

**HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES**

Humanitarian action in the face of civic mobilisations. The example of the Senegalese movement *Y en a marre*

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**How can humanitarian rhetoric be mobilised in the context of civic struggles in the Souths and how can such mobilisations call out to humanitarian NGOs from the North? Thomas Fouquet invites us to reflect upon this interwoven issue, as he retraces the first media and political successes of the Senegalese movement *Y en a marre* [Enough is enough]. Despite presumably having little to do with humanitarian action, such a movement may prefigure a new way for Western NGOs to rally up with the dynamics which, in the Souths, are in line with the wish expressed by many of them, namely to be more locally rooted and to rely on endogenous forces.**

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In January 2011, a handful of young Senegalese, mostly rap artists and journalists, created the collective *Y en a marre* (*YEM*). Initially arising from and as part of the protest against the regime of Abdoulaye Wade<sup>1</sup>, then President of the Republic of Senegal since March 2000, *YEM* quickly came to occupy a much more significant and complex place on the social and media-political stage of Senegal – and beyond<sup>2</sup>. This movement indeed has the particularity of constantly crossing and blurring the boundaries between civic commitment, artistic practice, political protest and actions in favour of development. The interweaving of these various repertoires is crystallised in the “civic projects” initiated by the movement.

Based on an anthropological survey of *YEM*, launched in January 2012 in Senegal<sup>3</sup>, this contribution focuses on the current reconfigurations of internal power relations within Senegalese politics. More specifically, the example of this civic movement forms the basis for considering popular means of enunciating politics<sup>4</sup>, the humanitarian and developmentalist repertoires of which are both the arena and the sociological indicator.

### ***Y en a marre!* Elements of a genealogy**

“We founded the movement *YEM* on January 18, 2011 to encourage our generation to detach itself from the political idols to whom we entrusted our future for more than fifty years and who have not brought us out of underdevelopment. [...] It is simply important to remember what we were discussing, my friends and I, on the night we created the movement *Y en a marre*. We were talking about ‘nights spent in darkness and work days lost, children who pass away in hospitals and operating rooms, bodies left to decompose in morgues because of power cuts’. We were

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<sup>1</sup> *YEM* is nevertheless heir to a long history of protests against the powers in place in Senegal, especially amongst youth. In this regard, see S. Awenengo-Dalberto, “Sénégal : les nouvelles formes de mobilisations de la jeunesse”, *Les Carnets du CAP* [Centre d’analyse et de prévention], 15, 2011, p. 37-65.

<sup>2</sup> *YEM* was one of the leading drivers behind the public protests against Abdoulaye Wade’s candidacy for a third term in the presidential elections of 2012, which attracted the attention of both national and international media. Moreover, *YEM* has been working closely with other social movements in West Africa (“Le Balai Citoyen” – The Civic Broom, TN – in Burkina Faso among others) and Central Africa (Filimbi movement in the DRC, for example) for several years.

<sup>3</sup> This contribution is based on current research. In that respect, it does not aim to present “results” in the strict sense of the term, but rather a number of assumptions and directions for further research.

<sup>4</sup> J.-F. Bayart, “L’énonciation du politique”, *Revue française de science politique*, n° 3, 1985, p. 343-373.

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observing the failure of agricultural policies and a rural world left to itself. Financial scandals with billions misappropriated, and corruption erected as a governance system. As for us, we were sick of seeing all these accumulated frustrations suppressed day in, day out. These evils that we so heavily condemned are in fact the daily reality of many African people; for them, the future no longer exists<sup>5</sup>.”

It is in such terms that Fadel Barro, founding member of *YEM*, talks about the circumstances that inspired the creation of the movement for which he currently acts as national coordinator. One thus understands that the nature and meaning of the various actions supported by this movement cannot be reduced to a sociology of mobilisations or social movements.

*YEM* was assuredly one of the pillars in the protest against the candidacy of Abdoulaye Wade to his own succession in the presidential elections of February-March 2012, and played a central role in the democratic change that took place when Macky Sall came to power. Although the electoral victory of this former minister of A. Wade cannot exactly be considered as a rupture, *YEM*'s current popularity nevertheless stems largely from the political and civic commitment it has inspired and supported among the Senegalese people, with key dates as detailed below<sup>6</sup>.

