

**“OH NO! LET’S MARCH BUT NOT RIOT!”
STREET PROTESTS IN BAMAKO DURING THE YEARS 1992-2010**

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In the spring of 1997, when Malian president Alpha Oumar Konaré, who came to power in the wake of the 1991 transition to democracy, announced he was running for re-election, Mali was plunged into a period of civil unrest and protest against the “Alpha regime”. An atmosphere of confusion surrounded the legislative and presidential elections: the authorities failed to comply with electoral laws, and some opposition groups encouraged the people to boycott the elections and “make the country ungovernable”. Numerous demonstrations took place and riots occurred, along with attacks against individuals close to the regime, and the authorities were accused of a series of violent acts, such as setting fire to the law office of Mountaga Tall, one of the opposition leaders. In the Malian newspaper *Les Échos*, friendly towards the regime, the following cartoon appeared on the entertainment page, under the regularly featured game of “Find the 8 Mistakes”:



Les Échos, 7 May 1997.

The caricature testified to more than a contested president condemning potentially violent marches, and these events were not the only political violence the country had experienced since the transition in 1991. The virtual rioting of “the street” still permeates to a large extent people’s ordinary perception of marches (Maliens use the French word *marche* in preference

to *manifestation* or “demonstration”).¹ Marches continue to be widely associated with “the young”, in an ambivalent register that stigmatises their violence and at the same time commemorates their role (and that of the 1991 “martyrs of democracy”).

Although the study of protests and social movements was revived in African studies during the 2000s, the renewed interest in the topic did not extend to all the countries of Africa. Little attention has been devoted specifically to protests in Mali. Studies tend to focus on the broader issue of the mobilisation of “civil society” (ROY, 2005) rather than on protest in the strict sense.

Because the street is the place where protest is expressed most clearly in urban Mali, we would like to examine here the forms such protests take. We will not divide marches into proper, peaceful, controlled use of the street on the one hand, and a violent, riotous use that would be eruptive, spontaneous and responsive to possible violence from the authorities on the other. Instead, we will study the marches and riots together to understand how one form can turn into the other, and how the peaceful form can even be de-legitimated by the violent form. Indeed, talk of marches in Mali implicitly refers to riots, whether they are potential, feared or historical like those of the “martyrs” during the 1991 transition.

What does “taking to the streets” mean in a society often considered hostile to protest due to its supposedly consensual culture, and more prosaically, its hierarchical structure and cronyism, which are more likely to lead to intermediation and patronage than to protest? What is the significance of marches in a country often praised as a (relative) model of democracy, where criticism of the authorities is permitted? Does demonstrating in this case correspond exactly to the meaning an outside observer, familiar with routine forms of social movements in particular political configurations, would be inclined to give to it? Indeed, not all marches are protests: they may also reflect mobilisation techniques used by the state.

The study of marches thus comes down to observing their highly ambivalent and controlled status: marches evoke riots.

1. STREET PROTEST IN MALI?

Polarised between armed disagreement in the North and a civil society of NGOs issuing civilised claims, Mali is often considered a country with a weak “tradition” of protest.

Few studies have been conducted on protest in Mali. No books have been devoted to social movements or protest in the country. There are no references to Mali in the three collective reference works on protest in Africa (CRUMMEY, 1986; ROTBERG, MAZRUI, 1970; ELLIS, VAN KESSEL 2010), with the significant exception of a text by Yves Person (1970) devoted to Samori Touré. In going through collective works dealing with this topic either in general or quite specifically, we found no articles on the case of Mali. Occasionally we came upon an article pertaining to a sectoral cause, usually promoted by an NGO, in conjunction with international organisations, referring to types of mobilisation rather than protest (cf. on such issues, WING, 2002; LATOURES, 2009), or to strictly channelled means for lodging complaints, such as the very institutional Espace d’Interpellation Démocratique (EID) (WING, 2002). There is nothing in African studies journals on protest in democratic, post-1991 Mali in *Cahiers d’études africaines* (except comments by FAY, 1995, in a paper on democracy), nor in *Politique africaine*, with the significant exceptions of the Tuareg case (CLAUDOT-HAWAD, 1992; BOILLEY, 1999) and Mali’s transition to democracy

¹ “Taama ka na nyejira”: “march to go and explain” is the expression used in Bambara when talking about a “march”.

(BERTRAND, 1992), nor in other French- or English-language journals, with three exceptions mentioning “unrest” and the uncivil or even riotous aspects of “the street” (BERRUBE, 1995; LANGE, 1999; SMITH, 1997). In short, the few writings on social conflict in Mali pertain to the periods prior to (AMSELLE, 1978; RILLON, 2010) and during the democratic transition (especially student and peasant mobilisations: LE PALEC, 1992; LE ROY, 1993; BINGEN, 1994 and 1996). A few studies, often concerning both Senegal and Mali, discuss the trade union struggles of the 1950s and how they were linked to the national struggle, e.g. the Bamako-Dakar railway strike. Comparative studies and works on the West African coastal area as a whole also exist, but none focusing on Mali (WISEMAN, 1986).

How are we to interpret this vacuum with regard to Mali, when the topic of protest has been studied in so many African countries? Has protest become merely a residual form of political expression in Mali since it acquired democratic institutions? This explanation would support a culturalist interpretation of Malian realities: there are few words in Bambara² to designate revolt or the refusal to submit to government authority, and they usually have negative connotations: *ka muruti* (meaning “to rebel” or “revolt”, the root of *murutikelaw* (demonstrators), and *muso murutilen* (uncontrollable woman); *ka ban* (meaning “to refuse”, the root of *banbaganciw* (rebels), and *bankoma* (one who refuses or is rebellious). The notion of demonstrating, when it is not reduced to “looting” (*ka ci*, a word primarily meaning “to break”), the fact of meeting together and the notion of a public place (e.g.: *kenekanlajeba*), rather than an aspect of conflict. There is no direct translation of the verb “to protest” (it is necessary to use *ka ban*, *ka muruti*, *te son* – the negative form of the verb “to accept”). The word for “strike” (*grewu*) was imported from the French *grève* specifically to designate work stoppage (*baarabila*). Finally, conflict often seems to be perceived negatively (in *kele manyi*), *kele* can designate quarrel or conflict as well as war or battle). To talk about public collective action, Malians tend to employ the vocabulary of meeting, group and defence or encouragement (e.g. the term *lafasa* is often used by women’s associations).

