* comes out after two special issues already published by this journal on religion in Africa (« L'argent de Dieu », n° 35, 1989 and « Les sujets de Dieu », n° 87, 2002). It would like to deal specifically with the process of “religious pluralisation” to question contemporary religious changes as well as the processes of politicization of religion.

Religious pluralisation refers here to a set of emerging groups, a growing offer in the religious landscape, the breaking out of existing denominations and the multiplication of religious actors. These processes generate new religious entrepreneurs, and the spreading of new repertoires, theologies and imaginaries (from the theology of Christian prosperity to new Muslim brotherhoods). Moreover new institutions simultaneously appear, outside or at the margins of religious institutions with quasi-religious associations, NGOs devoted to education, health, development and humanitarian activities, bookshops and inter-religious associations... Eventually, religious pluralisation can be read through the diversity of specific political modes of action, the unequal degree of religious ‘invasion’ within the public sphere, the forms and consequences of religious mobilisations in a given political space and the public management of religious pluralism.

Historically grounded in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, this process is one of the main features of contemporary religious evolutions of the continent. This concept of « pluralisation » is of particular interest: it makes it possible not to use other contested terms (conquest, spreading, swarming, etc...) but it especially gives the opportunity to integrate debates on Africa into global discussions on contemporary religious changes. Eventually, this special issue would like to contribute to an emerging debate on the religious, political and geopolitical effects of religious competition.

The growing pluralisation has generated situations of cohabitation and competition between religious actors. Processes of Christianization and Islam conversions often appear as contiguous and contemporaneous. In practice, this means that situations where distinct religious groups are competing on the same space are numerous, and perhaps more than ever before. Evangelical churches enter ‘Muslim areas’, spaces presented as strongly Christianized prove to be privileged places of new forms of Islamic practices while spaces ‘not yet converted’ are becoming places of religious confrontation. Religious identities of spaces and borders are splitting.

But these situations are rarely analyzed as such. Whereas recent works have proposed new approaches on Christianity and Islam in Africa, scarce studies directly address pluralisation and religious competition, offering comparative approaches, or even more, questioning the fluidity of religious categorizations. The few available comparative books

mainly juxtapose studies on various religious actors or set in a largely historical perspective. Thus, religious pluralisation and competition are still rarely discussed in the academic literature. We suggest however that this situation could lead to more productive approaches.

First, a localized and comparative approach could analyze similarities and differences in speeches and values, proselytism or social activism between religious actors sharing the same space. Then, a reflection is necessary on what is happening, what is daily at stake between these actors. Although religious conflicts are often put forward, it is only one issue which arguably does not represent the most common interaction between religious actors. Avoidance, distinction, mimicry are also at work. It thus appears interesting to work on reciprocal influences between religious actors. These researches can also lead to question, discuss and comment religious boundaries, distinctions and categorizations that researchers constantly refer to. Eventually, the links between religious competition and a changing political landscape also suggest questioning the politicization of religious forms. To what extent religious competition and pluralisation affect the way religious actors become involved in politics? What could be a comparative approach on the process of politicization developed by various religious actors within a same space (development of social activism, participation in electoral competition, influence on the development of public policies, investment in activities of mediation and resolution of conflicts...)? Last, what are the procedures developed by African states to manage religious pluralism and religious conflicts?

Without favouring neither specific areas nor specific religious movements, this issue would like to address the following issues:

- historicity, spaces, rules, importance and consequences of religious pluralisation;
- social and political impacts on spaces (local, national, regional) that used to be less heterogeneous;
- comparison between distinct religious groups living in the same area (concerning organizational arrangements, speeches and processes of social visibility, modes of political action, politics from below and from above);
- exchanges, imitations and circulation of references, knowledge, practices and techniques in the dynamics of avoidance or confrontation between religious actors. What are their participations into the production of policies, in reshaping public spaces and in the transformations of public action?
- state policies in the management of the pluralisation and religious competition, including the issue of secularism.

This issue will favor comparative articles: special attention will be given to proposals for co-written articles, by specialists of two different religious movements.

Within the framework of the preparation of this issue, a writing workshop will be organized at the end of September 2010. It will gather all contributors selected in order to favor the building of a collective reflection. A provisional version of each article will then be presented and discussed.

Schedule

30 June 2010: deadline for the receipt of proposals (in French and English). The proposals should be of a maximum length of one page and should be sent to Maud Lasseur: maud.lasseur@gmail.com and Cédric Mayrargue: c.mayrargue@sciencespobordeaux.fr

July 2010: selection of proposals

End of September 2010: a preparatory workshop gathering all the contributors of the issue

1 January 2011: final version of articles to be sent to the coordinators

October 2011: publication.