- January 18, 2011: creation of *YEM*.
- February 2011: *YEM* takes part in the World Social Forum in Dakar; noteworthy intervention during the general assembly of social movements.
- June 23, 2011: victory of the public mobilisation against the constitutional reform instigated by A. Wade; *YEM* experiences a rise in popular and media power.
- Late January 2012: onset of “active democratic resistance” following the approval of Abdoulaye Wade’s candidacy by the Constitutional Council of Senegal.
- March 2012: election of Macky Sall, main opponent of A. Wade, as President of the Republic of Senegal.
- August 2013: launch of the Observatory for democracy and good governance, “DOX AK SA GOX” (meaning “Walk alongside your people”), in partnership with Oxfam in particular.

*YEM* positions itself as a driver of social change or as an agitator of consciences, rather than as the instigator of a political or partisan rupture in the strict sense of the term. For that purpose, the movement supports arguments and initiatives that are closer to the actual prerogatives of players involved in humanitarian action and development.

*YEM* is certainly generally considered from the perspective of its protest activities or through the prism of urban cultures and their relationship to politics<sup>7</sup>. But its ambition consists above all in “building new hope and raising the awareness of young people who are likely to put [Senegal] on the path to development”, as Fadel Barro says. To do so, the movement relies on a slogan: that of the New Type of Senegalese (NTS), which refers more or less to a new programme for

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<sup>5</sup> Interview of Fadel Barro, first published in the Senegalese newspaper *Le Quotidien* and reproduced in *Courrier International* on March 7, 2013. <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2013/03/07/vu-du-senegal-generation-y-en-a-marre>

<sup>6</sup> In that respect, we can nowadays talk about a genuine “*YEM* phenomenon” in Senegal. I hereby speak of a “phenomenon” in reference not only to the popularity of the movement among the people of Senegal (in particular its youth) and abroad, but also to the fact that the slogan “Y en a marre!” has become a rallying cry, or an emblematic formula for being fed up, including among those who are not formally involved in the movement. This is particularly evidenced by its rapid spread in the public speeches commonly given throughout Senegal.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular T. Fouquet, “La trame politique des cultures urbaines : motifs dakarois”, in *Enough is Enough!*, collective work published in connection with the European Conference on African Studies, Paris 2015 (Brill, June 2015).

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citizenship, whereby each and everyone is expected to show their commitment and efforts. In other words, it is through the commitment and awareness of the majority that change in/through development can be achieved. Such a position has to be devised both with and against the rulers, since the latter simply become a component or variable within the wider dynamics that the movement is aiming to implement. In that respect, *YEM* clearly went back into politics, but without actually *doing* politics<sup>8</sup>.

### **Calling out to bring about change: humanitarian action as a lever for civic mobilisation**

In order to encourage and support the involvement of populations in the development of Senegal, *YEM* relies on its local rooting. The movement indeed quickly redeployed as a myriad of regional affiliates, called “spirits of Y en a marre”, distributed across the entire Senegalese territory. Building on its internationally connected “hard core” in Dakar on the one hand, and on these local micro-entities on the other, *YEM* is able to achieve large-scale mobilisations, report back the grievances of local populations, while still focusing its attention on major national or international issues. In concrete terms, its action is centred around a set of stances and “civic projects”. Two main types of activities and initiatives can be identified.

First, the movement became heavily involved in the democratisation processes, both locally and nationally. This involvement realised its full potential with the creation of an Observatory for democracy and good governance, in partnership with Oxfam in particular, in August 2013. This scheme is intended as a genuine civic control mechanism over public action with the view, *inter alia*, of ensuring “an effective involvement [of the populations] in the choices of political programs that meet their needs<sup>9</sup>” Among the actions undertaken as part of this observatory, *YEM* organises itinerant “citizens’ juries” in all regions of Senegal; these gatherings aim to promote meetings and exchanges between local elected representatives (MPs, mayors, etc.) and constituents, in the form of direct dialogue. People thus have the opportunity to put forward their expectations and grievances to their elected representatives, who are called into question regarding the political solutions they should or could implement in response. There are undoubtedly interesting avenues for anyone involved in the field of aid and solidarities who endeavours to develop actions aimed at meeting the real needs of people. Such an undertaking, hybrid as it was (combining a social and civic movement, a non-governmental organisation, the people themselves and lastly their elected representatives) also provides food for thought in terms of reconfiguring the connections and types of collaboration between the NGOs from the North and the social movements from the Souths.

