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M'Bokolo, Elikia

1994-07-13T08:48:43Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7927

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13 - 15 JULY 1994

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

DANCE AND CONFESSION: POPULAR CULTURE AND PERCEPTION OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ZAIRE

Elikia M'Bokolo
EHESS
Paris

AFRICANA

HWS 276

DANCE AND CONFESSION: POPULAR CULTURE AND PERCEPTION OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ZAIRE

By Elikia M'BOKOLO

The notion of "good governance" is conceived through the manner in which political power handles social problems of population. The Zairean popular culture (mainly music and drama) is characterized by a sharp perception of social problems: polarization of unequalities and social classes; increasing marginalization of strata; rapid and fraudulent enrichment of the ruling classes; immoral behaviours of the oligarchy; repetitive shortage of food and hunger; daily insecurity for the poorest classes; etc... The Zairean modern music describes this people's daily misery through songs.

It is important to point out that, the social misfortune is first considered as an individual situation and not a collective problem. This raises insurmountable difficulties concerning the elaboration of strategies which aim at lifting out the community from its predicament. Social problems are also perceived as an unescapable destiny.

Variety music reveals the community's perception of politics and "good governance". This perception has remarkably remained constant for the four last decades.

Firstly, there is an eminently consensual perception of "good governance" and democratic practice. In the early 1960s, Zaire was notably characterized by secessions in the Katanga and Kasai provinces, rebellions, riots, ethnic conflicts and killings. In this context, messages comprised in songs were therefore related to mutual understanding "*koyokana*" and reconciliation "*kolingana*". These consensual values were removed during the Mobutist period and replaced by the notions of "militantism". Nowadays, consensual notions come back in songs and political speechs. They are especially sought by the opposition ("non-conflictual transition", "consensual transition") while Marshall Mobutu and his group are encouraging violence and military riots and refuse to respect the rules established by the "Sovereign National

Conference".

Secondly, the Zairean music conveys a **fatalistic conception** of the political change. There is plenty of adages and proverbs invented or extracted from traditional locutions which demonstrate this view: *ata ndele* (a day will come...); *"Mokili mayi ya bwatu"* (life is for human beings what the river is for boat); *"Lelo ya yo lobi ya ngai"* (today is for you, tomorrow will be my turn)... In these conditions, the formulation of a true programme of political change appears to be out of reach of human beings.

Although it is easy to notice the decay of the state, it seems however impossible to understand rationally reasons which explain the failure. Instead of accusing political authorities, songs just moan.

Thus, there has been progressively the emergence of elements of a "minimum package of demands". The latter is not exclusively related to democracy. It may be also applied to all régimes. Initially contained in "memoranda" and *"Notebook of Complaints" which were addressed to the President of the Republic* in the beginning of 1990s by civil society, this "minimum package" was later spread into the public through songs. Its basic claims are food, jobs, schooling, and health for all.

Attempting to solve the multiple problems he faces, the individual acts in isolation, basing his hope in **"good luck"**, **"smartness"** and **sorcery**.

Moreover, "good luck" and even "sorcery" are sometimes confused with God. Thus, in his recent song entitled "Democracy", Tabu Ley calls upon both the God of Christians and ancestors of traditional cults.

Religious songs have experienced a great development these last years. There is also a growing number of "prayer groups". The basic ritual of these groups is the "testimony" which is a kind of public confession during which believers, and especially political personalities of the Mobutu régime recount different stages of their life. They confess how the thirst for power led them

to pactise with Satan, and explain how and why they have come back to the Christian life.

The paralysation of the democratic process has given birth in the 1990s, to a new musical type of songs, the popular political songs. The vocation of these songs seems to supply with the inadequacy and political weakness of variety and religious songs.

This paper will be concluded by an observation and a question. Political dimension of the life is a central element in popular cultural songs. However, its central position is related to the idea of "good governance" which does not necessarily correspond to that of "democratic" governance. The association of "popular culture" with democracy is neither a spontaneous phenomenon nor an irreversible one. Moreover, making such a democratic "popular culture" compatible to democratic practices of political struggle and exercise of power requires perhaps other social complementary factors.