Can the concept of moral economy be useful to understanding riots, popular indignation and protest in Africa and elsewhere? To answer these questions, this paper combines a theoretical discussion of the concept and its application to riots in poor countries, paying particular care to two main aspects. First, it discusses the link between popular expectations and the patronage of authorities, where the latter are expected to provide for the needs of the former and where popular expectations are indeed indebted to a paternalistic and protective model wherein authorities are obliged to provide these services. Consequently, this helps us see riots as inherently non-spasmodic and pathologic, and adhering to their own particular rationality. Secondly, this paper discusses the potential problems that this notion may raise, particularly the dangers of culturalist appropriation where the moral economy risks becoming a “black box” within which all manner of rationalizations for rebellion or riots may be contained. Finally, through fieldwork carried out in Bamako, Mali I explore the types of inferences that can be made in terms of the political dimensions expressed in riots, using interviews with former rioters, press data and administrative records of the riots of 1994-2010. With Thompson I find that riots in Mali occur in subsistence societies, where extreme poverty comingles with outrageous wealth. I conclude that any riot, whether the trigger is inherently political or not, must be carefully examined to understand what kinds of inclinations and aversions inform them, and the ways in which the cravings of wealth and disdain for the wealthy ‘villain of the moment’ are expressed.

1. From the lack of riots to the lack of moral economy in Mobilization studies

Although "explosive collective violence is a part and parcel of life in contemporary societies of the advanced north" (Auyero, 2007: 8), and despite the legacy of Charles Tilly's contentious politics, the sociology of mobilization has, in the last thirty years, paid little attention to riots. There are several reasons for this: Foremost, this sociology is mainly tethered to an occidental and ultra-contemporary landscape, where the riot seemed to be a minority practice compared to the “social movement”, which had taken on a much more routinized and axiomatic character in the literature. Secondly, this sociology was forged in the rejection of incendiary conceptions of the crowd, whether emerging from the theory of crowds, or because they put into motion the concept of relative deprivation and is rooted in the work on collective behavior.

The result is a low capacity within mobilization studies to analyze riots, as if between social movements and the downfall of regimes, it was difficult to say anything politically about this

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1 Even when riots occur in Western democracies, they are then analyzed by sociologists rather than urban, ethnic relations, or youth, as sociologists of the protest, as if the question of the political significance of these phenomena was left to the journalistic debate. For a review of works dedicated to collective violence, see Auyero (2007: 15-20).
form of protest. Yet it is ironic that mobilization studies owe a debt to the legacy of two of their founders, Anthony Oberschall and Charles Tilly. Oberschall (1973), for his part, explicitly included the riot in his model for the crossing of protest degree of integration of group and internal structure. Tilly’s training as a historian allowed him access to numerous social science libraries at a time, which in turn led him to consider, with Louise Tilly (1971 and 1983) food riots in France (1971). Moreover he was compelled to focus on the work of his fellow historians: EP Thompson certainly, as well as Barrington Moore, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.

In particular the concept of moral economy is due to Thompson, although James Scott increased its notoriety; yet despite a recent revival in the social sciences the concept is still relatively absent from protest studies. Indeed, a tally of two journals of the field, Mobilization and Social Movement Studies, finds no references to the moral economy any more than there is work on the riots. Yet as there has been a return to consideration of emotions in the analysis of collective action, it would be interesting to consider how the concept of moral economy in particular permits us to think about popular indignation and to take into account the social and economic embeddedness of protests, without a deterministic outlook. It may be that the moral economy represents an effort in the historical field very different from those that have taken place in the field of social movement studies, to make sense of the rationale surrounding collective protests. The very similarity in objectives of these two projects merits a reconnection of the two fields.

In contrast, throughout Latin American and African studies as well as history and political science the concept of a "moral economy" seems unavoidable. What explains the geographical preponderance of a concept originally applied to wheat producers’ revolts in eighteenth century England and farmers in Burma? Can it serve to understand forms of collective action, and especially riots, in Africa or elsewhere? After a theoretical discussion of this concept, where I discuss the different uses made of it, the limits of the concept as well as its ultimate utility, I will apply the moral economy to the riots in Bamako, Mali between 1994 and 2010.