A second large class of actions implemented by *YEM* consists in a set of advocacies intended once again to relay the people’s wants or grievances (power cuts, etc.), to give a voice to the voiceless (evicted populations, etc.) or to participate actively, sometimes even physically, so as to overcome the shortcomings of the state (in favour of flood victims, or for the refurbishment of buildings of public interest, for example). Despite their often local ties, these advocacies also address major national issues, such as people’s access to health care and education for all, peace in Casamance, improved conditions for the detention and rehabilitation of prison populations, economical and logistical support for small-scale agricultural activities and traditional fisheries, environmental conservation, etc. Since January 2012, these advocacy activities have been summarized through the establishment of an annual event called “La foire aux problèmes” [“The problem fair” or *frequently addressed problems*]. On this occasion, associations and representatives

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<sup>8</sup> As explained later: *YEM* indeed clearly endeavours to retain a form of political “neutrality”, in the sense that it is very careful not to be subject to any political appropriation.

<sup>9</sup> As per *YEM*’s exact terms regarding this program.

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from all sectors and regions of Senegal are invited to express their wants and grievances in a space especially dedicated to them in Dakar.

Through its various civic projects and initiatives, *YEM* acts at the heart of political action, thereby revealing its failures and/or shortcomings. For all that, its leaders are constantly reaffirming their independence with regards to the ruling powers and political sphere, so as to guard against partisan appropriation and thus to ensure maximum neutrality (at least from a political point of view) for their actions and speeches. They simultaneously keep their distance from the “NGOist” principle while maintaining a rather ambivalent, or at the very least strategic, relationship with it (see below). It is that in-between, or preliminary, and at times uncomfortable position that makes up *YEM*'s originality and interest.

### **Ethical and moral archaeology of YEM: thinking beyond the ethics of doing**

Throughout *YEM*'s emergence and structuring phase, it is a philosophy of action that dominated its various initiatives, thereby simultaneously helping to legitimise the movement's public speeches, which rely on accurate knowledge of people's issues and grievances at the national level. This *ethics of doing* was relatively independent and improvised at first, in that it was not underpinned by a code of conduct formalised as such, unlike ethics charters that organise and supervise the action of some NGOs for example. So how was the ethics of doing gradually rewritten into a more elaborate code? What are its terms of reference and inspirations? What conceptions of aid and citizenship emerge from it?

The acuteness of this ethics of doing, with the element of improvisation it implies, was directly related to the objectives that mobilised the movement at the time: overturning the regime of A. Wade to allow for a democratic change. Once these initial objectives were achieved, *YEM* had to reconsider its own future, reinvent its methods and subjects of intervention, while safeguarding the reserve of public legitimacy it had managed to build up through and in action. In this regard, one of the hallmarks of *YEM* is to make the people aware of the necessity to collectively manage the development (economic, democratic, social/human, in the broad sense) of the country. The ethical objectives developed and defended by the movement combine civic, humanitarian, social and political elements for that purpose. They rely particularly on an anti-victimist rhetoric, where notions of personal accountability, involvement and commitment play a central role. In doing so, *YEM* promotes the idea that dignity is to be conquered through the involvement and commitment of every individual. There emerges a major heuristic shift since the said “beneficiaries” are destined to simultaneously act as the direct instigators of their own emancipation (economical, political, symbolic). One understands that such a line of research leads to query the ethics supported by *YEM* in light of certain debates on “humanitarian reason<sup>10</sup>”, with the idea that the victimisation of the Souths (i.e. of the “beneficiaries” within these societies) would paradoxically be a vector of their dependency at national and international level, due to the *de facto* levelling down of some of the people's expectations and demands.