This does not mean, however, that there is no social bedrock for protest. The tendency to create associations, whether community-based or not (*tons* and *grins*), which in the case of NGOs tends to produce material resources, reveals a strong propensity among Malians to generate *mogotigiya* (the state of someone who has people, of *mogo*: man, person – *tigi*: leader, possessor of), which translates into money and connections (Vuarin, 1994), combines them and converts one into the other. Yet this propensity to form associations and mobilise does not imply any shift to protest action; rather it designates a wider palette of ways to take charge of people’s interests, which may involve unofficial contacts and mobilising acquaintances as much as social conflict.³

Is Mali a country of consensus, averse to protest, all the more since it acquired democratic institutions? Silence does not always mean consent. Other ways of expressing disagreement or even resolving social misfortune coexist with protest: escapism (GARY-TOUNKARA, 2005), patronage and calling upon occult forces in particular. Protest thus appears as a visible part of disagreement and collective action. It does not play the same role as in many societies of the North, or mean the same thing when it takes place. Speech can also be highly critical in Mali, which one quickly discovers by reading the press or listening to the radio: an attitude of dutiful deference towards certain powerful people alternates with a litany of complaints and ruminations about corruption and elites in general. So what does it mean to protest in a society

Comment [ST1]: Les casseurs en français « break ». Mais j’ai utilisé « looting » parce que « casse » dans le témoignage se référaient au pillage. Ici, je crois que c’est mieux de dire « break »

² While French is the official language of Mali, the country has twelve national languages including Bambara, which is understood by three-quarters of the population. It has acquired the status of a common language, especially in an urban context (DUMESTRE, 2003).

³ This tension between the bellicose tone of protest and the more consensual tone of rallies is one explanation for the amazing naturalisation of the lexicon of “civil society” and of the institutional forms it encourages.

with institutions that are formally democratic, and at the same time, a population that, for the most part, cannot see beyond the daily concern for material survival?⁴ We must therefore be careful not to yield to strict nominalism according to which a thing must have a name in order to exist. The Bambara language only reveals what we already know about Malian society: an attention to social hierarchy and respect for elders, superiors and the powerful; a preference for intercession rather than confrontation; the value of self-control (and of not complaining) and knowing one's place; and finally the importance of the dictate to reach consensus, which is considered a value.

The image of a consensual, peaceful Mali (which surely reflects one of the ways Malians like to see themselves) is thus shattered: even in post-1991 Mali, recourse to protest practices indeed exists. Our aim must therefore be to identify the concrete forms of protest in Mali. This poses a problem of method to anyone wishing to discuss protest without limiting the study to a particular group or political circle.

Identifying protest events

Outside of some sixty interviews and direct observation of marches (I spent four months in the field in Bamako, in 4 stays from December 2008 to March 2010), it is hard to objectify the marches and riots that have taken place. The National Archives of Mali are available for consultation only for the colonial period. When negotiations with the administration allow, some archives may be selectively consulted. The press, which is relatively accessible on the Internet for current affairs, is more difficult to consult when one goes back in time: *l'Essor* is the only newspaper that has properly archived back issues in the National Library of Mali. Of all the country's newspapers, it is the most institutional and closest to the authorities, and hence "filters" accounts of protest more than any other.

In addition to the partial, fragmented view of recourse to marches provided by these sources, it was also possible to gather photos of demonstrations on the web (on Malian press and activist websites), together with the photos I took myself and those sent to me by acquaintances.⁵

In the face of these obstacles, I came across one, unhoped-for source: a cardboard box in the metal cabinet belonging to the general secretary of the town hall of District III⁶ in Bamako, which contained a "Report on marches from 1994 to 2008-2009". The report listed all the letters declaring marches from individuals and organisations seeking to demonstrate on the territory of District III. An overwhelming majority of marches in Bamako take place in this district. There is no equivalent archive on marches in the other districts. To confirm that District III hosts most of the marches authorised in Bamako, I consulted archives accessible to me in District I, where many militant organisations are located, as well as at the District Office, the central town hall of Bamako, which is likely to be contacted when a march is planned to cross through several districts of Bamako, and finally at the office of the governor of Bamako. I was also able to consult several boxes of correspondence in 2005 and 2006 at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Communities – MATCL⁷. In all four cases, my technique was to try and "get a foot in the door" rather than patiently wait for a possible authorisation. That is why these surveys pertain to very recent periods, corresponding to the files still present in employees' offices concerning 2009-2010.

⁴ In 2009, Mali ranked 178th (out of 182 countries) in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme.

⁵ Special thanks to M. le Prévost, C. Broqua and M. Kimbiri for sending photos.

⁶ Bamako is divided into 6 *communes* or districts.

⁷ I would like to thank O. Rillon for facilitating my access to these archives on which she was working at the time.

While these successive surveys revealed several cases of urban violence and even riots, they confirmed that few requests for march permits were made outside District III. Going through this list thus enabled a somewhat systematic analysis, enriched by more qualitative approaches that sometimes allowed access to unauthorised marches.

2. “PERMIT REQUEST FOR A PEACEFUL MARCH...”

2.1. Marching in an institutional space

The archives of District III are particularly useful owing to the status of this district as the administrative and commercial centre of Bamako. Though it represents only about 8% of the total city area and 7% of its population (approximately 120,000 inhabitants out of the 1.8 million people living in Bamako), it is the location of most ministries, the Primature, which houses the prime minister and his cabinet, the Modibo Keita memorial, the Labour Exchange, the French Cultural Centre, the Aoua Keita Occupational Training Centre⁸, police headquarters, the Conference Centre, Hôtel Salam, one of the capital’s luxury hotels, the Ecole Normale Supérieure (national teacher’s college), etc. North of District III lies Koulouba or “hill of power”, where the President of the Republic resides. Alongside District III, though officially in District II, stand the National Assembly and the Grand Mosque, the two departure or arrival points of some of the demonstrations declared in District III. This institutional space is also one of the areas enshrining the memory of the 1990-1991 democratic movement, of which the Labour Exchange was a rallying point. For this reason, beginning in 1991, the area became a space for erecting monuments in Bamako (the Monument to Independence inaugurated in 1995, at the corner of Avenue de l’Indépendance and Boulevard de la Paix, and the Monument of Peace – or of the Dove – inaugurated in 1996 at the foot of the boulevard). The Labour Exchange is thus the traditional point of departure and assembly for demonstrations. The marches then proceed along Avenue de l’Indépendance. All these aspects help to make District III the place of choice to hold a march in Bamako.

Here is the list of the marches for which a permit was requested and preserved in the archives:

Table 1 – Marches declared from 1994 to 2009 according to the archives of District III of Bamako

Year	Number of declared marches
1994	5
1995	7
1996	2
1997	6
1998	5
1999	1
2000	6
2001	9
2002	7
2003	15

⁸ Located in premises where the UDPM, the single party under Moussa Traoré, planned to house its women’s movement, the UNFM (BARRY, 2004: 125).

2004	20
2005	13
2006	19
2007	20
2008	26
2009	6 ⁹
Total	167

Some of the permit requests were refused, such as a request filed in August 1995 by the Coordination of Victims of Structural Adjustment Plans, a request filed by the COPPO (the Collective of Opposition Parties) on 3rd June 1997, and a request for a march “against the cost of living” dated 13th May 2008, initiated by the Movement of the Voiceless.

