

TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE COUNTRIES OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF NEO-PAN-AFRICANISM

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Abstract. This article examines social movements (SMs) in sub-Saharan Africa, including Y'en a Marre in Senegal, Le Balai Citoyen in Burkina Faso, and La Lucha and Filimbi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The author focuses on the emergence and transformation of these movements following the rise to power, in Senegal and Burkina Faso, of new political forces interested in reforming their countries' political and economic systems. The paper aims to analyze the institutional consequences catalyzed by these movements. It also explores the similarities and differences in the activities of these movements, including their approaches to addressing pressing issues and the actual forms of the implementation of those approaches. The paper notes that the SMs share a common strategy of action related to popular mobilization. The conceptual foundation of their activities is neo-Pan-Africanism, a commitment to internationalization across the continent, and a reimagining of a future free from the external influence of Western development concepts. The key role of these SMs in the creation of the pan-African civil society organization Afrikki, which unites civil social movements from 30 countries across the continent, is examined in the paper. The author concludes that SMs are constantly adapting to the changing political environment and continue to challenge politicians who monopolize power in their countries. This applies primarily to movements such as La Lucha and Filimbi and, to a lesser extent, to Le Balai Citoyen, which operates under martial law. As for Y'en a Marre, it is gradually shifting its focus to mobilizing civil society to address social issues within the national policies pursued by new leaders.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, social movements, Y'en a Marre, Le Balai Citoyen, La Lucha, Filimbi, Afrikki, transformation, neo-Pan-Africanism

Conflict of interest. The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed a surge of social movements in the aftermath of the events known as the Arab Spring, which embedded themselves in the

wider context of global political destabilization [Korotayev, Meshcherina, Katkova 2019]. The main participants in these movements are young people, who refuse to accept a future filled with poverty and injustice [Hamidou 2018]. They embody a new vision of Africa, free from the oppression of neocolonialism, authoritarian regimes, and the destructive economic policies imposed by international financial institutions. At the same time, there is a widespread desire for change shared by all social strata. These sentiments manifest themselves through various forms of protest, ranging from street demonstrations and social media activism to civil society organizations and religious movements [Strong 2018].

Social movements, as defined by the renowned French sociologist Alain Touraine, are a form of organized collective action aimed at promoting or preventing social or political change [Touraine 1965: 19]. Sociologist Eric Neveu, in his book *The Sociology of Social Movements*, characterizes these movements as “a coordinated mobilization of actors around a common goal, often in opposition to power or authority perceived as repressive” [Neveu 2019: 11].

In sub-Saharan Africa, this definition has its literal meaning, since social movements in the region are a response to authoritarian power structures and neoliberal policies that exacerbate inequality and poverty [Bayart 2021].

The forms and methods of action used by these movements are diverse, ranging from street mobilizations, which they view as spaces for discussions and the organization of street parliaments, clubs, sit-ins, and peaceful marches, to more radical forms of resistance, such as those seen in Burkina Faso in 2014 (see below). Some scholars qualify them as revolutionary [Hagberg et al. 2015], carried out through mass mobilization (both civil and military) in the name of justice and the rule of law.

Social movements are a response to the ineffectiveness of traditional political parties, which are perceived as being complicit in maintaining the status quo [Branche, Mampilly 2015]. Unlike parties, these movements do not see themselves as a political power but rather as a counterbalance to it. Their specific mass actions are often motivated by various factors that cause discontent and indignation in the social sphere. These movements actively participate in various political processes, particularly during election campaigns.

A distinctive feature of social movements in Francophone Africa is their challenging not only of the political and institutional order within their own countries but also of the neoliberal hegemony of France [Degterev 2025: 19]. For several years, protests have taken place in countries of this region, expressing growing disapproval of France’s presence on the continent and accompanied by anti-French slogans¹. These protests are seen as a tangible manifestation of the deep rift between Paris and some of its former colonies. The most significant of these is the *Frapp France Dégage* movement² in Senegal, fighting for the sovereignty of its country. Initially, these were demonstrations against the French retail chain Auchan and the French oil and gas company *Total SE*. The Front for an Anti-Imperialist Popular and Pan-African Revolution (*le Front pour un révolution anti-imperialiste, populaire, et pan-Africaine*, FRAPP) has become the standard-bearer of discontent with France’s presence in Senegal. It is headed by Guy

¹ Guiffard J. Le sentiment anti-français en Afrique de l’Ouest, reflet de la confrontation autoritaire contre “l’Occident collectif”. *Expressions*. 04.01.2023. <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/expressions/le-sentiment-anti-francais-en-afrique-de-louest-reflet-de-la-confrontation-autoritaire-contre> (accessed: 23.08.2025)

² “France, get out!” (vernacular French).

Marius Sagna,³ a member of Parliament from the ruling PASTEF party (*Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité*). The FRAPP's main goal is to fight against the CFA franc.

Y'EN A MARRE: FROM A STREET MOVEMENT TO A CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION

The *Y'en a Marre*⁴ movement was founded in 2011 by a group of young rappers, journalists, and students, led by journalist Fadel Barro and his rapper friends from the well-known group “*Keur Gru*.” The movement has a hierarchical structure, with the founding members determining the overall policy and direction. This centralization is balanced by regular meetings with grassroots representatives, who also discuss and approve important decisions and proposals emanating from the central group.