What emerges as particularly interesting at this level is the fact that socio-political claims are formulated through action and discursive repertoires generally attributed to aid and development professionals. *YEM* arranges a kind of mutual convertibility between these different registers. It is in this regard that the interweaving of boundaries appears most fruitful and original: actions in favour of development and solidarity are established as new ways to enunciate citizenship and,

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<sup>10</sup> D. Fassin, *La Raison humanitaire. Une histoire morale du temps présent*, coll. « Hautes études », Paris, éditions de l'EHESS (avec Seuil/Gallimard), 2010.

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incidentally, as critical or even political levers<sup>11</sup>; but this process is mainly carried out *from the bottom*<sup>12</sup>, unlike “official” programs which are most often developed from the top and/or from the outside.

With no evidence at this stage to question these logics of interrelationship in more detail (from politics to development and humanitarian action, via the critical enunciation of citizenship “from the bottom”), one can simply point out that the biographical approach should allow for a better understanding of the specific dynamics involved. Do the players involved in the movement *YEM* have a militant (associative, political) and/or humanitarian past? Why did their will for personal commitment turn towards this collective movement rather than towards more traditional aid organisations, or even political parties? Moreover, are these commitments perceived as necessarily exclusive of one another and what is *YEM*’s specific contribution compared to what already exists in terms of humanitarian and political action? How has their social conscience been strengthened or at least shaped through their participation in activities initiated by the movement? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, how does the ethics of *doing for others*, specific to humanitarian action, act upon a *sense of civic duty* in return, and vice versa?

This review should therefore help comprehend the anthropological depth of humanitarian and development action by gauging how it is designed and implemented, understood and interpreted, condemned or discussed, or even appropriated and reinvented. It also allows some mechanisms specific to what shall be referred to as a “socialisation” of humanitarian action and solidarities to be examined, by playing on the double meaning of the expression.

First, in the lexicon of social science, socialisation can define the process by which an object (material, notional, etc.) is integrated in the collective understanding and daily practices. In that sense, it implies a review of the social logics that contribute to the popularisation of humanitarian practices and prerogatives through popular or non-specialist initiatives (i.e. as opposed to “expert” actions conducted by humanitarian and development professionals). Then, the term “socialisation” in this context refers more formally to the shift between humanitarian work and social work, in that it characterises a logic of local ownership – or domestication – of solidarities. In simple terms, how does the transition and/or conversion of humanitarian action to social action and civic commitment take place? In the case under study, this process is largely driven by popular and sub-state initiatives. In this sense, it would be interesting to gauge how public action, thought out and conducted from the highest level of the State, could prove pervious to these popular dynamics. In other words, is it possible to eventually contemplate a genuine “nationalisation” of humanitarian action: under what forms, guided by what political and ethical plan, and in light of which local issues? Incidentally, does the very concept of “humanitarian” remain valid when reporting on such aid practices subject to an endogenisation or domestication process? Though clear or definite answers to these fundamental questions cannot be provided at

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<sup>11</sup> In that respect, it can be suggested that people’s aspirations to a certain well-being, to decent and dignified living conditions (social justice and good governance, food security and access to health care, education, etc.) carry all the more weight in the action of public authorities as the latter claim responsibility for them. At the very least, the relative ability of rulers to take on these popular expectations crystallises major social and political issues.

<sup>12</sup> The expression “from the bottom” is in this case used in reference to the concept of power developed by Michel Foucault: “One day, I used the formula *power comes from the bottom*. [...] If one raises the question of power in terms of power relations, if one clearly admits that there are governmentality relationships, among individuals, a crowd, a very complex network of relationships, the main forms of power in the strict sense of the term – political power, ideological power, etc. – are necessarily found in this type of relationships, namely government, conduction relationships that can develop among men. And if some type of relationships such as these does not exist, some other types of major political structures cannot exist.” M. Foucault, “L’intellectuel et les pouvoirs”, in *Dits et Écrits*, t. IV, texte n° 359, Paris, Gallimard, 1994.

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this time, one can at least admit that these lines of convergence are, in themselves, indicative of certain transformations that are still in their embryonic stage.

### **“Independence” and “neutrality” in question: new links between citizens’ movements and humanitarian organisations?**

Recompositions, which I refer to as the “socialisation of aid”, are particular evidence of new forms of *agency* on the part of individuals previously confined to the status of beneficiaries and assigned to a passive role of persons who “require assistance”, with all that it implies in terms of symbolic domination via the submission to imposed standards. In this sense, it is necessary to achieve a better understanding of the new power games/stakes that structure themselves between public action, popular initiatives and, lastly, humanitarian and development professionals.