First observation: the number of marches seems low when compared with demonstrations in other capitals of democratic states.

Second observation: while District III is considered the city’s administrative and commercial centre, the traditional route along Avenue de l’Indépendance and Boulevard de la Paix is not part of a “centre” that would make a march visible to the Bamako population. These two avenues are three-lane roads with a central island, bordered by a wide space on either side. Most of the marches that take place there occupy only half the road, with traffic continuing in the other lane. A march that starts out from the Labour Exchange to the Peace Monument would pass only the French Cultural Centre before arriving in front of the Primature, at the site of the Monument to the Nation, and then in front of the Modibo Keita monument on its way towards the Peace Monument. This itinerary is far from the bustling markets and pedestrian activities in certain streets of Bamako! And although other demonstration declarations indicate plans to take alternative routes in District III, any march towards the Primature, above all when it is concentrated into half the avenue, will be particularly at risk in the event of a charge by the police. Finally, marches that have trouble enlisting more than a thousand people, or even a few hundred, look pathetic on this wide avenue. On the other hand, since the riots in 1991, almost all shopkeepers are armed; when protest organisers are unsure of their ability to control their troops, they are thus inclined to avoid marching in the busiest shopping areas of the city (and the authorities are spurred to dissuade them from doing so).

Consequently, the space where these marches take place is the administrative centre of the capital and the site of its main monuments, a place that commemorates Malian history and the democratic transition, embodying a well-controlled, institutional dimension. Yet if these marches address the government, it is also because the organisations that call for marches are highly structured by their relationship to the state as provider.

Aside from a number of disparate organisations that were very difficult to group together (cf. “Others”), the alterglobalisation movement has held marches since the mid-1990s. The sponsors include the Aminata Dramane Traoré Forum (Forum for Another Mali), the Coalition of African Debt and Development Alternatives (CAD Mali), the organisations supporting the 2006 Polycentric Social Forum in Bamako, the Movement of the Voiceless and

⁹ This count was carried out in November 2009. The classification of the declarations for that year is therefore incomplete.

organisations linked to the newspaper *San Fin*¹⁰ published by Mohamed Tabouré (also a leader of the Cocidirail, the Collective against Mali Railway Privatisation). These organisations have forged concrete ties with each other because they are based in the same Djelibougou quarter of District I.¹¹ In their critique of neoliberal globalisation, all of them call for state intervention and the restoration of sovereignty to the countries of the South. Some are quite familiar with modes of protest, which they experienced abroad (May 1968 in Senegal or during studies in France) and/or in their activist background.

Table no. 2 - Organisations that declared marches in District III, Bamako, 1994-2009

Alterglobal movements : CAD Mali, Mouvement des Sans Voix, Cocidirail, Comité d'organisation du FSA, FORAM, Association Malienne des Expulsés, Collectif de soutien aux expulsés de France, d'Angola et d'ailleurs (sise Radio Kayira), Collectif des Maliens expulsés de la Lybie en 2000, FORAM * FORAM CAM Gnéléni * FORAM/Cté d'organisation Forum sur le coton africain, Mvt des Sans-Voix, Collectif pour la défense des Maliens de l'Extérieur (co/ Kayira)	21	12,5
Ex-workers : Association des travailleurs compressés du Mali et ou Union Nationale des Travailleurs compressés du Mali (Bourse du travail), Association des travailleurs Volontaires à la Retraite (Bourse du Travail Bko), Association des Travailleurs licenciés de la mine d'Or de Kalana (ATLMK)	19	11,3
Trade unions : UNTM, CSTM, FEN, ou affiliés, Union nationale des travailleurs retraités de la convention régis par l'INPS, rural trade unions	14	8,3
Opposition parties : COPPO, RPM, USRDA, Collectif des associations démocratiques du collectif des partis de l'opposition et du forum de concertation des sensibilités nationales	14	8,3
Youth organisations : AEEM, jeunes volontaires de l'APEJ, Collectif des jeunes de Badialan III, Jeunesse OUA, ONG Jeunesse et développement, Jeunesse Malienne pour le développement et le progrès, Groupement des jeunes de Niarela, Collectif des Jeunes Libres de Bamako, Cercle de Réflexion pour Jeunes Garantibougou 300 logements	14	8,3
Consumers organisations : Groupement des Consommateurs du Mali GCM, Comité de Défense des Produits de Première Nécessité – et du bien être social), Regroupement pour la Défense des Consommateurs du Mali (REDECOMA)	9	5,4
Childhood and education : Administrateur national du programme national de lutte contre le travail des enfants au Mali, au nom de la CAFO en collaboration avec le BIT), Club SOS Ecole, Coalition des organisations de la SC pour l'Éducation pour Tous au Mali, Coalition Malienne pour les Droits de l'Enfant (COMADE), Collectif des mamans pour sauver l'école, ECPA Luxembourg Coordination AI Contre l'Exploitation des enfants, Le SG du ministère de l'éducation, pour le Ministre * idem Au nom de l'ONG ASSAFE	8	4,7
Journalist organisations : Maison de la Presse, ORJM, UJAO	6	3,8
Foreigner organisations : Association des étudiants burkinabés, Association des Jeunes Congolais au Mali, Communauté tchadienne du Mali, Coordination des ressortissants togolais au Mali, Collectif des Ivoiriens vivant au Mali	5	3
Muslim organisations	4	2,4
Victims of SAP : Coordination des Associations Victimes du Programme d'Ajustement Structurel au Mali (CAV/PAS)	4	2,4

¹⁰ Literally: "black sky" (translated by "dark cloud", the cloud that announces rain).

¹¹ With the exception of the Aminata Dramane Traoré Forum, who can use the premises of her Amadou Hampate Bah cultural centre opposite her Djenné Hotel and not far from her restaurant-art gallery, San Toro.

Human rights organisations : Amnesty International Mali, Mouvement des Jeunes pour les Droits de l'Homme	4	2,4	
Handicaped persons organisations : Association des Jardiniers Malades de la Lèpre Djicoroni Para, Association Malienne des Personnes Handicapées Physiques AMPHP, Collectif des handicapés diplômés du Mali COHD	4	2,4	
Women organisations : CAFO, Coalition des associations et ONG féminines du Mali pour la marche mondiale, WILDAF	3	1,8	
Other	39	23,2	
Total	168	100	

This table shows that, of the 168 names of organisations noted among 167 permit requests for marches in District III, 12.5% were names of organisations belonging to the alterglobalisation movement.