Young people identifying with the *Y'en a Marre* movement are organized into local groups calling themselves “*Spirits of Y'en a Marre*” (*Esprit Y'en a Marre*). They focus their activities on local and regional issues, including the difficulties of rural areas. These groups also operate in Europe, focusing on issues related to immigration. Their main goal was to prevent Senegalese President, A. Wade, from holding office for a third unconstitutional term. Their slogan “*Don't touch my constitution!*” became a symbol of resistance against Wade's regime and of the electoral victory of his rival, Macky Sall, who became President of Senegal (2012–2024). These events demonstrate the importance of this movement in the political landscape of Senegal and its influence on the outcome of elections.

The Yenamarristes have gained recognition not only in Senegal but also in other countries in the region. Similar movements have emerged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso, and Mali, among others. Their followers regularly communicate, moving from country to country. Passionate about rap, they conduct discussions accessible to young people in Senegal, Burkina Faso, the DRC, and other countries.

After coming to power, President M. Sall offered important positions to the leaders of the movement, according to Thiat (Cyrille Oumar Touré), one of the founders of *Y'en a Marre*. However, they declined. Over time, the movement distanced itself from the president, taking an increasingly critical stance towards his and his government's domestic policies aimed at suppressing the opposition.

The *Y'en a Marre* has been actively involved in protests aimed at defending democracy and the rule of law. In 2019, the supporters of this movement, together with the *Aar li ñu bokk* movement,⁵ advocated for the sustainable management of Senegal's natural resources, sparked by the release of a BBC documentary on hydrocarbon concessions involving the president's brother, Aliou Sall.⁶

In the spring of 2023, Yenamarristes helped establish the *F24* movement, a coalition of parties and civil society organizations whose demands went far beyond their

³ In 2012, he was the coordinator of the M23 movement, which opposed A. Wade's third term as president. Then, citizens united around a small group of activists who, through election monitoring and surveillance, were able to influence the vote and prevent the former president from being re-elected.

⁴ “We've had enough!” (vernacular French).

⁵ “Keep what we have in common” (from the Wolof language).

⁶ Sylla C. Pétrole, corruption et frère du président: au Sénégal, le «scandale à 10 milliards de dollars»! *Sputnik*. 07.06.2019. <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20190607/petrole-corruption-et-le-frere-du-president-au-senegal-le-scandal-a-10-milliards-de-dollars-1041384060.html> (accessed: 15.02.2026)

opposition to M. Sall's third consecutive presidential term. Their demands included the release of political prisoners, as well as inclusive and transparent elections for the presidency, in which all major candidates would be allowed to participate.

At the same time, Yenamarristes saw their mission not only in organizing protests,⁷ but also in creating a social project called the "New Type of Senegalese." According to Thiat, the essence of this project was to create a new generation of Senegalese who would "break with fatalism, defeatism, wait-and-see attitudes, pessimism, the idea that nothing will work out, that politicians are to blame for everything."⁸ Many members of the movement consider Ousmane Sonko, the current Prime Minister, the first example of this new type of Senegalese. They explain this by the fact that his discourse never deviated from the demands they put forward for the government: the rule of law, effective governance, the fight against corruption, independent management of Senegal's resources, and severing relations with France. It is no coincidence that many former supporters of the *Y'en a Marre* movement joined the PASTEF political party, founded by Ousmane Sonko in 2014, which became the ruling party after the victory of its founders, B.D. Faye and W. Sonko, in the 2024 presidential elections.

Y'en a Marre activists believe that every Senegalese should contribute to changing their mentality. In addition to organizing civic initiatives such as tree planting, school renovations, etc., the movement leads projects directly related to politics, such as *Dox Ak Sa Gox*,⁹ which exists to this day. Its goal is to create inclusive governance and accountability that should be at the center of the public space.

According to project director Abdou Khafor Kandji, "it is necessary to ensure civic oversight of local officials and elected officials, including mayors and departmental councils."¹⁰ One of the reasons hindering this control he sees in that "the reports and official documents are written in French, a language not spoken by many."¹¹ Another reason hindering civilian control, according to Kandji, is the blocking of people's access to information by administrative structures that have been preserved since the time of colonization. In this regard, in 2023, civil society organizations called for the adoption of a law guaranteeing access to public information. This project involves holding meetings between prefects and mayors, and the public on a regular basis, not just before elections as is currently the case.

One of the movement's most recent projects involved training young citizen reporters living in Dakar in filming and editing skills, producing reports on urban issues and then sharing them on social media.

Y'en a Marre is planning an ambitious project for the near future. It envisions the creation of a kind of "dissident city" in Senegal, which will welcome activists and political opponents of their countries' current governments from across the continent. Many of them were previously forced to leave their homelands and travel to Europe, seeking political asylum there. *Y'en a Marre* aims to preserve this human capital by creating a safe space for them in Africa. The city of dissidents will serve both as a refuge

⁷ Rivière C. Sénégal. Treize ans après Y'en a marre (toujours) marre. *Afrique XXI*. 29.01.2024. <https://afriqueXXI.info/Senegal-Treize-ans-apres-Y-en-a-toujours-marre> (accessed: 29.08.2025)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Walk with your community" (from the Wolof language).