2. The moral economy of Thompson and Scott: between food, popular indignation, reinvention of tradition and relations to the elite

2.1. The crowd face to face with the market and the moral dimensions of class

If the term moral economy already appears in The Making of the English Working Class (1968: 68, 222), Thompson did not give it a central place until his article of 1971. Reporting on riots incited by the increase in grain prices in England in the second half of the eighteenth century, the historian aims to combat a "spasmodic" and mechanical (stimulus => protest) conception of the crowds and riots, to reconstruct that which these revolts were expression in popular definitions of legitimacy and justice vis a vis economic transactions. Unanimity and shared beliefs are central: it remains only to study the communal consensus. By refusing to disembed relations of exchange and production from their social environment, the use of the term moral economy is opposed to the lexicon of political economy and the "top-down" conception of consent. Thompson embodies a Marxism attentive to the moral dimensions of the class in the making: the community is as much produced by living

2 Chapters 2, 3 and 4 partly draw on Siméant (2010).
conditions as it in turn produced through moral and political work. Relations of exchange and production cannot be separated from moral conceptions that partially precede them and endow them with meaning.

Thompson considers the popular revolt in the context of historical transition and economic upheaval (i.e. the industrial revolution and the advent of the market); while important, this remains a vivid memory of the old arrangements, structured by a paternalistic model and protector in which the authorities are supposed to provide for needs in a crisis or shortage. Thus there was always the possibility of popular intimidation towards the representatives of authority who did not conform to a model grounded in the idea of traditional rights. Thompson (1993: 260-261) offers both a model of protest, political culture and relations between elites and dominated.

2.2. Farmers as seen by James Scott: Ethics subsistence, personal dependence and micropolitics of resistance in the village

If, as a historian of the working class, Thompson deals with the buyers / consumers of grain and bread in urban areas, Scott (1976) focuses instead on the producers (Adas, 1980). With others (Wolf 1969), he focuses his study on the peasantry in colonized or formerly colonized societies; consequently his reflections have become part of a very active debate surrounding peasant subsistence economies. Scott intends to speak to some of the great peasant revolts that occurred in Southeast Asia during the Depression of the 1930s when he tries to capture "[the peasants'] concept of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation - their view of which claims toward their product were tolerable and which were intolerable"(p. 3). For him, the concept of a moral economy can be applied to other peasant societies to better understand the "normative roots of peasant politics": how economic and political transformations of the colonial era have challenged peasants’ conceptions of social equity, leading to a “class of ‘low classness’ [which] came to provide, far more often than the proletariat, the shock troops of rebellion and revolution” (p. 4).

As with Thompson, "moral economy" reflects a notion of exchange between people and elites, supported by norms of reciprocity and the right to subsistence included in daily routines. The notion of ethical living is central to Scott, and involves behavior marked by caution and an absolute survival instinct, based on the assumption of a social and technical order that avoids risk (certain cropping patterns safer than other, for example). This results in a conception of justice wherein the leader is legitimate not according to his wealth or his frugality, but because of his understanding of the needs of farmers and his ability to provide them with enough to live. But to explicitly ask for that which the wealthy patron gives as a favor, even if the thing that is given is seen as a right rather than a luxury, is to publicly encourage legitimation to which we then make strategic use (Scott 1976: 204). The struggle for meaning takes place almost entirely within the legislative framework of the old agrarian system. Scott therefore analyzes how subsistence is achieved at the cost of dependence, also appreciating the certainty among the rich that the abandoned poor are dangerous. Therefore he does explore riots as such, but instead concentrates on the potential threat posed by the poor in the form of the crowd, the circulation of rumors, or sullying the reputations of the rich and middle class to assert claims that they violate standards.
Ultimately Scott's approach is more structural and less historical than Thompson: at most, any situation of living in the world produces its own ethic of subsistence, which says nothing about its practical expression. On this point, Scott can be criticized for not sufficiently taking local and indeed, moral variations of his moral economy. Scott moreover almost did not use this concept that has failed to act as the organizing principle of his research program: the book was originally entitled, *The Political Economy of the Subsistence Ethic: Peasant Rebellions in Southeast Asia* 3. It was during a review of a first draft of his work in 1973-1974 that he found Thompson's article and changed its title (Scott 2000). Like Thompson, with whom he had collaborated on the project, the work of Richard Cobb (1970) on riots in Paris and "subsistence" became one of his references.

2.3. A concept to think "against"

Despite differences (the authors employ two very different bodies of literature and are part of separate discussions), their shared interest in the concept of moral economy has several objectives in common:

- to reject an idea of the crowd as an eruptive force without resorting to the opposite utilitarian explanations inherent in the sociology of social movements;
- to consider domination without assuming the unconditional internalization of consent. "Moral economy" implies a relational conception of legitimacy: therefore we can think about contestation and paternalism together, as we can with patronage and rumor, deference to authority and the obligation that leaders have to act as a "good authority".
- to avoid economic reductionism, to challenge the idea of a market economy and self in relation to the social world, and to identify popular conceptions of right and wrong in economic matters.
- Finally, because economy refers to the entire body of work by both Thompson and Scott, the term evokes a social history literature detached from a "vulgar Marxism" (Bayart 1994: 138), apt to restoring a sense of the popular illegalities and invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, 1959, 1969, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). On the other hand this concept is tied to both an anthropology of resistance and the idea of hidden transcripts, themes developed later by Scott (1985, 1990)3.