Another group typical of the organisations seeking to march is a direct reflection of the effects of the structural adjustment policies implemented by Mali under pressure from international investment funds. This group is made up of Malian workers who have been laid-off or who accepted “voluntary retirement”. They are former employees of state companies who have been pushed one way or another to leave one their jobs during privatisations or civil service workforce reductions in exchange for compensation, which in some cases was never paid, or paid only partially or late¹², as well as beneficiaries found themselves in extreme poverty once they had spent their severance pay. If we add these Victims of the Structural Adjustment Programme and young volunteers in the Association for Youth Employment (a system to incorporate young people into the civil service), who hoped to be given permanent status after completing a volunteer phase, we discover a sizeable group of people nostalgic for access to the civil service and the job security it once guaranteed. The same could be said of Malian trade unions and the UNTM, the main association of trade unions, which, while claiming historic legitimacy linked to its role in 1990-1991, in fact represents a very specific, atypical demographic in a country where 70% of the population is rural and the informal sector accounts for a considerable portion of economic activity. In Mali, a salaried position in the formal sector, and even more being employed by the state or a state company, is the exception rather than the rule. As for marches of students and young people, they are another traditional expression of street protest in Bamako.

Marching in District III thus means demonstrating in a space that is extraordinarily structured by the state and procedures. The world of legal marches is a world of red tape: Article 4 of the 26th March 1959 order regulating demonstrations issued by the interim government of the Sudanese Republic¹³, stipulates that public meetings (including marches) must have “a board of organisers made up of at least three people”; they “are subject to prior declaration to the administrative authority (...). This declaration must specify the name and address of the three organisers, (...) the declaration must be signed by the three designated organisers”. All these constraints presuppose familiarity with French, which is the official language of Mali and the language of the law, whereas most Malians lack fluency in spoken and above all written French, even in Bamako. Exposing oneself by putting one’s name down on paper is not easy

¹² Another form of protest used by these groups is occupation of the Labour Exchange (through sit-ins or more recently, hunger strikes), as in the case of the workers laid off by Huicoma (the recently privatised Huilerie Cotonnière du Mali).

¹³ The entity set up by vote of the electorate of French Sudan within the framework of the French Community. The Sudanese Republic would later ally itself with Senegal to form the Fédération du Mali, which became independent on 20th June 1960, and subsequently split up, with Mali becoming an independent republic on 22nd September 1960.

for everyone, and may betray fear of revealing one's identity as a march organiser, especially if the authorities are perceived as hostile to the march.

The world of marches is also a world of the written word, with the vast majority of banners in French, which again presupposes knowledge and skill in writing. Small, individual signs are sometimes observed, by the way, bearing messages that can be recycled from one demonstration to the next. Although most signs and banners are carefully written in French (using templates to form the letters), reflecting the know-how and material resources of the interest groups that organise the demonstrations, one sees many handmade signs (painted or traced on pieces of salvaged cardboard), which are obviously more individualised and less controlled by the organisations, especially when the strong indignation of the demonstrators is combined with limited writing abilities. These signs are usually the most virulent: at a demonstration against Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to Mali, one sign said "*non à la visite du néonaziste incarnation de la xénophobie française. Sarko = sale con. Dehors*" (No to the visit of the neo-Nazi incarnation of French xenophobia. Sarko = dirty bastard. Get out) and another "*Sarkozy. Ta ka boyan*" (get out of here); a collage of seven A4 sheets of paper was printed and glued to a rough cardboard base to form the sentence "*BLOOD for BLOOD; there will be terrorist attacks in France and the US*" (at the march against the intervention in Libya on 25th March 2011), and at the protest march against expulsions and land expropriations: "*DNDC sans cadastre. Où sont nos titres? Service d'urbanisme incompetent*" (DNDC with no land registry. Where are our titles? Incompetent urban development department) and "*Commune V agents corrompus*" (District V agents corrupt). Slogans, on the other hand, are often chanted in Bambara or a mixture of Bambara and French.

Thus, demonstrations do not reflect only the world of oral tradition: one could describe the authorised marches "with signs" as embedded in "graphic reason" Goody evokes (GOODY, 1979), which no doubt makes them more difficult to organise – but this is do less to a poor appetite for protest on the part of Malians than to more subtle obstacles in the way of this form of protest.

Some marches resemble campaigns that border on sponsorship by public authorities and institutionalised interest groups, which also contributes to confining demonstrations to a highly institutional space. One example is a declaration filed by the general secretary of the Ministry of Education, on behalf of the Minister and the NGO Association of Sahel Aid to Women and Children, announcing a march of schoolchildren after the World Forum in Favour of Education for All, "*within the scope of the national education campaign of the NGO ASSAFE*" and in partnership with the office of OXFAM GB in Mali. Other marches fall into the same category of demonstrations organised by internationalised NGOs in favour of human rights, women's rights and consumer rights or against child labour (in collaboration with the ILO).

District III is also the space for demonstrations in support of the authorities, e.g. the demonstration organised by the important "Coordination of Women's Associations and NGOs of Mali" (CAFO), which took place following a declaration by President Att that had created a public scandal. At the time of the food crisis, the president spoke at the celebration of International Women's Day on 8th March, recalling the Bambara proverb "*Bee b'i ba bolo*" (literally: "it all depends on the/your mother")¹⁴, which many commentators had interpreted to mean "you're on your own" or "every man for himself". The "*peaceful march to support the president and his government*" sponsored by the CAFO on 3rd April 2008 planned to deliver upon arrival at the Primature "*two declarations of support for the Prime Minister, the Head of*

Comment [ST2]: Si « graphic reason » veut dire une sorte de pensée graphique, il faut supprimer « the »

¹⁴ This proverb can also be understood as suggesting "to each the protection of his mother", which would be a way for the authorities to refuse any responsibility for the crisis.

the Government, one concerning peace and the other on the school crisis and highway safety”, which came in the nick of time to defend the president’s remarks as intending to emphasise the eminent role of women in Malian society.

The material culture of the march thus appears to be at the intersection of formal space – the world of law, of the written word and of the state –, which places strong constraints upon it.

2.2. Where to march poses a problem: uncertainty, protest skills and denial of violence

The number of marches has increased since the early 2000s, but all social groups do not feel equally authorised to protest, particularly in the street. Some seem to be unable to control their ranks or mobilise crowds, and therefore run the risk of being reproached, explicitly or implicitly, for organising marches involving “rioters” or “youths” or both.

Several aspects characterise the “permit requests for authorisation of peaceful marches” addressed to the mayor.

The first is the strong denial on the part of the organisers as well as the authorities of any possibility of an outburst of violence. From 1994 to the end of the 1990s, the document delivered by the mayor was entitled “Receipt of declaration of a peaceful march”. The organisers themselves used the same terminology. Some representatives of organisations went so far as to commit themselves to ensuring that no violence took place. Though the term “peaceful march” was the one used by the town hall on its receipts, it is not based on law: the 1959 order does not refer to “peaceful marches” but to “public meetings”.

The second aspect of these requests: they express an uncertain relationship with the law. Many of the declarations filed at the town hall were drafted as requests for permits rather than as declarations. The fact that the authorities can decide at the last minute to ban a march obviously contributes to this uncertainty.