¹⁰ Rivière C. Sénégal. Treize ans après Y'en a marre (toujours) marre. *Afrique XXI*. 29.01.2024. <https://afriqueXXI.info/Senegal-Treize-ans-apres-Y-en-a-toujours-marre> (accessed: 29.08.2025)

¹¹ Ibid.

and a place for sharing knowledge and experiences, acting as a “school for political activism.”¹²

To implement this project, the movement needs to address the issue of ensuring the safety of dissidents from the intelligence services of their countries of origin, as well as ensuring compliance with the extradition agreement signed between Senegal and other African countries.

It’s worth noting that the development and implementation of civic initiatives are gradually transforming *Y’en a Marre* into a non-governmental organization. Of course, all these projects require funding. In addition to private donations, in its early stages, the movement received funding from international donors, such as the British NGO Oxfam and the Osiwa Foundation (Open Society Initiative for West Africa), part of the global network of George Soros foundations.¹³

Until November 2018, the international non-governmental organization *Lead Africa* (LEADAF) headquartered in Dakar was the administrative and financial manager of *Y’en a Marre*. However, after the Senegalese authorities accused it of illegal financial transactions, LEADAF was forced to cease operations in the country [Sadovskaya 2022: 43]. Recently, the American Hewlett Foundation¹⁴ has provided financial assistance to *Y’en a Marre*.

It should be noted that the reputation of this movement was damaged when the Senegalese public became aware that it was financed by foreign funds. This was also exacerbated by the departure of *Y’en a Marre* founder Fadel Barrot, who decided to enter politics. He initially ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Kaolack in 2022, and then in November 2023, he announced his intention to run for president in the 2024 elections. However, he later abandoned it, focusing on promoting a “new pan-Africanism” and establishing and developing ties with young African movements such as *Le Balai Citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Filimbi* and *La Lucha* in the DRC, *Sofas* in Mali, *Athiame* in Togo, and *Ça suffi comme ça* in Gabon [Ndiaye 2023].

All these events have led to *Y’en a Marre* losing its previous position in public space as it did in 2011–2012. The movement has transformed into an organization that focuses primarily on civic engagement and educational activities.

LESSONS OF *LE BALAI CITOYEN*

The *Le Balai Citoyen* (the Citizen’s Broom) movement was founded on August 25, 2013, by a small group of influential representatives of Burkina Faso’s civil society. They were united with one goal: to prevent the constitutional changes and the election of B. Compaoré (1987–2014), who had been in power for 27 years, as president for life. All supporters of *Le Balai Citoyen* were united by the ideology of Thomas Sankara¹⁵,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Fonds of subventions-OHCHR. *Human Rights*. <https://ohchr.org/Documents/AboutUs/CivilSociety/Chaper9.fr.pdf> (accessed: 06.12.2025). Its activity is considered undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation.

¹⁴ According to the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute (SWF), the Hewlett Foundation’s assets totaled more than \$13 billion. The foundation is one of the top ten grant makers in the world. For more information, see: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. About Us. *Hewlett*. <https://hewlett.org/about-us/> (accessed: February 15, 2026). The organization ceased operations in the Russian Federation in March 2024.

¹⁵ T. Sankara, the President of Burkina Faso (1983-1987), who was assassinated during a military coup by Captain B. Compaore, became a national hero. He is also referred to as the “father of the revolution,” who, due to his short term in power, was unable to implement all the revolutionary transformations he had planned in the country.

including trade unionists, journalists, and representatives of cultural and educational circles. The most prominent members included Hervé Cama, a lawyer, and Serge Bambara, a hip-hop artist and actor, known as “Smockey.”

The organizational structure of *Le Balai Citoyen* is composed of a General Assembly, which determines the movement’s main directions, and a National Coordinating Committee, which is the executive body, with members elected by the Assembly of Clubs for a three-year term. In addition to these two bodies, there are also regional “*Cibal* Clubs,”¹⁶ located in communes, urban districts, and rural areas. For example, just one of the districts of Ouagadougou had several such clubs, and there were 30 of them across the country. Each club has a movement representative appointed by the Assembly to coordinate activities [Romelot, Verrier 2018].

Due to threats and assassination attempts against *Cibal* leaders by the ruling regime, many of them had to communicate confidentially. They used e-mails and messengers to arrange meetings. Thus, a territorial network emerged, involving ordinary Burkinabes in the activities of these clubs and in holding joint events, such as sit-ins, conferences, roundtables, and public meetings [Touré 2017].

In June 2013, the *Le Balai Citoyen* officially received its status, when lawyer Guy Hervé Kam drafted the charter establishing the movement. His presence among the musicians who founded the organization has strengthened its credibility. As a negotiator between the military and the opposition, his expertise was in high demand after the fall of the B. Compaoré regime, during the establishment of a civilian-military transitional government, when the country was on the verge of chaos.

The *Le Balai Citoyen* movement required the moral and financial support of its compatriots abroad. Rapper Serge Bambara, better known as “Smockey,” was appointed as the coordinator to contact them. Later, the movement established links with activists from the Burkinabe diaspora in Germany, the United States, and Canada.

