

long-term involvement of Africa in the broader political and cultural context. He firmly stands against any type of reductionism, he almost always offers the readers a balanced view among the many, often contradictory approaches that he presents in this book. This book is a must-read not only for those who are interested in African social and political philosophy but for everyone who rejects efforts to view African people through the lens of ethnocentrism and Afro-pessimism.

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Lisa Mueller. 2018. *Political Protest in Contemporary Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 264 pp. ISBN 978-1-10843825-4. Paperback £ 21.99

With the rise of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp public protests seem easier to be organised than ever. A simple look at hashtag movements in South Africa from the past few years provides us with evidence that in the information era protests can spread quicker, mobilise faster and involve far more people than before. Protest movements recently hit the whole of Africa. From Burkina Faso, Niger and South Africa to the very recent protests in Sudan and Mali. We have seen widespread dissatisfaction among the population which ultimately led to uprisings in multiple places. This leads to important questions. Why do these protests happen? Do they have something in common? How can we better understand them and interpret them? In her book *Political Protest in Contemporary Africa*, Lisa Mueller has adequate answers to these questions. The book has five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. In my view the monograph is suitable mainly for scholars and students looking for inspiration in well-managed research (from a methodological perspective) or with an interest in the study of protests.

The author starts with a comparison of three waves of protest, namely the First Wave, that related to independence; the Second Wave, that burst out after the Cold War in 1990; and the most recent Third Wave, that is still ongoing. The strategies, participants and frames of meaning of these protests are evolving. One of the critical differences between these protest waves could be the new frames of meaning. For

example, according to Mueller, the last wave of protest movements is questioning injustices regarding access to upward mobility. But why does the materialist frame of upward mobility appear in the current era of Africa's economic growth? The reason may be the gravity of the unevenly distributed economic growth. Mueller aptly refers to a West African individual saying: "You can't eat growth" (p. 60). Despite economic growth, African countries severely suffer from socio-economic inequality. This leads to the situation of growing middle classes in Africa, while at the same time the majority of people live in poverty and therefore have material incentives to protest. This is Mueller's key argument.

She argues that many observers view protests in Africa in too narrow ways. Generally, there are two possible interpretations. Recent protests can be pro-democratic-driven struggles, or they can be based on socio-economic motives. Lisa Mueller shows that both answers have their merits. Her interpretation of protest movements in Africa returns the topic of class to the study of African politics. Class analysis has been partly out of the mainstream study of sub-Saharan African politics, maybe with the exception of South Africa, even though middle class is not a new phenomena, as Mueller points out. According to her, "members of an emerging middle class desire political influence commensurate with their economic status and possess the money, education, and communication skills that make them effective protest organizers. Meanwhile, most rank-and-file protesters in sub-Saharan Africa are not middle-class but rather live at subsistence level. This group is motivated foremost by materialist concerns" (p. 6). Therefore, sometimes these events are misunderstood as being only pro-democratic. According to Mueller, this misleading assumption is caused by the fact that the middle class, the "generals of the revolutions," are the main spokespersons. Meanwhile, however, the overwhelming majority of protesters, so-called "foot-soldiers of revolutions," have different reasons for protesting than those belonging to the middle-class (p. 13–22).

In chapter three, Mueller demonstrates how economic growth has released the middle class from patronage as the middle class was able to accumulate private capital. Without the patronage system, the middle class has become much less dependent on the state and therefore its members are more likely to challenge it. Historically, the

middle class was considered part of the state patronage system. Private capital has made it more autonomous and this created a fertile ground for protest leadership. In the new economic situation, the middle class strives for political influence, which lies behind the beginning of the protests. In order for the protest to have an impact, however, the middle class needs to mobilise the poor, who have a different kind of grievance – the materialist one. This argument of cross-class alliance is something that has always stood outside mainstream research in African studies. This might have been true historically but with the globalising economy, society in Africa has changed. Of course, it is hard to use a classical or orthodox definition of the middle class. Mueller knows this as she redefines the middle class as that “stratum of Africans who meet their basic material needs with income from sources outside the state” (p. 9). Her definition is original and precise as it embodies the important material and political characteristics (independence) of the middle class in Africa.

The novel approach of the author represents a welcome contribution to African studies and political science scholarship. Mueller’s interpretation is based equally on statistical methods as on deep contextual knowledge. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 consist of thick and original empirical work. Mueller has been able to gather impressive field data and combines this material with a comprehensive survey of the Afrobarometer in order to arrive at a holistic picture of African protests. Using interviews and ethnographic observations in chapter 4, she demonstrates how protest leadership works. In the subsequent chapter, she employs regression analyses of Afrobarometer data to show that “people are more likely to protest, on average, if they anticipate decline in their living standards” (p. 150). It is, therefore, a vision of low upward mobility that motivates people to participate in protests. In a situation in which people are uncertain or worried about their material future, uprisings fall on fertile ground. Mueller also mentions that “the sum of evidence supports Bayart’s intuition” about the relevance of ethnicity which, however, is not the most important explanation (p. 139). From my perspective, maybe a discussion about the interaction between ethnicity and class would be more interesting.

Chapter 6 introduces the case of Niger. With a much lower expectation of upward mobility this is an important case to study. By analysing survey data gathered after the protests of 2009–2010, Mueller shows

that in Niger the protests were induced more by a low expectation of future economic well-being than by questions of democracy. From a methodological point of view, the use of local scientists seems to have been an important part of a proper elaboration of the data gathering. Their input helped reduce bias in the interviews.

Mueller's inquiry, as she reflects, echoes some modernisation theories but instead of focusing on the rise of democracy she provides insight into the roots of African protest movements. Class analysis is not common in African studies, with the exception of contributions by Richard Sklar (1979) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1973). Recently, works of Henning Melber (2013, 2015, 2016) can be mentioned but, generally, a focus on class does not seem to be a mainstream approach, in my view. Given Mueller's compelling account, this might be a major shortcoming. Her perspective is inspirational, especially because of her thorough combination of qualitative and quantitative empirical sources. A focus on class analysis might help understand grievances behind conflicts, electoral behaviour or party politics. Future research should pay more attention to class as an important variable in the study of African political dynamics.

It may be risky for an author to come up with something outside the main research field as it can be hard to uphold the relevance of one's approach. However, this is not the case with the book under review. Lisa Mueller's *Political Protest in Contemporary Africa* is, from my perspective, a classic in the study of protests in Africa. It aptly discusses the recent protest waves in sub-Saharan Africa and offers an innovative, elegant, well-informed and convincing interpretation of these developments. Her contribution to the comeback of class analysis in the study of Africa is inspirational and can be very helpful in understanding other recent events in African politics and society.

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