As a result, numerous requests for demonstration authorisation were couched in expressions of deference and accompanied, even though it was not required, by the receipt approving the foundation of their association, sometimes along with an excise stamp on the request. The requesting parties often requested an *authorisation* from the town hall, which was granted, even though here again the law does not require one (only the receipt is required, but we counted from the end of the 1990s to 2009 more than 50 *authorisations* from the town hall). The authorisation did not, however, guarantee that the demonstration would in fact be permitted on the appointed day.

Unequal skill at demonstrating also pertains to the ability to mobilise people, march according to the rules and control the ranks, and thereby avoid any violence that might occur from being attributed to the marchers. This problem was anticipated by the demonstrators, by the way, when they explicitly asked the authorities to take the necessary measures, as in this letter to the governor of the district of Bamako asking him to “*kindly oversee security for the march to avoid infiltration by ill-intentioned individuals.*”¹⁵

The fear that violence may be committed especially affects groups with politically or socially powerful adversaries, who could use the violence as an argument to rob the protests of their legitimacy – or justify police repression of the march.

Who mobilises large marches today in Mali? The most striking fact in the past six years is the success of demonstrations initiated by Muslim authorities and organisations. To my

¹⁵ Letter dated 4th October 2006 addressed to the Governor of Bamako, from the 2006 post archive in the MATCL box, “*contesting the interim results of the consular elections of the Mali Chamber of Commerce and Industry held on 1st October 2006 at the International Conference Centre in Bamako*”.

knowledge, with the exception of the Polycentric Social Forum of Bamako, which included numerous foreign activists, these are the only demonstrations that exceeded a thousand participants during the 2000s. They included demonstrations against caricatures of the prophet (3rd February 2006), against the film “Fitna” (6th April 2008), in favour of the death penalty (21st June 2008) and the meeting against the reform of the family code (held on Saturday, 22nd August 2009 at the 26th March stadium¹⁶), organised by Mohamed Kimbiri, head of Radio Dambé (“dignity”) – “*La Voix du Musulman*” (the Muslim voice), who recently became secretary of the High Islamic Council of Mali, as well as the march on 15th August 2009 against the family code. Many of these demonstrations followed the route from the Labour Exchange to the Peace Monument, which offered the occasion to conclude the march with prayers and blessings at the foot of the monument.

It is striking that the only large-scale demonstration I witnessed personally, which was presented to me as a demonstration against the signing of an agreement between France and Mali to readmit expelled Malians, was mixed. Two separate calls to demonstrate had been issued for the same date; the organisers of the first decided to merge their demonstration with the second, which was organised by Mohamed Kimbiri in support of Palestine. This march, described by Agence France Presse as an important demonstration against the readmission agreement, actually owed its success more to the mass of Muslims that were mobilised than to the usual troops of the small alterglobalisation movement. It combined the attraction of anti-imperialist themes with sensitivity to the powerfully mobilising Palestinian cause. Similarly, the large march in favour of Colonel Gaddafi and against Western intervention in Libya on 25th March 2011, combined the anti-imperialist theme with the mobilisation of certain Muslim organisations¹⁷, and signalled the importance of Libyan interests and investments in Mali, described with gratitude by numerous Malian journalists.

Islam’s ability to mobilise in Bamako must be viewed against the backdrop of issues perceived as legitimate as well as the size of the Muslim social network (Bamako has nearly 1,300 mosques, each with a five-person management committee, which supplies the logistics required to supervise and mobilise marches). When marches claiming allegiance to Islam are focused on topics enabling criticism of the North based on values experienced as authentically local, they can easily be combined with the know-how of groups more accustomed to mobilising but less able to fill the streets.

3. STREET VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRATIC GESTURE

The constant reference to “peaceful marches” implicitly suggests the possibility of the sudden appearance of street violence and vandalism. But violence is not solely the responsibility of those who take to the streets; it is also that of the police, as if the possibility of a riot would ultimately succeed in containing the march, with both sides calling upon the same memory of the 1991 transition.

3.1. Public order, police violence and protest containment

How do the police manage urban dissent?

Part of march management takes place upstream during the process of transmitting march declarations between the town hall, the governor’s office and government ministries. First of

¹⁶ This meeting drew a crowd of nearly 50,000 people.

¹⁷ El Hadj Mohamed Macki Bah, the president of the “Coalition of support for the great Libyan Jamahiriya against Western Aggression”, is also President of the Malian Union of Muslim Youth (UJMM). This coalition could be added to some thirty Muslim associations.

all, a march may be banned before it is scheduled to take place. The grounds for refusing to grant a permit are not always specified, or “reasons of public order” are invoked without further explanation. Sometimes the refusal is based on a formal flaw in the filed declaration. It is not surprising therefore that groups choose to include in their declarations proof of the association’s authorisation, even though it is not legally required. Prior management of demonstrations also involves a series of recommendations or even intimidation of the organisers, reminding them they will be held responsible for any violent outbursts. A rather broad range of techniques exists to discourage marches and mobilisations beforehand, such as a summons from the prefect issued to quarter or village chiefs the day before a planned local event.

Is it possible to identify groups that inspire the greatest amount of wariness? In the corpus of District III declarations, many banned marches involved relations between Mali and foreign countries, a sensitive issue in this district, which is the showcase of government authority. Thus, the march planned in mid-May 2004 by the Collective of Malians Expelled from Libya to obtain payments promised by Libya and against violence towards Africans was banned by the governor, like the other march it planned for 8th March 2005. The march organised in February 2005 by the Coordination of Togo Nationals in Mali concerning the situation in Togo was banned because the group was not legally approved. The same lack of legal status was the explanation for prohibiting a Protestant consumers association from demonstrating in June 2005 against soaring food prices. Demonstrations in the name of Islam are given special attention. Similarly, the marches of workers who accepted voluntary retirement (known as the *compressés* or “downsized”) are perceived with concern by the authorities because their grievances are addressed directly to the state (which has not always delivered the compensations it promised).

The declarations stamped “not authorised” include those in which the risk of violence breaking out is considered likely. This was the case for the request to march “against the attitude of the president of the Malian football federation during the election of African candidates for FIFA in January 2006” (the memory of the 2005 riots following the Mali-Togo match was still fresh). Similarly, marches are banned when the topic might call the authorities into question in a particularly sensitive way.

Here again the special status of District III ends up transforming these demonstrations into direct confrontations with the state, especially when its own personnel consider themselves victims of government policy. The fact that the Primature is situated only a few hundred metres away from the marchers makes the very possibility of such a march fraught with tension (several demonstrations of the *compressés* were banned in 1995 by the governor). Prohibitions were also meted out to the Collective of Opposition Parties (COPPO) in 1997, at the height of protests against Alpha Oumar Konaré. Most of these marches were banned by the authorities, and were thus held illegally, often at night, and were accompanied by violence.