The creation of *Le Balai Citoyen* was driven by the majority of the country’s population’s rejection of the policies pursued by President B. Compaoré’s regime and his aspirations for lifelong power. This movement has always pursued its fundamental goal: building a state based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and an active civil society. It is no coincidence that *Cibal* has always included the mobilization of the population in its priority strategies, which it did during the Burkinabe people’s uprising in 2014. At that time, *Le Balai Citoyen*, “having the loudest voice,” did not act alone but was an important link in the popular movement, mobilizing citizens for over a year [Romelot, Verrier 2018].

On October 28, 2014, at the call of the opposition, trade unions, and *Le Balai Citoyen*, a million people took to the streets to protest against the constitutional reform proposed by B. Compaoré. The uprising lasted four days, culminating in violent clashes between protesters and security forces, which resulted in the deaths of more than 30 people. On October 30, demonstrators stormed the Parliament building, where a bill to amend the constitution was scheduled to be debated that day. However, this did not happen because Army Commander-in-Chief Honoré Traoré declared the dissolution of the government. That same day, B. Compaoré announced his resignation and fled the country. However, the uprising proved incomplete, as the system that existed under Compaoré was not destroyed due to the return to power of his former companions [Bonnecase 2015].

¹⁶ “Cibal” is an abbreviation of the first syllables of the French words *citoyen* and *balai*.

After the failed uprising, Sams’K Le Jah (Karim Sama), co-founder of the *Le Balai Citoyen*, declared that the organization was created to combat poor governance in the country. He believed that *Cibal*’s mission was to change people’s mentality, to create a new generation of Burkinabes who respect others and share common values [Degorce, Palé 2018].

The *Le Balai Citoyen* movement continued its fight against impunity, fraud, and the high cost of living. The most significant event since the 2014 uprising was the National Protest Day on November 29, 2018, when a march was organized by *Cibal* and the Consumer Trade Union League to mobilize people against high living costs, corruption, and rising fuel prices.¹⁷

It is important to note that, since its inception, the movement has opposed foreign domination and sought full independence from it, not only for Burkina Faso but also for other African countries. The movement expresses its disagreement with the use of the CFA franc. In a statement released during Macron’s visit to Burkina Faso in November 2017, the *Le Balai Citoyen* drew attention to the fact that the CFA franc symbolizes a legacy of colonization that has survived “decolonization and even the creation of the single European currency.” The movement views it as “a symbol of the preservation of paternalistic and asymmetric relations between France and the countries of this zone.”¹⁸ And since part of its reserves is kept in the Banque de France, the central banks of these African countries do not have full control over their own reserves, which are one of the “symbols of independence” [Romelot, Verrier 2018].

Le Balai Citoyen’s opposition to foreign domination has also extended to the legal issues facing Burkina Faso. In its appeal to Macron, the movement condemned France’s position as an “obstacle to justice” regarding François Compaoré, the brother of B. Compaoré, who is suspected of murdering journalist Norbert Zongo. *Cibal* is also demanding access to archives related to the murder of T. Sankara, arguing that “the information gathered points to France’s probable responsibility.”¹⁹

Le Balai Citoyen is committed to supporting liberation movements in other countries. It demands justice for the arrests and repression of young people who participated in the protests that took place in Kinshasa in 2015, as well as for those who were arrested during a meeting with *Y’en a Marre* leaders the same year.

LE BALAI CITOYEN DURING A STATE OF EMERGENCY IN THE COUNTRY: CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION

The *Le Balai Citoyen* movement did not support the military coups in the country in 2022. Instead, its members hoped for the swift restoration of constitutional freedoms, positioning themselves as defenders of democratic achievements and concerned about the lack of transparency in public policy.

While not denying President Ibrahim Traoré’s efforts to strengthen Burkina Faso’s security and implement a development policy similar to that pursued under T. Sankara in

¹⁷ Journée de protestation contre la hausse du prix des hydrocarbures: Le ministre du commerce rassure les manifestants. *LeFaso.net*. 29.11.2018. https://lefaso.net/?page=impression&id_article=86742 (accessed: 15.02.2026)

¹⁸ The CFA franc zone comprises eight West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

¹⁹ Jaffré B. Macron au Burkina, comprendre ce qui va se passer. *CATM*. 28.11.2017. https://www.cadtm.org/spip.php?page=imprimer&id_article=15523 (accessed 21.03.2026)

the 1980s, the leaders of *Le Balai Citoyen* accuse him of violating democratic freedoms. They criticize the government for militarizing the country, expanding information bans, including on many international media outlets, and restricting Burkina Faso's broadcast of foreign content. However, supporters of *Le Balai Citoyen* ignore the fact that the country is living under a state of emergency. It should be noted that on May 2, 2025, Burkina Faso approved a Charter, allowing the military regime to remain in power for another five years under the current circumstances. In the context of terrorist threats posed by Islamist organizations operating in the country, the President of the transitional period, Ibrahim Traoré, argues that "individual freedom does not take precedence over the freedom of the nation."²⁰

A Burkina Faso-based newspaper of the same name, *Le Balai Citoyen*, has published some new social projects developed by this movement.²¹ Among them, "Encouraging Civic Engagement Among Youth and Women in Building a Just and Peaceful Society" is notable. One of the main goals of this project is to strengthen "political control over public policy" and "preserve democratic freedoms and youth participation in government."²²

Before launching, these projects are being discussed at *Cibal* clubs. There was a debate on the topic "The situation in the country and how can young people help overcome the crisis?". During the discussions, it became clear that young people in Burkina Faso are already contributing to the fight against terrorism by joining the Defense and Security Forces and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP). At the same time, attention was also drawn to the fact that some young people are joining terrorist groups.