3. Moral economy in Africa and Latin America: the revolt of others, and its reasons

While the notion of moral economy was anchored both in the respective histories of Britain and Southeast Asia, the term also took root in African and Latin American societies. Remarkably, it subsequently came to describe urban uprisings rather than riots in rural areas, leading to a qualification and veritable transformation of the concept.

In Latin American Studies, Benjamin Orlove returns to the moral economy of a Chilean food riot in 1905 as a way to tailor the model to subsistence riots. He recalled that the rise in food prices occurred years before demonstrations and repression, and that they were based on the lack of meat rather than wheat or rice, and finally that the link between protest demonstration and repression was suitably complex. The protest was not aimed at sustenance as such, as meat was a crucial marker of social position: “The absence of meat would not only have carried a general social stigma. It also might have been taken as a sign of slipping down into

3 Although many authors utilize Scott when discussing resistance they often fail to go beyond the title of the 1976 book, and often attribute the two titles as separate works.
a world of casual employment in which the permanent workers would have been seen as living like the people who moved from one place to another in search of work. The threat that meat would be removed from their diet undercut a deeply held sense of social position” (Orlove, 1997: 256).

Javier Auyero, a student of Tilly, also discusses the term moral economy (without necessarily employing it as a central concept) in his work on the urban protests in Argentina, and particularly of food looting (2006, 2007). The value of his work, and in this he is faithful to his intellectual tradition, is to reject an incendiary conception of the crowd and instead to consider the link between the behavior of authorities and protesters. Auyero highlights the relational underpinnings of looting and the selectivity of the looter’s actions (2007: 15), and in so doing rehabituates the role of patron-client relationships. He also stresses the importance of a gray area of patronage and control between protesters and state, rejecting the “imaginary Political anthropology of collective action and social movement scholarship” (2007: 20) that draws “clear boundaries between insurgents and authorities”. Hence the importance of dealing with brokers responsible for the dirty work in this gray zone.

Finally, Paula Vasquez Lezama (2010) returns to the movement of riots in 1989 (the Carazo) in Venezuela, where the state had followed a structural adjustment program under the IMF. That moment marked the end of the myth of national unity, which was afterwards utilized in numerous episodes to embody the question of whether or not looting was a legitimate practice. The author also examines the practices of looting by the police themselves. Vasquez’s approach, as she defines it, intends to refine the discussion of the moral economy by taking into account how the authorities consider and sometimes plan the looting - which is in truth an orientation faithful to the original notion of thinking about both authorities and protesters within the same context.

In African studies, "moral economy" is not used with regard to peasant protest but is instead evoked to discuss everyday or hidden forms of resistance, or before references to social banditry (Hobsbawm 1969). However we find the classic themes of peasant solidarity, the relation to the market and the state, renewal of the resistance of the dominated at once against and outside of the official order within Goran Hyden’s (1980) "economy of affection" and “uncaptured” peasantry in Tanzania. Similarly, Michael Watts (1983) describes the ethics of living and expectations of Hausa farmers in northern Nigeria to the authorities: the good leader is one who protects his people from famine, which is seen as a moral disorder.

It is notably John Lonsdale and his work on the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (Lonsdale, 1992) that has helped to diffuse the notion of the moral economy in African Studies. He does not limit himself to discussing the popular mindset, but also links this to the moral formation of classes and the state. In describing the moral economy of the Mau Mau, Lonsdale does not refer to a romantic conception of pre-capitalist economies but a "practical philosophy" (Bayart 1994: 139) of the link between virtue and wealth (represented by the ownership of land) that takes place over the long term. First developed and claimed by the Kikuyu elite in the 1920s as the principle of domination, these ideas were soon taken seriously as a means to achieving the status of adult male by young (“social youngs”) Kikuyu during the 1940’s and 1950’s. At a time when capitalism and increased access to land (not only for settlers but also the leaders of the older Kikuyu Central Association) destroyed the link between work and access to

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4 A movement that lasted from 1952 until the end of the 1950’s.
property\(^5\), and thereby upset the conditions of access to the status of man among the Kikuyus, their identity societal obligations were thrown into question, compelling a reference to an ethnicity that was not self evident before. This crisis, at once material and moral, became embodied in the Mau Mau (1952-1960): ultimately it was not only a violent independence movement, but became a veritable civil war amongst the Kikuyu. Through this work as well as in others (1994), Lonsdale explores the notion of "moral ethnicity" to mean a way of thinking about civic virtue which strongly differs from the concept of tribalism. His take is very close to Scott, and especially to Thompson:

- the attention to an ethos that links economics and virtue, and suggests the relationship between rulers and ruled in terms of accountability (Lonsdale 1986: 131) and the responsibility of powerful to less powerful;
- considering the formation of a group or class as a moral issue;
- the idea that any conception of economic inequality implies a moral theory:

  "for injustice is as much moral as material fact. […] Moral economies are stubbornly distinctive, historical bargains between informed people, not the theoretical construct of a trained mind. […] Material change is a moral issue. Inventively remembered rights show what is at stake. The brute necessities of one age become exemplary myths in the next. […] All class consciousness is to some extent colloquial or ethnic and therefore "false" (ibid.: 352).

In African studies, five items in particular form the crux of the moral economy in terms of protest actions, but deal with the mobilization of urban workers rather than collective action is rural areas. Dunbar Moodie (1986) studied the great strike of miners in the Witwatersrand in 1946 and found that the growing proletarianization of miners in South Africa was not the direct cause of their mobilization. Instead he employs the moral economy as a balance, an arrangement that in a situation of domination defines the parameters of what is acceptable. There would have been no engagement without the union, but it would have not been an efficient engagement without relying on the moral economy of the mine.

Most of this worker action was plebeian in E. P. Thompson’s sense rather than proletarian. That is to say it grew out of a powerful sense of collective moral outrage of worker mobilization at what was seen to be the mines’ unwillingness to pay equitable wages in an inflationary economy and it was most successfully implemented by migrant workers with a firm stake in the rural economies of the Xhosa-speaking reserves and Lesotho. Thus, although it was initiated by the African Mine Workers Union, it was organized according to the mine workers’ own established but informal means of redressing grievances.

Marsha Posusney (1993) re-examines workers’ protests in Egypt, which are considered "irrational", and collective action is seen as a response to the violation of norms and rules to which the ‘subaltern class’ has become accustomed and which the dominant classes expect to be maintained. The protest pegged to the moral economy intends to restore the status quo ante when from which the sense of a violation of rights emerges. Referring to Hobsbawn, Abdullah (1994) described the strikes and riots of 1919 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, as modes of negotiation of the workers and urban poor to stop the decline of wages, the rising cost of living, unemployment and general famine raging after the First World War. For him, the moral economy refers to "social and economic rights or traditions enjoyed by a subaltern class or group" (p. 198). The general consensus regarding a fair price for rice, a staple foodstuff, and the theme of economic injustice gave the crowd a sense of moral right to express his anger against profiteering Syrian merchants, and beyond rallying against the living

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\(^5\) Assuming the material wealth that would permit marriage.
conditions in a colonial economy. Finally, Paul Zeleza (1995) deals with the general strike in Mombasa, Kenya (January 1947), where an analysis of the ordinary, everyday social relations that underlie this society is at the heart of the article. Considering that colonialism "made a mockery of any moral obligations and bounds" (P. 55), it disconnects these relations from those to the authorities by defining them as "the socio economic, political, cultural and moral imperatives that sustained relations in African working class communities" (Ibid.). By removing the vertical dimension of the moral economy he transforms it into something else, closer to a set of standards specific to a community. The concept therefore no longer applies to the continuum and the breaks between protest and capitulation, common forms of transactions between dominant and dominated, or implicit and tacit ruptures in consensus among the dominated.

It is Paul Lubeck (1985) who initiates the turn of the notion of the moral economy towards the religious, a tendency very prevalent today in regards to Islam. Dealing with insurgencies in five urban millenarian movement initiated by the Islamic Yan Tatsine in Nigeria in the early 1980s, Lubeck rejects idealist explanations of mobilizations, by ideology or the charisma of its leader, for example. For him, the erosion of the material bases of gardawa (the system of Koranic student vendors, who up to 1974-1975 were absorbed into the fabric of the urban economy), the replacement of Islamic education with universal primary education, the transformation of the city of Kano, northern Nigeria, to a semi-industrial capitalism during the oil boom of 1974-1981, and the role of the state and the police explain insurgent hostility towards political elites, security forces of the state and the larger social order. The gardawa undergoes a complete degradation over the course of ten years. This group, partially integrated into the urban labor force, initially contributed to the development of discourses opposed to over-exploitation by subscribing to a rigorous version of Islam. But gradually as the number of students increased and Koranic rural incomes stagnated or declined, these students came to be called thugs of the streets by the inhabitants of the cities became, in the early years of the oil boom.

a large, impoverished, lumpen population, whose daily experience reflected many of the changes and tensions inherent in Nigerian peripheral capitalist development, but nevertheless a social category which was maintained by the subsistence ethic rooted in a moral economy of Islamic charity once supported enthusiastically by urban dwellers” (Lubeck 1985: 377).