Even when an organisation has received an authorisation from the mayor, the march does not always take place. The first phase of a march allows the representatives of the police to observe the crowd and estimate its strength; if they consider the group unwieldy, they may then ask the demonstrators to disperse. Marches with few demonstrators, which mobilise activists considered to be radical and critical of the authorities, are the most likely to be cancelled at the last minute. Thus, the few activists who prefer to demonstrate (even at the risk of attracting small numbers) will complain of “police repression” (bans, charges by the police and sometimes detention), and tried to convince me that democracy in Mali is merely a “façade”.

When a ban is announced – whether the march is held anyway without a permit or is cancelled by the police at the last minute – there is a strong likelihood that violence will erupt, either on the part of discontent demonstrators, or more often on the part of the police when the demonstrators fail to disperse. The possible occurrence of police violence when street demonstrations take place is not necessarily due to determination from “on high”. Of course no political leader wants to give the impression that he or she cannot control the street, and many subordinates may zealously anticipate what they take to be the expectations of their superiors. But other micro-social factors, such as male honour, may explain the prompt recourse to the baton on the part of police forces quickly annoyed by the fact that their uniforms do not result in immediate obedience. If we add to these factors the low esteem in which the police are held by the population, owing to their privileged access to the state and the propensity of some to abuse their power (e.g. by ransoming drivers)¹⁸, we can see that there are many contributing factors to tense interaction during marches.

Finally, the location of the police presence at marches varies. Usually they are usually stationed on the outside the march, but sometimes inside, in lines allowing them to channel the crowd. The location of police forces may be the subject of preliminary negotiations, without any certainty of the outcome other than indirect hints. Hence, the remark of the mayor in response to my question about security at demonstrations, a term had a different meaning for him than for me: “*security teams (i.e. for him the police) often ask to be paid because it is a service*”. One administrative agent told me that the town hall must pay a *per diem* and petrol, as well as other expenses of the police commissariat in the event of a demonstration, which did not boost the enthusiasm of the districts for marches. It therefore seems likely that the degree of police cooperation also depends on the ability of the organisers to compensate them for their efforts.

3.2. “But everybody wants something!” The relationship to the state, to wealth and to abundance in rioting

With the exception of 1993 and 1997, during periods of serious political conflict, street violence erupts less often during marches than on other occasions, such as popular uprisings triggered by events without any explicit connection to politics – but it is necessary to grasp the political aspects with which they may or may not be invested afterwards.

Here again, although direct observation of riots can be a dangerous undertaking¹⁹, the press, the available archives and the accounts of Bamako residents mention numerous cases of “riots” and “vandalism”. The most traditional model takes the form of indignation expressed towards what is experienced as outside aggression against a group. The outsiders may be representatives of the state (policemen, administrators, etc.) or simply “social foreigners”²⁰ who do not belong to the community of people in a neighbourhood or a community of believers or both (in the case of vandalising places of debauchery), a particular religious

¹⁸ There are few Malians who have not been personally subjected to the abuse of discretionary authority (low-level corruption, arbitrary police custody, etc.) when confronting the police, or even witnessed the police being used to defend the private interests of the powerful. For an ordinary example of police violence, « Descente musclée des éléments du camp I à la Cité Farako : Pour laver l'affront de leur collègue, les gendarmes tabassent une dame et son gardien avant de les faire embastiller », *L'Indépendant*, 15 novembre 2010.

¹⁹ The fact that an outside observer does not share the characteristics of the rioters, in this case the fact of being white, makes him or her a potential target – among other individuals with characteristics that put them at risk of public condemnation when tensions run high.

²⁰ In other words, de facto foreigners (e.g. a Sotrama driver of a public bus that runs over a pedestrian) or that can be denounced as such due to their origins, their supposed wealth (Lebanese or Chinese shopkeepers, etc.) – or their sexual behaviour.

group, or a group engaged in the same business activity and/or the same use of urban space (evicted street vendors or youths accustomed to using a football field, etc.).

One need only peruse the press to come across cases of rioting, which are given journalistic treatment somewhere between political news and sensationalism, a description of local indignation and moral considerations about Malian society or even the crisis of values (when the rioters are young, or when it is possible to suggest they may have been manipulated by a particular powerful individual).²¹ Although I am concentrating here on Bamako, such riots have been attested in other regions of the country.²²

Thus, the Bamako quarter known as Banconi Salembougou experienced several days of rioting in February 2009 (several people were killed) following the intervention of police forces that had expropriated the chief of the quarter, an adopted son of the previous chief, whose aunt expected to inherit the house. The outrage seemed to stem from the fact that a woman had won a lawsuit against the person viewed as the true son of the quarter, and once he had been expropriated, he found support among his neighbours.²³ In December 2009, again in Banconi, further riots broke out to protest an accident in which a little girl was killed (and against the town hall for failing to set up speed bumps).²⁴ In February 2011, rioting erupted in the Sikoro quarter after another road accident occurred.²⁵ More recently, Malians repatriated from Libya vandalised the civil protection compound in Sogoniko, held up traffic, demanded their bags and suspected the authorities of stealing part of their repatriation grants.²⁶ Also in the Sogoniko quarter, a group of youths who used a football field that had been sold to a company clashed with police in February-March 2010 after their sports club leader was arrested.²⁷ In February 2010, following unjustified police violence against one of their colleagues, the apprentices and drivers of Sotrama barricaded certain roads in Bamako, burned tyres, attacked police hangars and destroyed two police stations.²⁸

These uprisings must also be understood from the perspective of social relationships in which violence is a way of managing deviance, particularly theft, as demonstrated by the cases of lynching thieves in markets, or country villagers confiscating the vehicles of cattle thieves. It is no accident that responsibility for these practices is openly claimed during periods of political crisis, which proves they do not reflect any immutable fatality of crowd violence: in 1991 as in 1997, “the people created their own code of law, one interlocutor told me: “article 320” (for 300 CFA francs worth of petrol and 20 CFA francs worth of matches) of the

²¹ The format of small news items allows all these aspects to be articulated.

²² Riots at the mosque in Djenné in September 2006, and in 2009, the riots in Loulo, Kita, Tabacoto, Kadiolo, etc.

²³ « Banconi Salabougou brûle », *Les Échos*, 19 février 2009.

²⁴ KONE Assane « Une fillette tuée par une Sotrama : Émeutes à Banconi et Bougouba », *Le Républicain*, 08/12/2009 ; DICKO Abdrahamane, « Banconi, Une Sotrama écrase une élève et provoque des émeutes », www.bamanet.net, 8 décembre 2009.

²⁵ « Émeutes à Sikoro: le pire a été évité », *Le Caïman Indé*, 2 mars 2011.