The members of the *Cibal* clubs recommended that those gathered "become agents of peace and social cohesion," and "join reputable civil society organizations to monitor public policy at the municipal and national levels and facilitate access to reliable information" in order to exert pressure on the government.

Obviously, in the face of terrorist threats and the state of emergency in the country, with political parties and trade unions suspended, *Le Balai Citoyen* operates as a non-governmental organization that aims to promote democratic freedoms and transition to civilian rule. Unlike the Senegalese *Y'en a Marre* movement, which supports the new leaders like B. Faye and O. Sonko and the ruling PASTEF party, *Le Balai Citoyen* does not seek to collaborate with the military regime of Ibrahim Traoré, who is supported by the majority of the Burkinabe population.

FIGHTING FOR CHANGE: THE *LA LUCHA* CIVIL MOVEMENT IN THE DRC

The *La Lucha* civil movement (Struggle for Change)²³ emerged in 2012 in the wake of the Arab Spring in the city of Goma (North Kivu province), a region engulfed by

²⁰ Burkina: Les libertés individuelles ne priment pas sur celles de la nation (Capitaine Traoré). *Minute.bf*. 06.11.2023. <https://minute.bf/burkina-les-libertes-individuelles-ne-primont-pas-sur-celles-de-la-nation-capitaine-traore/> (accessed: 16.02.2025)

²¹ Le Balai Citoyen lance un nouveau projet intitulé Promotion de l'engagement civique des jeunes et des femmes au Burkina Faso. *Le Balai Citoyen*. 26.08.2020. <https://lebalaitoyen.fr/le-balai-citoyen-lance-un-nouveau-projet-intitule-participation-citoyenne-de-la-jeunesse-au-suivi-des-politiques-publiques-au-burkina-faso/> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

²² Ibid.

²³ La Lucha is an abbreviation of the first syllables of the French words: "la lute" (struggle) and "le changement" (change).

armed conflicts²⁴ between government forces and the rebel group March 23 Movement (M23), which represents the interests of the Tutsi living in the DRC.²⁵

The movement gained widespread popularity in the cities of Beni, Butumbo, Lubero and Kinshasa. From the start, it proclaimed itself a nonviolent movement, inspired by the ideas of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. Since its inception, *La Lucha* has set itself the goal of creating a New Congo envisioned by Patrice Emery Lumumba. The movement brings together hundreds of people across the country—the Congolese from all walks of life and all ages, including those living in disadvantaged areas. Since the main goal of the movement is to protect human dignity and promote social justice, it condemns human rights violations committed by armed groups. In March 2013, *La Lucha* accused the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) of inaction and called for withdrawal of its troops (over 18,000 men).

Between 2015 and 2018, *La Lucha*'s activities became increasingly political. It joined other civil movements, led the fight against President Joseph Kabila's third term (2001–2019),²⁶ and helped to secure Felix Tshisekedi's victory.

It should be noted that their political mobilizations did not always go peacefully. In many cases, the authorities resorted to violence, fearing that the protests would spread uncontrollably and engulf the whole country, and used arrests and repression against participants [Vinokurov 2003]. For example, from 2012 to 2018, 1,475 *La Lucha* supporters were arrested and detained across the country. Many of those detained, according to DRC criminal law, were charged with criminal offenses such as a call to rebellion, participating in a criminal organization, and others [Criminalisation... 2018].

In the DRC, despite government bans on street protests, there was still—albeit limited—freedom of expression in the media. The *La Lucha* movement actively uses social media to inform the public about its activities and, through its activists, establishes direct contact with Congolese residents. *La Lucha* is actively working in several areas: combating unemployment, improving drinking water supplies, building roads, and so on.

The movement has a horizontal structure consisting of 22 sections, the main ones of which are located in Goma, Kinshasa, Bukavu, and Bene. Each section includes five cells, which are responsible for developing communication strategies, mobilization issues, managing funds, establishing long-term goals for the movement, and maintaining documentation [Criminalisation 2018: 16].

As an anti-system movement, *La Lucha* does not believe in hierarchy among its members and has a collegial form of governance. This makes it difficult for the police to

²⁴ The armed conflict (2012-2013) was a continuation of the Second Congo War, also known as the Great African War (1998-2003) in the DRC, involving nine African states and more than 20 armed groups. The war resulted in the loss of approximately 5.4 million lives [Sidorova 2015].

²⁵ In April 2012, Tutsi soldiers rebelled against the government. They formed the March 23 Movement (M23), composed of former members of the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). M23 is one of approximately 100 armed groups fighting for control of the mineral-rich region located near the border with Rwanda. On November 20, 2012, M23 took control of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. In November 2021, rebel groups backed by Rwanda and later Uganda launched an offensive against the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the UN stabilization mission in the Congo (MONUSCO). They seized their positions in North Kivu, a region home to the richest deposits of rare earth minerals: coltan, tantalum, and tungsten [Sidorova 2013].