The oil boom contributed to the enrichment of urban elites in Kano and encouraged them to build, but it was modern concrete buildings. Koranic students of rural origin were not trained in these techniques but in traditional clay. Moreover, these constructions impinged upon semi-urban areas inhabited by students and farmers. The enrichment was accompanied by a more visible globalized consumerism and more aggressive shows of wealth (modern houses abandoned the traditional vestibule for barricaded entries making it difficult for those on foot to enter and solicit aid, the price of staple food items rose dramatically, especially inland), all of which took place in an atmosphere of growing corruption. This is where the crisis affects the gardawa, who pass from being a respected group to a class of threatening brutes. Maitatsine's anti-materialist ideology leads to violently millenarist criticism of the rich, leading to a refusal to consume modern goods, refusing money beyond the minimum necessary for daily survival, and antagonism towards police and merchants. But this ideology is linked to the moral economy similar to that discussed by Thompson not only because it allows followers to consider both their own dignity as well as the indignity of the dominant classes, but because it also reflects a more widely held indignation against the newly acquired
privileges of the dominants. Here we find a central aspect of Thompson’s approach to riots: the diffusion of popular idea in the midst of major social and economic upheaval that a consensus existed ‘before’; whereas it was once implied it is now called into question, allowing access to what was at one time an inseparable aspect of material well-being and dignity.

With this exception, African studies have a looser usage of the idea of a moral economy in its relation to Islam. The term designates the practices of accumulation either allowed or valued in Islam (and particularly in the Islamic reform movements), the affinities between a religious and economic ethos, and the subsequent access to goods of salvation, in the strict market sense. If the moral economy is meant to characterize a "before" endangered by various aspects of modernity and particularly by the market (and even then it is the case of these items), the concept is diluted, returned to values more or less pegged to the economic field, absent of the vertical dimension of the relationship between elites and popular classes.

The resonance between the moral economy and "politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993) or "politics from below" (Bayart, Membre Toulabor and 1992) is strong: attention to the material dimensions of legitimation and the ensuing conceptions of wealth and abundance are never separable from an implicit theory of legitimate wealth - and in doing the duties of redistribution of the powerful. The challenge is in both cases to "save the bottom" (Lonsdale): to look for politics outside of the most institutionalized arenas of political expression and not to amputate the material demands of the senses they carry, to consider how tradition is mobilized and reinvented to cope with changes brought about by capitalism and its transformation, and to reconstitute the moral architecture. All of these aspects evoke similar questions to those faced by historians of eighteenth century popular classes: how to discern the expression of dissent in what may not necessarily by a highly articulated political agenda, and which seems to engage tradition to support considerably material claims? Therefore, the notion of the moral economy is not without its problems, particularly when its use is unconstrained. I turn to these issues in the next section.

4. Clarifying and controlling the uses of the moral economy

To prevent the moral economy from becoming a fad within social science literature to deal with public outrage and particularly riots, we must first clarify the different meanings of the term, and limit its most unhinged uses.

4.1. Moral economy, economy of morals

The meaning of the words "economy" and "moral" in the term "moral economy" (EM) vary considerably, so that one can identify three moral economies:

- ME1: confronted by economic turmoil: conflicts of subsistence, paternalistic authority, expectations and popular inventions. This is the meaning that corresponds most strictly (although with certain differences) to that introduced by Thompson and Scott. It explicitly highlights the relationship between people and leaders (political or economic) to material sustenance in times of economic turmoil and privileges then link to the domination / confrontation dichotomy. It is based on the idea of "tacit pacts and expectations," referring to a more or less 'reinvented' tradition which allows us to rethink the relationship between ordinary people and authorities: this gives way to a more continuous and relational account.
between ordinary time and the time of the revolt (which may well be only potential or hypothetical) and popular protest cycles. Beyond the flat utilitarianism that often marks the mainstream sociology of social movements, which all but banned the phenomena of crowds and riots from its purview, "moral economy" reaffirms the idea that revolts express conceptions of legitimacy in terms of economic transactions. This therefore means taking seriously the needs which, while aimed at subsistence, do not speak only to survival but carry a sense of right or wrong. This sense is itself derived from a reasonable expectation by the people from the authorities, which the latter endorse within the framework of their positions. Moreover, forms of protest based on recourse tend to rely less on the vocabulary of the 'social movement' or silent forms of resistance, and are instead more often marked by riots. "Moral economy" does not seek to systematically search for a conflict where one expects to find it (in "the" social movement) as it can be thought of without taking the activity of the authorities into account: this invites us to consider the authorities not only in their repressive role but also in their role as providers. In addition, this approach suggests taking into account the phenomena of clientelism and patronage and to reintegrate this with the field of collective action by considering how paternalism, cronyism and possible crises all echo the concerns within the classic sociology of social movements (Oberschall 1973). On this relationship to paternalism it is well understood that it is indeed a sociology of the processes of legitimation and delegitimation that invites the notion of the moral economy, as this field is not limited to study the reasons stated by the actors, but that is able to grasp the meaning of ordinary practices.