²⁶ MAÏGA Abdoul Karim, DAOU O., « Émeute de Maliens rapatriés de Libye : Oumar Mariko accusé d’incitation à la violence », *L’Indicateur du Renouveau*, 22 mars 2011 ; YOSSSI Diakaridia, « Sogoniko : Des rapatriés Maliens de la Libye vandalisent l’enceinte de la protection civile », *L’indépendant*, 21 Mars 2011.

²⁷ YOSSSI Diakaridia, « Affrontement entre policiers et jeunes en commune VI : Suite à un espace utilisé comme terrain de football, vendu par la mairie, les jeunes ont décidé de se faire justice », *L’indépendant*, 1 avril 2010 ; « Émeute à Sogoniko hier matin : Quatre blessés graves et la démission du maire Dagnon demandée », *Nouvel Horizon*, 1 avril 2010.

²⁸ DOUMBIA Chiaka, « Encore des scènes d’émeutes à Bamako », *Le Challenger*, 26 février 2010 ; « En réaction à la mort par balle d’un chauffeur par une patrouille de police : Un mouvement de grève des transporteurs a paralysé hier les transports publics dans le district de Bamako », *L’indépendant*, 24 février 2010 ; COULIBALY Seydou, « Assassinat d’un chauffeur de Sotrama : La tension toujours vive entre policiers et chauffeurs », *Le républicain*, 24 février 2010.

“accelerated criminal code”, which consisted not only in dousing thieves and criminals with petrol and setting them on fire, but in the process, protesting process against the police and magistrates accused of setting them free.

Uprisings against police violence can therefore unleash more politicised protests: the first marches and riots that led to the 1991 transition after young street vendors who occupied the Dabanani centre were evicted by the police, who were accustomed to ransoming them. Violent rioting with burned cars followed the police interventions. The evictions, from the hospital centre to rue Al Qods, also set off protests against the police forces.

What can be said from a political standpoint about these revolts over issues of property, morality and the occupation of space, which can always be politicised, or about the looting that occurs, sometimes during explicitly political riots (like those in 1991, 1993, 1997), but also during urban violence which is not always politically motivated *a priori* (e.g. the riots following Mali’s defeat by Togo in 2005)? The risk of attaching excessive political significance to these phenomena is as great as the risk of failing to view them from the angle of “empty bellies”, out-of-control crowds, or “bandits” (as the northern rebels along with many protestors were labelled to depoliticise their action). To rehabilitate rioters’ motives, Edward P. Thompson (1971) developed the concept of the moral economy of the crowd. With it, he sought to combat the conception of food riots as “spasmodic”, mechanical revolts and restore them as expressions of popular conceptions of legitimacy and justice in the area of economic transactions. The notion has since been widely used in African studies dealing with urban riots, but without great caution. In particular, we can regret that it consists in applying to present-day Africa a concept that originated in Europe’s past, at the risk of real evolutionism.

I have proposed elsewhere (SIMEANT, 2010) that, if in fact we mean to give the term in an heuristic manner, we should consider moral economy as a set of values derived from living conditions marked by an obsession with subsistence, linked to the reciprocal expectations, at once pragmatic and normative, of leaders and those they lead, concerning fair distribution of wealth, and the responsibility of leaders regarding subsistence. We should not be misled by the term “subsistence”: the notion of moral economy was first usefully applied to all or part of popular groups faced with ensuring their material survival because it provided a solid structure for their relationship with the authorities (witness the tension between deference, dependence and the violence of a riot), as well as what the authorities could legitimately expect from those they led. But that does not mean that rioters are only interested in subsistence: to be placed in such conditions can also generate a thirst for luxury, abundance and consumption/destruction of goods that is so often expressed in riots.

How can this notion orient the way we view the riots in Bamako? We must begin by distinguishing between situations where we can clearly identify a moral economy prior to the mobilisation (without turning it into a causal factor), and situations in which a conception of fair and unfair is developed haltingly by trial and error. Hence the importance of describing the riots as fully as possible and looking at the *emerging* character of what is morally articulated in the course of the protest process.

Let us take for example the riots following the Togo-Mali football match on 27th March 2005 in Bamako, after the national team was defeated 2-1 at the stadium on 26th March. The public overran the field, threatening to kill some of the players. The police responded with tear gas, and then a large crowd of young people took control of the main roads and clashed with police forces (who were ill-equipped and suffered many injuries), demanded payment before allowing cars to go by, and after destroying or setting fire to sports symbols and premises, went on to attack symbols of the administration and the state (traffic lights, the “Tower of

Africa” monument on Avenue de L’OUA, the Aoua Keita centre on Avenue de l’Indépendance, etc.). Finally, the rioters attacked shops, particularly those run by Lebanese (such as the Amandine pastry shop, popular among rich Bamako residents and expatriates) as well as numerous bar-restaurants and small hotels run by Togolese and above all Chinese businessmen (some twenty were ransacked) reputed to be used by prostitutes. Women were raped. The damage was assessed at several billion CFA francs. The riot cannot be explained simply as the combination of a desire to stigmatise the depravation represented by “the bars” and an equally fierce desire to access material enjoyment in all its forms. Yet it is difficult to view what happened except in terms of a feeling of rage not only towards the leaders of the Malian Federation of Football, whose resignations were demanded by the demonstrators, but more broadly towards the rich and the state, as well as in terms of an aspiration for material riches that were beyond the reach of most people – all of these topics are staples of everyday conversation in Bamako. Interpreting the riot therefore presupposes describing it in order to understand the tastes, the loathing and the aspirations it expressed, tastes that do not depend solely on the chance to enjoy them, even though they express themselves when the opportunity arises. And it would be equally problematic if we failed to consider the highly political way the athletic defeat was perceived: not only because football is a constant topic of discussion and hence of moral development, but also the date (the riot took place the day after the 26th of March, the anniversary of the 1991 revolution and the fall of Moussa Traoré), as well as an all-pervasive national pride in Mali, which seemed to be trampled by the defeat which eliminated Mali from the African Football Championship, and finally because the public authorities had made a considerable contribution to support the *Aigles* team of Mali. Judging the failure of the national football team also meant judging the authorities that had paid them and hired their coaches.²⁹

As a mirror image of these riots, which reveal a political significance even though there seemed to be nothing political about the triggering mechanism, we might examine the violence that took place in extremely tense political situations such as the spring of 1993 and 1997. The violence on these occasions also combined a very strategic use of violence with the same possibility of material enjoyment. One participant in the mobilisations in 1991 and 1997 (at the time, he was a member of the Collective of Opposition Parties), relates that he talked with his comrades about “technical rioting”, a “march with rioting” and “targeted rioting” during the 1991 movement. In 1997, he said, the villa of “Alpha’s mama” (the mother of President Konaré) was a designated target, along with the home of the lawyer Demba Diallo, a friend of the regime, and other places as well.

This highly strategic use of violence, the well-informed circulation of details about the homes of those close to the regime, did not rule out taking part in looting that was prompted by a combination of social as well as political loathing of those in power, vengeance and material enjoyment.