²⁶ Presidential elections were scheduled for November 2015, but they never took place. Kabila had already been re-elected twice: in 2006 and 2011. In 2016, his second and final constitutional term expired, but he refused to leave office and remained in power for another two years. The opposition leader Félix Tshisekedi won the 2018 presidential election.

identify its leaders and active members due to the lack of information indicating their status. Regarding funding, activists say that it is obtained through donations from members of the movement and sympathizers. *La Lucha* also receives “pro bono assistance” from NGOs such as Lawyers without Borders (ASF), which sends human rights defenders or local lawyers to court to defend accused activists.²⁷

LA LUCHA UNDER FELIX TSHISEKEDI

Following the victory of Felix Tshisekedi, an opposition politician, in the 2019 presidential elections against J. Kabila, the *La Lucha* movement’s irreconcilable antagonism to the powers that be no longer aligned with the majority of the population’s views.

The new president received great support from the Congolese people and embodied hope for the future, which weakened *La Lucha*’s protest potential. However, the movement soon regained its role as a “counterweight” to the government, a role it had assumed since its inception. *La Lucha* implemented this role through a civic monitoring initiative, *Fatshimetrie*, which involves continuous monitoring and analysis of the president’s fulfillment of his commitments to the people. The movement believes that the head of state must constantly be aware that “the people are watching him.”²⁸

Under the hashtag #*Fatshimetrie*, *La Lucha* started posting daily positive and negative comments about the head of state on Twitter. In the early years of Tshisekedi’s rule, the movement acknowledged some of the president’s successes, particularly the initial steps toward free basic education. However, they more often expressed “disappointment” over persistent corruption, insecurity, poverty, and the lack of security and rule of law.²⁹

At the same time, *La Lucha* has also mobilized its supporters to address various everyday issues, including the drinking water shortage, particularly in the densely populated city of Goma, and tariff hikes by telecom operators, etc. Local sections of the movement mobilized the population to pressure authorities to address political and social problems, such as police harassment of *La Lucha* activists, crime, poor road conditions, and others.³⁰

This local activism has manifested itself noticeably in the east of the country, in North Kivu, where security concerns are particularly urgent, devastating the local population. The *La Lucha* movement is at the forefront of local civil society marches demanding the eradication of armed groups and an end to killings. It condemns human rights violations by armed groups, including the Rwandan-backed M23. On April 24, 2025, *La Lucha* released a statement regarding the dialogue between the DRC government and the rebels (a coalition of the AFC³¹ and M23 groups) held in Doha, Qatar. It warned against “peace agreements,” which, according to the movement’s supporters, “reward criminals at the expense of victims, further undermine the work of

²⁷ Analyse sur les observations de la population face aux mouvements citoyens. *CliCours*. <https://clicours.com/analyse-sur-les-observations-de-la-population-face-aux-mouvements-citoyens/> (accessed: 16.12.2025)

²⁸ Polet F. RDC: La Lucha sous l’ère Tshisekedi – une marginalization relative, prix de l’intransigence. *CETRI*. 03.01.2022. <https://www.cetri.be/RDC-La-Lucha-sous-l-ere-Tshisekedi?lang=fr> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ AFC is an armed group called the Congo River Alliance (*Alliance Fleuve Congo*).

the security services, and threaten democratic principles.”³² The movement thus affirms its readiness to oppose any peace agreement that would grant a “general amnesty” to all those responsible for serious crimes, the “collective integration” of the rebels into the national army, and their inclusion in the country’s political institutions.”³³

Relations between *La Lucha* and the government worsened as early as 2021, due to the imposition of a state of siege and increased repression due to the resumption of armed conflict in North Kivu. Activists confirmed the persecution and detention of several of its members.³⁴

Another factor in the worsening of relations between the *La Lucha* civil movement and the DRC authorities was the adoption by Parliament in June 2021 of a reform of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), which weakened the influence of civil society within it.

However, it’s worth noting that over time, *La Lucha* has been losing some of the influence it once had in Congolese society. As a movement that positioned itself as a fighter for democratic freedoms in North Kivu under a state of siege due to armed clashes between the Congolese army and rebel groups, it has gradually transformed into a media organization that depends on favorable media coverage, especially from foreign sources.

In recent years, due to increased repression against *La Lucha* activists and the constant threat of attacks by AFC/M23 rebels, the movement’s activities have shifted towards the media. Reports of persecution of members by Congolese authorities are being released, reaching not only local but also international media, which are supposed to be able to influence the authorities of the DRC through their respective governments.

DRC: *FILIMBI* SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Translated from Swahili, *Filimbi* means an alarm whistle or call to mobilization sent to residents in neighborhoods and villages in the event of a threat. This movement was founded on March 15, 2015, in Kinshasa, in the presence of representatives of *Y’en a Marre*, *Le Balai Citoyen*, *La Lucha*, and journalists. Unlike other movements, its founders are not musicians, although they use music and other artistic means to inform and mobilize the population. Among the founders are banker F. Anzuluni, physician F. Otete, and lawyer and entrepreneur Y. Kiakwama.³⁵

Unlike *La Lucha*, which has an influence that extends not only to urban but also to rural areas, *Filimbi* is a more urban movement, with little impact on Congo’s deep rural areas. However, they have much in common: both maintain close ties with their Senegalese and Burkinabe counterparts, sharing the ideology of Lumumba and Mandela. Their primary and common goal is “creating a New Congo.” *Filimbi* supporters believe that “revolution isn’t made on Twitter, but rather that the struggle takes place within the continent itself, through human interaction” [Ndiaye 2023]. Radio, however, remains the primary means of communication, especially outside the major cities.