- **ME2: social embeddedness of economic activities, economic aspects of moral practices.** The second sense of the term ‘moral economy’ is absent neither in Scott nor Thompson, but appears more in the sense of an implicit axiology. It refers to three analytically distinct questions: the empirical observation of a differentiation of the sphere of economic exchanges from the other social spheres, partially engendered in an autonomous historical trajectory (Polanyi), the moral regret it inspires (Polanyi, Weber), and the attention to affinities between modes of economic accumulation and religious activities. This framework thus refuses to disembed the relations of exchange and production from the social world, notably the moral conceptions that partially precede these relations while simultaneously giving them meaning (varying according to that which we observe in more or less differentiated social spheres). The reference to the moral economy (ME2), insofar as it assumes that it is normatively and/or descriptively problematic to plunge societies into the icy waters of the free market and the bald search for profits, can be an argument present in the phenomena described in ME1. But if ME2 remains tethered to the economy it is in a more diverse fashion, and less directly anchored to the analysis of protest action or the relation to authorities. It includes both the description of "affinity" (in the Weberian sense of the term) between economic ethos and religion, with Islam figuring principally in the field of African studies, as well as a description of accumulation practices that fit into moral registers, whether religious or not.

- **ME3: Moral architecture, values, norms and cultures.** An even more buoyant use of the term ‘moral economy’ seems to remove any reference to economic ethos, or the reinvention of tradition in the face of economic turmoil, to avoid outlining an economy (in the structural or architectural sense) of a specific moral framework devoid of its economic dimensions. Didier Fassin defines the moral economy as "the production, distribution, circulation and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, norms and obligations in social space" (2009: 1257). It is this broader conception which comes closer, according to the authors, in terms of culture, norms, and values, as historian of sciences Lorraine Daston notes (1995). For her, the term is equivalent to the notion of moral agency, the linking of these values with a certain
degree of regularity, and reflects the desire to articulate emotions and values, to apprehend the "saturated values of affect." To think of the moral architecture of certain social groups is not an illegitimate undertaking. Rather this reflects what was for Daston a revival of the sociology of emotions whose character has been successfully demonstrated, particularly in the field of social movements (Jasper 1998, Goodwin and Jasper, 2003; Traini 2008). But why use the moral economy to describe something that many existing concepts already capture? It is not clear that this general extension results in much intellectual gain beyond a certain chic, and to think itself liberated from the stigma of ignominious "culturalist" explanations. It is not even certain that this expansion allows for realignments at the core of the moral architecture; thus the concept is stretched so large compared to a controlled use of culture that it is neither fixed nor homogeneous. Especially when turned toward the analysis of collective action, this opens an alternative: either we retain a minimum ratio between the concept of moral economy and the arena of production, consumption and subsistence, or we use rather "culture" or "mentality" with care, rather than to add yet another conceptual layer to those which already exist.

4.2. Avoiding dead-ends in the use of moral economy

If the notion of moral economy (often appearing in literature as "the moral economy of ..."), used with caution and contextualization, can capture the "affinity" (in the Weberian sense), between an economic ethos and the relation to subsistence on the one hand, and to different forms of revolt (particularly riots) on the other hand, it becomes fodder for even more haphazard usages, and has certainly less heuristic value. The benefits of ME3 are thereby inversely proportional to its uncontrolled proliferation.

Besides this first problem of concept stretching (Sartori 1970) there is an implicit temporality that arises in the term. Originally applied to the history of grain riots in Europe in the eighteenth century, the concept carries the risk of an implicit evolutionism, a binary opposition of tradition / modernity, before / after, as if it were only applicable to the popular protests models of European history. This is not to say that comparative history is not founded with good reasons in the cases mentioned above: some societies bear the brunt of merchant capital and respond, some through the riot. But the obstacle is always to think of cases of revolt or riots in other continents together with our past, at the risk of making them appear inexorably archaic, stuck in "the community", "tradition", or "custom".