Here is the eye-witness account of a Bamako resident, 35-40 years of age, who talked in the presence of friends about his participation in the movements and rioting (the marches in early 1991, prior to the fall of the regime of Moussa Traoré and the transition to democracy, the looting of the national assembly in 1993, the protests in the spring of 1997). One can read in his account – at the time he was a young man, politicised and French-speaking, who had begun his university studies – the description of a taste for material things, which seems to have been inseparable from the protests against the regime that took place in the streets in this period.

²⁹ It is significant that requests for marches against the management of Malian football can be found in the archives of District III.

There wasn't a single house that didn't have... that didn't have rice and millet at home or... it was for the state... that's the point of the state, everybody knows that... And it wasn't... only state property that they wrecked... the bosses that the state encourages to live better than the Malians, they wrecked their shops, too, like... What's his name... the Lebanese guy... Who had his shop... Ashkar... He had flour there, he had I don't know how many tons of flour, they stole all his goods and the state reimbursed him afterwards... But there wasn't a house in Bamako that didn't have something from the state in it... there wasn't a single one... afterwards, they managed to recover some of it but... but... we stole millet and rice...er...anything there was to eat er... (...)

JS. And did you demonstrate again afterwards?

Yes... I did ... I found a lot of things, too er especially... I had a lot of things to eat, rice, s... Flour and... tins of food... Everything I needed to take, I take...

JS. You only took what you needed? er...

But everybody wants something!... (...) when I go out to demonstrate, there are people that only like to have money, they're the ones who break the strongboxes ...and if I...I want...I need tins of food and...bottles, drinks and cakes, there are also people who like cakes and they go into the pastry shops... but there are also some who want stuff...like jewellery or motorcycles...There were...in that WFP there, how many motorcycles were in there? They stole all of them...There are those who like motorcycles... There are those who only like tinned food... There are those who like... bags of flour...(...) frankly...I, my case, my ideas were not to push me into rioting...My ideas were first to... to... to end my poverty first... To be like the sons of bosses who have done nothing to have money...So I wanted there to be at least a...balance between our lives...(...)..if it was hotels for prostitutes, too er they raped the women they could find...so it happened that the boys who go out just to...er...have...er...look for pleasure, they don't go out looking for money, they go out to have fun and afterwards to rape...There are all sorts of people who go out...er...to riot... To break in, people say break but...(...) I go only to steal the strongboxes...But some people also go out to find something to eat... there are even some who go out to find even alcohol... there are some for...who go out to rape... Everybody is bitter about his... about his side... But you don't know who is who...[...] When people are poor, when they rise up, only then it is to cause damage...They don't even try to steal...First, they attack first... [recording, December 2008]

The account of the places that were targeted (the warehouses of the World Food Programme, the villa of “Alpha’s mama” where the former president of the Republic was said to have hidden his gold, the state storehouses and those of wealthy shopkeepers, the National Assembly, etc.), just as the goods that were targeted by the rioters (rice, sugar, drinks, motorcycles, women, etc.), express very clearly what people may expect from the state and the feeling of having a right to help your during the riots and avenge yourself. The trophies kept after the looting (cf. also LE PALEC 1992) also clearly reveal this relationship to moments of urban effervescence, which are inspired not only by a concern to meet basic needs, but express at once the reversal of social hierarchies, the possibility of asserting oneself as a “boy” and of showing one’s courage in the face of danger.

Rioting, and not only at the time of the democratic transition, thus remains one of the ways of expressing popular dissent. It is invested with a considerable amount of political sentiment, even if it is felt only after the violence has been unleashed, or is confusedly rooted in what the targets of the violence stand for.

Yet the violence, like the marches, remains deeply permeated by an explicit or implicit reference to the movements that brought about the fall of the regime of Moussa Traoré, and it explains how one can feel authorised to resort to violence – and how one can also be wary of “young looters”.

Conclusion. The ambivalent memory of the transition: “young martyrs” and “looting”

Indeed, the reference to the 1990-91 transition remains a permanent grid for viewing, interpreting and (de)legitimising recourse to street protest. It explains how the marches can be perceived as the business of youths³⁰, of potential rioters – like the marches in 1991, which

³⁰ In contrast, whereas the massive participation of women was attested in 1991, they appeared to be less present in memorialising 1991 – and are less inclined to lay claim this heroic precedent to give legitimacy to their contemporary demands.

means that this memory is still highly ambivalent, as it presupposes both the risk of looting and violence, as in 1991, and may legitimise such acts. Speeches about marches are moral discourses about young people and violence. One frequently hears this reference used both by protesters who claim to be heirs of 1991, individually and as a group, such as students and by those who good-humouredly mock the marchers or criticise them.

The participation of young people in marches and riots is of course not specific to Mali. It is a familiar model throughout Africa: a relationship combining wariness and cooperation linking those in power to urban young people, especially students. Students, more or less educated, urban and aspiring to social mobility, form a population feared by government authorities (more, in any case, than people in the bush or peasants), which agree to give out scholarships³¹ in order to forestall social protest.

The combination of this situation, and the role of students in the transition to democracy, has succeeded in encouraging and justifying, at least in their own eyes, the extremely frequent recourse to violence in making their demands. This was the case during the demonstrations in early 1991, and again in April 1993 (when student violence was followed by the resignation of the government of Younoussi Touré), in 1994 when a large percentage of the population supported the repression of student violence by Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, during the movements from December 1995 to January 1996, in 1997, etc.³², and today as well. It is true that the Malian Students' Association (AEEM) took part in the transition coalition and negotiated an agreement to increase scholarship stipends (an agreement that was not honoured). Before and after the advent of democracy, numerous protests arose as a result of breaching of the tacit contracts through which those in power pandered to this social group.

The virulence and repetition of student mobilisation led to multiplying the number of "blank" or half-completed years of university study and a certain sense of impunity or at least of the right to protest on the students' part. The commemoration of the "martyrdom" of certain students (and the monuments to the glory of those same martyrs), has manifestly contributed to this sense – just as memorialising the sacrifice and 1991 has helped to give more widespread legitimacy to marches.³³ In return, the 1991 slogan, *An te korolen fe fo kura*³⁴, explains the aspirations of young urban youths in the face of those in power and their social elders even today.

1991 embodies not only the memory of the democratic movement but also the moment when the young were in power... if only at the cost of violence. The still vivid memory of the conditions leading to the overthrow of the regime both empowers those who invoke it when they engage in protest or even in violence – and reminds us of why every protestor remains suspect.

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³¹ The amount of these study grants is often equal to or even exceeds the wages of a manual worker.

³² For a very precise chronology of AEEM actions between 1991 and 1996, cf. SMITH (1997).

³³ On memorialisation in Mali, cf. particularly DE JORIO (2003) and RILLON (2007).

³⁴ "We don't want/we no longer want the old but the new" (in Bambara).

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