³² RDC: les mouvements citoyens LUCHA et Filimbi sont-ils en perte de vitesse? *Heshima Magazine*. 15.05.2025. <https://heshimardc.net/v1/2025/05/15/rdc-les-mouvements-citoyens-lucha-et-filimbi-sont-ils-en-perte-de-vitesse/> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Polet F. RDC: La Lucha sous l’ère Tshisekedi – une marginalisation relative, prix de l’intransigence. *CETRI*. 03.01.2022. <https://www.cetri.be/RDC-La-Lucha-sous-l-ere-Tshisekedi?lang=fr> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

³⁵ RDC: les mouvements citoyens LUCHA et Filimbi sont-ils en perte de vitesse? *Heshima Magazine*. 15.05.2025. <https://heshimardc.net/v1/2025/05/15/rdc-les-mouvements-citoyens-lucha-et-filimbi-sont-ils-en-perte-de-vitesse/> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

The creation of the *Filimbi* movement coincided with the struggle of civil society organizations in the DRC against extending President Joseph Kabila's term in office. Since its inception, the Congolese authorities have accused the movement of being involved in terrorism and preparations for an uprising, while its members, on the contrary, have declared their nonviolent policies, respect for the rule of law, and a desire to break the cycle of violence devastating their country. Among those accused were three of the movement's founders, who were exiled to Europe after their arrest. In December 2016, Carbone Beni, one of the movement's leaders, was arrested during a popular mobilization against Kabila's third presidential term. Only nine months after his arrest, he was sentenced to 12 months in prison.³⁶

The repression of its leaders did not stop the movement's activities, which were organized in four areas: political, economic, civic, and intellectual. The movement's primary means of implementation were social media and radio, which it used to inform citizens and call for mobilization against government violations of the law, as well as mass protests (marches), but only those that resonated widely across the country.³⁷

It's worth noting the significant role these movements played in the events of January 19, 20, and 25, 2015. During those days, unprecedented events took place in the DRC since the time of President S.S. Mobutu (1965–1997): the country experienced intense social unrest. It engulfed not only Kinshasa but also 24 cities across the country. The detonator for this popular uprising was the revision of Article 220 of the Constitution, which limited the powers of the head of state to two terms. The protests lasted three days and were accompanied by clashes between *La Lucha* and *Filimbi* supporters with police and the Republican Guard. The protesters resisted the military that fired at them, building barricades, burning tires, and throwing stones at police. These events prevented the Senate from amending the Constitution. The events of 2015 in the DRC showed that the activists of these two civil movements are "bearers of a democratic radicalism that is completely alien to classical social and political organizations" [Polet 2022: 152–153].

After the removal from power of J. Kabila, the influence of *Filimbi* and *La Lucha*, as leaders of civil resistance in Congolese society, has weakened to a certain extent. These movements are increasingly assuming the functions of civil society organizations. They are mobilizing citizens, especially young people, to participate in efforts to improve living conditions, pressuring government decisions, for example, to cut budget expenditures by maintaining unnecessary public institutions at the expense of healthcare, education, and security. Activists in these movements are drawing attention to the problems of urban sanitation, the digging of sewage ditches, and environmental pollution.³⁸

As a significant force in Congolese civil society, *La Lucha* and *Filimbi* demonstrate resilience and determination in advocating for social justice and supporting the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FAPDC). They condemn the human rights violations committed by armed groups and criticize Tshisekedi's policies, accusing him of failing to improve the living conditions of the Congolese people.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ RDC: les mouvements citoyens LUCHA et Filimbi sont-ils en perte de vitesse? *Heshima Magazine*. 15.05.2025. <https://heshimardc.net/v1/2025/05/15/rdc-les-mouvements-citoyens-lucha-et-filimbi-sont-ils-en-perte-de-vitesse/> (accessed: 18.02.2026)

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS. PAN-AFRICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT *AFRIKKI*

Afrikki is a network of civil society movements across the African continent and the diaspora, which aims to accelerate social transformation in Africa and revive the ideas of pan-Africanism. The plan to create the organization originated in 2012 and belonged to the leaders of *Y'en a Marre* and *La Lucha*, and in 2013 they were joined by the movement *Le Balai Citoyen*.

Afrikki currently unites 30 civil society movements. Some of the most prominent ones include *Y'en a Marre*, *Le Balai Citoyen*, *La Lucha*, *Filimbi*, *Team Gom Sa Bopa* (The Gambia), and several others.³⁹ The movement's structure consists of a steering committee, a task force, and a general assembly.

In addition to political activities, neo-Pan-Africanist activism focuses on such important issues as environmental policy, foreign exploitation of natural resources, financial sovereignty (particularly the abolition of the African CFA franc), sexual and gender-based violence, and the repatriation of stolen artifacts. *Afrikki* activists advocate removing barriers to the free movement of Africans within their continent [Ndiaye 2023].