Moreover, the question may be less about the confrontation with the market than the danger of romanticizing societies outside of the market (and do they still exist)? We must however understand what happens when the general feeling says that the market economy upsets moral agency in a given society. Far from a binary opposition between "early societies" that would have refused the introduction of the market and "societies today," those that would have experienced painful and inevitable entry into the market, it is more fruitful to explore the intricacies of complex, localized and discontinuous passages between "the" social and "the" market, which also means to understand the varied threads that constitute today's market exchanges (Margairaz and Minard 2006: 246-247).

Whether in its restricted version (ME1 and ME2) or more enlarged (which nearly dooms it), the risk is that the term ‘moral economy’ might function as a black box or a causal shortcut, eschewing the "how" of 'mobilization by suggestion that the moral economy is in itself an explanatory factor. By overextending its use (ME3), the moral economy suffers from the same limitations as that of culture: we risk asking the moral economy to function as a routine
explanatory variable even though it the very thing which has been deduced from the behavior of actors in question! Beyond this, the problem of the causal (or non causal) status arises. It is striking that such a routine place should be given to a concept that its authors take such care to avoid overstating causality. If for Thompson the attainment of those moral rules as much as actual deprivation could be a common cause of direct action, it fails to give ME direct causal status. Scott (1976: 4) does not purport to address the root causes of peasant revolution, "A study of moral economy of peasants can tell us what makes them angry and what is likely, other things being equal, to generate an explosive situation". Same caution in Lonsdale (1992: 326): "This chapter will not explain Mau Mau. It hopes to uncover the moral and intellectual context in which explanations may be found."

The prudence of these authors is consistent with a Weberian argument that proceeds by affinity, but the uses of the moral economy are not all as conservative or empirically dense. Ultimately, it is less a causal function than a form of thick description (Geertz 1973) that typifies the concept.

4.3. How can the moral economy be saved?

Can the moral economy be more than a “fruitful paradigm for research on subsistence riots in Europe and America” (Bohstedt, 265)? I propose several avenues that may underline the interest inherent in the idea of the moral economy, which may consequently rescue it as a research program (Passeron 1991: 43) concerning collective protest action. These precepts help to develop a more narrow reading and to consider the moral economy as a set of values derived from living conditions marked by a preoccupation with subsistence, linked to the reciprocal expectations of leaders and those they lead which are at once pragmatic and normative, and which concern the fair distribution of wealth, and the responsibility of leaders.

The first aspect concerns the notion of subsistence. The moral economy was first effectively applied to popular groups faced with ensuring their material survival, as 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. That does not however 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 so often becomes an element of the riot. However because the moral economy was an important tool among historians to think about popular culture and attitudes and that affected livelihoods, to expand the scope of the concept would result in a loss of its descriptive force. This does not mean that the moral economy has nothing to say about "those above", quite the contrary: the interest in the concept is to be able to think about the vertical link between rulers and ruled.

The second point is related to the values derived from living conditions. The term "derivative" is purposely chosen, for "values" do not arise mechanically from living conditions. Humans develop, without even knowing it, a sense of right and wrong from the conditions within which they are immersed; while this idea clearly requires some caution on the question of tradition, it is still an important guiding principle, with noteworthy implications. As a case in point, Thompson’s 1971 work clearly underlines the role of custom and community consensus. Yet other passages of Thompson are more cautious on this point and stress that certain customs were a recent invention and used to claim new rights: indeed, custom was the preferred language in the eighteenth century for protesting (Thompson 1993: 6 ). That these facts derive from a shared conception of living conditions equally assumes that not everything
occurs in the domain of ideas, but rather a considerable amount takes place in the concretely lived experience and practice of domination.

The third point expands on the irrevocable difference in the types of expectations held by both rulers and ruled, and the intersect between the normative and pragmatic ideas for the fair distribution of wealth, and responsibility of leaders for subsistence goods. I propose a reading of the moral economy that pays attention to the singular approach to security behavior of the "common people" (Thompson 1993). Ultimately it is of little import whether it is from habit or ‘belief’ among the poor that expectations towards their leaders are generated. What matters is that they refer to that which was heretofore reasonable to expect from their leaders, and which might suddenly be denied with drastic consequences when taken within the context of an already difficult mode of subsistence living. More precisely, if there is still a concept of justice in the distribution of wealth (an already normative assessment), it traverses the very practical issues of everyday experience, between the usual order of operation and that which will appear as particularly problematic and likely lead to a breakdown of collusive transactions (Dobry 1986) and implicit deals between rulers and ruled. What sustains the notion of the moral economy and should not be abandoned is indeed to envision this vertical link between the elites and the governed as well as the changes and crises within this relationship.

That said, three caveats seem necessary to limit the use of moral economy, especially in the analysis of collective action (including riots):

- The first refers to the temporal status of the moral economy. Without a doubt we should carefully try to distinguish situations in which we can clearly identify the existence of a moral economy prior to mobilization (which does not, as I want to again emphasize, not give it a causal status), situations in which they emerge and confer a meaning, little by little, to what is at stake within the riot (even if the analytical distinction does not imply that these two areas are completely separated).