Such a review cannot be completed without a precise study of the dominant social representations in Senegal, both within the political class and among the humanitarian and development players. In the latter regard, one has to admit that some issues that presently fall within the humanitarian realm<sup>13</sup> are reflected in the debates on the political, economic and symbolic independence of formerly colonised states. These controversies do not solely involve the political elites of these countries. The threat of a “recolonisation” through transnational organisations also features prominently in the speeches and minds of West African people. In this instance, this issue is all the more relevant as the spectre of partisan and/or NGOist appropriation largely influences the popular legitimacy on which *YEM* can rely to conduct its actions. In concrete terms, the risk would be to be suspected of working for financial gain (obtaining funds destined to aid) and/or power (accession to political offices). The leaders of the movement are therefore *de facto* required to constantly negotiate and justify their stances, actions, funding sources, etc., in the light of such risks.

These stakes are presently focused particularly on the financial and logistical support that Oxfam, among other NGOs, is providing *YEM* with for the completion of its civic projects, in particular the Observatory for democracy and good governance. This support from the British NGO is stirring up much controversy among people and the media, amid denunciation of a dependency caused by transnational organisations. Faced with such controversies, and thereby demonstrating their acuity, Oxfam felt obliged to better clarify the terms of its partnership with *YEM*, through a statement dated February 5, 2014.

“Much is being said about the Oxfam’s funding of *Y en a marre* in the media. In view of the wave of comments it has triggered, Oxfam would like to make the following clarifications:

- Oxfam has been operating in Senegal since 1983 through various projects and programs, conducted primarily by national NGOs, associations and community based organisations.
- This funding complies with the laws of Senegal and with Oxfam’s partnership principles.
- Oxfam considers *Y en a marre* as an important partner for the implementation of its governance program, in particular by encouraging youth to take part in the decision making process within their respective localities.
- One of the objectives of the partnership between Oxfam and *Y en a marre* is the “establishment of a civic control mechanism over public action in order to contribute to

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<sup>13</sup> Humanitarian and development action is hereby discussed in its routine and sustainable dimension, in contrast to so called “emergency” interventions, whatever their cause.

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the strengthening of democratic achievements and to promote better citizenship, among youth in particular.”

- Since *Y en a marre* had not yet been legally recognised at the time of finalising the partnership with Oxfam, funding management was entrusted to Enda Lead.”

*YEM* is somehow caught between the need to provide a solid economic and logistical foundation to its initiatives and the risk of being discredited in the eyes of the general public of Senegal as a relay for “disguised imperialism”, even though it draws its strength and purpose from its popular endorsement. In that respect, the fact that a British NGO rather than a French one offered its support to *YEM* may be a significant point; otherwise, if such support was provided by an organisation from the former colonial power, one can assume that the suspicions or judgements of neo-colonialism (even indirect) would have been even stronger. This example leads to two central questions: that of the *independence* of the movement on the one hand, and that of its *neutrality* on the other.

The issue of independence or self-reliance implicitly raises that of the *conditions for the possibility of one's own word about oneself*. “Own word” meaning one that is not subject to substitution, confiscation and/or instrumentalisation either by the ruling powers (“popular masses” versus “political elites”) or by international humanitarian and development professionals, however commendable their intentions may be. The issue of neutrality appears more complex, in that it raises that of the strictly political nature of a movement such as *YEM*. As a hypothesis, I suggest that managing, to a certain extent, to anticipate the changes in the humanitarian field of Senegal (transition considered “from the bottom” in this case, through a double movement of domestication and popularisation) involves devising a *shift in the boundaries* of power and commitment. This shift is evidence of an increasingly clear involvement, through politics, of humanitarian and development issues.

Such a research perspective should help understand how humanitarian action is, in some way, recaptured and intersected by local power stakes/games. The intention here is not to rejoice or to lament such a state of affairs, but rather to understand the mechanisms that drive these shifts. This is what it will take for the issue of neutrality, which stands out as one of the fundamental ethical principles in the humanitarian field, to be raised anew, including in the field of social and civic action.

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