Afrikki members come from diverse backgrounds and hold different beliefs. Some focus on democracy promotion, others on climate change, while others yet are dedicated to political education, LGBT advocacy,⁴⁰ business, and more.⁴¹

This association represents a “transnationalization” platform for grassroots public organizations to develop approaches to solving local and continental problems, including those related to social justice.

Through the People's University of Civic Engagement (UPEC, *Université Populaire de l'Engagement Citoyen*), created in September 2018 in Dakar, *Afrikki*'s largest and most prestigious project, thousands of people have been trained in activism there [Ndiaye 2023].

Every two years, the organization holds joint events where its members not only meet in person, but also discuss common problems and, when needed, offer support, especially during difficult times. For example, when activists from Senegal and Burkina Faso attended a presentation of the *Filimbi* movement at the invitation of their Congolese counterparts in March 2015, they and their founders were arrested and thrown into a secret prison on charges of conspiring to overthrow President Kabila. They were sentenced to 18 months in prison, and some even faced the death penalty. Owing to the support from *Afrikki* activists, the event gained international attention, leading to their release [Ndiaye 2023].

Overall, *Afrikki*'s activities aim to strengthen the foundations of pan-Africanism and the decolonization of consciousness, which underpin the ideology of the social movements under consideration. In this context, French-speaking African countries can be seen as the epicenter of neo-Pan-Africanism in the 21st century, which serves as the

³⁹ Mwendike M. *Afrikki: Transnational Africanism to Revitalize Pan-Africanism*. *International Center for Nonviolent Conflict*. 02.07.2025. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/blog_post/afrikki-transnational-activism-revitalize-pan-africanism/ (accessed: 22.02.2026)

⁴⁰ LGBT is an international social movement recognized by the Supreme Court of Russia in 2023 as an extremist organization.

⁴¹ Mwendike M. *Afrikki: Transnational Africanism to Revitalize Pan-Africanism*. *International Center for Nonviolent Conflict*. 02.07.2025. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/blog_post/afrikki-transnational-activism-revitalize-pan-africanism/ (accessed: 22.02.2026)

ideological foundation for African social movements that recognize the need to internationalize civic engagement.

CONCLUSION

Social movements in African countries are a unique form of collective action based on informal relationships between individuals. These movements are built on shared beliefs and solidarity and are expressed through various forms of protest.

It's worth noting that while civil society movements in Francophone Africa were previously primarily protest-oriented, becoming an important part of the political process itself and even leading to leadership changes in some countries (Senegal, Burkina Faso, DRC), their activities are now taking on a character more similar to traditional non-governmental organizations (*Y'en a Marre*). As for the activists of *La Lucha* and *Filimbi*, they can be an exemplification of a democratic radicalism that is completely alien to traditional social and political organizations. They have even been compared to a "pebble in the boot of power" [Polet 2016].

A paradigm shift in the public consciousness of many Africans has facilitated the emergence of these movements. However, institutionalization carries the risk of limiting their ability to mobilize. In this context, the government's approach towards social movements is crucial. The government either supports these movements or attempts to suppress them through increased political control. This is evident in the cases of *La Lucha*, *Filimbi*, and *Le Balai Citoyen*. Globalization and the rapid spread of information have also led to the rise of social activism in areas where people are concerned about issues such as democratic succession, inequality, and justice.

Social movements are currently a real force, compared to the weak actions of political parties, especially during presidential election campaigns. Their internationalization strengthens civic mobilization and brings people together.

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Научная статья

ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ ДВИЖЕНИЙ В СТРАНАХ ФРАНКОФОННОЙ АФРИКИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ НЕОПАНАФРИКАНИЗМА

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию таких социальных движений (СД) в странах Африки южнее Сахары, как *Y’en a marre* в Сенегале, *Le Balai Citoyen* в Буркина-Фасо, *La Lucha* и *Filimbi* в Демократической Республике Конго. В центре внимания автора – процесс возникновения и трансформации этих движений после прихода к власти новых политических сил Сенегала и Буркина-Фасо, заинтересованных в реформировании политической и экономической систем в своих странах. Анализируется процесс институциональных последствий, катализаторами которых они явились. В статье исследуется сходство и различие в деятельности этих движений, в том числе касающиеся решения насущных задач и форм их реализации. Отмечается, что общим для СД является

стратегия действий, связанная с мобилизацией населения. Концептуальная основа их деятельности – неопанафриканизм, стремление к интернационализации в масштабе всего континента, переосмысление будущего, в котором не будет внешнего влияния западных концепций развития. Рассматривается ключевая роль этих СД в создании panafricanской общественной организации *Afrikki*, объединяющей гражданские социальные движения из 30 государств континента. Автор приходит к выводу, что СД постоянно адаптируются к меняющейся политической обстановке и по-прежнему бросают вызов политикам, которые монополизируют власть в своих странах. Это, в первую очередь, относится к таким движениям, как *La Lucha* и *Filimbi*, в меньшей степени к *Le Balai Citoyen*, которое действует в условиях военного положения. Что касается *Y'en a marre*, то оно постепенно переключается на мобилизацию гражданского общества для решения социальных проблем в русле проводимой новыми лидерами национальной политики.

Ключевые слова: Африка южнее Сахары, социальные движения, *Y'en a marre*, *Le Balai Citoyen*, *La Lucha*, *Filimbi*, *Afrikki*, трансформация, неопанафриканизм

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