- The second caveat emphasizes the importance of retaining the descriptive value the moral economy. Understanding riots presupposes an ability to describe them, to capture the likes, dislikes and aspirations that fuel it, tastes that do not depend only on opportunity even if it is within this context that they are deployed. Once order is restored it becomes possible to find a sense of right and wrong expressed in the riot, even if it does not proceed directly from this specific sense, and may indeed have been initiated through other logics. It is therefore important to focus on the emerging nature of what is morally articulated during the protest process (targets under the authority, property looted, abused people, etc).

- The final qualification concerns the use of "collusive transactions" to refer to a sociology of legitimacy that considers not only the explicit discourse of legitimation, but also the semi-informal accommodations which follow from clientelistic relationships between "the patricians and the plebeians". It is crucial to keep in mind that it is when the material possibilities of legitimation are reduced that riots occur, as the indirect role of structural adjustment plans in the de-legitimization of authoritarian regimes in Africa in the late 1980s seemingly confirms. It is therefore a sociology of the crisis of paternalism and the dissociation between patrician and plebeian cultures (Thompson 1993: 30), far beyond that of one-dimensional cronyism, that invites an approach towards riots and collective action that is couched in the moral economy.
5. Urban riots in Mali: moral economy as an observation guide rather than an explanatory framework

One need only peruse the press in Mali to come across cases of rioting, which are treated by journalists as something 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 particularly powerful individual). Although I concentrate here on Bamako, and therefore do not fully escape the urban bias I mentioned concerning riot studies in Africa, such riots have been attested in other regions of the country.

What about this first issue of subsistence? In reality it is hard to find veritable cases of subsistence based riots in Mali: in 2008 the "hunger riots" spread across West Africa but skipped Mali, where those in power follow the price of rice very carefully. But it is not clear that the notion of moral economy should apply only to protests when the issue of subsistence is explicit. Even when it is not manifestly expressed, we can observe the centrality of these issues in the riot itself. As we shall see for contemporary Mali, moral economy is a concept that particularly allows us to think about protest in situations of considerable disparities in wealth and power, as well as in situations where the more polished form of the social movement no longer carries any weight.

Several aspects seem to be partly illuminated by the notion of moral economy, particularly the role of youth in the riots (illustrated by the transition to democracy in 1991, and since), and the relationship to abundance seen in the violent outburst considered the most political forms of popular expression. Moreover, it serves no good to harden the divide between "political" riots and those that occur in more routine circumstances; the strategic elements of the violence in their first episodes does not exclude the fact that they diffuse a taste for wealth. Conversely, in situations where social violence is most unexpected and least anchored to the policy, a scathing critique of social inequalities can be deployed, which is always susceptible to politicization.

5.1. Memories of 1991 and the relation to the legitimacy of protest violence: a violence of the "young"

Broaching the subject of violent protest in Mali cannot but evoke the changeover of the regime in 1991: in January and Mars, following a protest initiated at the end of 1990 which produced peaceful marches as well as violent street uprisings (barricades, burning, looting of villas close to the regime, which were brutally repressed) the country, together with the rallying of a number of officers, witnessed the fall of Moussa Traoré's regime.

It was while working on "peaceful marches" (as their founders described them) that I discovered the ubiquitous reference to 1991, as well as the pervasive denial of the potential

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6 A subsaharan country classed among the lowest 5 in the world in terms of the UNDP human development index, nonetheless considered a promising case study in democratic development. Apart from the press, as well as sixty interviews and direct observation of marches (and specific archives on them in District III of Bamako), I consulted archives accessible to me in District I, as well as at the central town hall of Bamako, at the office of the governor of Bamako, and several correspondence boxes in 2005 and 2006 at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Communities.

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

8 Riots at the mosque in Djenné in September 2006, and in 2009, the riots in Loulo, Kita, Tabacoto, Kadiolo, etc.
violence of the marches. The conviction that violence can spring from a singular event and the legitimacy of these episodes is strongly colored by the memory of 1991. This explicit or implicit reference to the movements that brought about the fall of the regime explains how one might feel justified in resorting to violence, and how one can also be wary of “young looters”. 1991 embodies not only the memory of the democratic movement but also the moment when the young were in power, if only through the use of violence. Evoking 1991 shows how protests are still perceived as the business of youths who are always potential rioters, indicating that this memory is still highly ambivalent. It presupposes both the risk of looting and violence as it occurred in 1991, and may also legitimize violence against primarily peaceful marches in the name of public order. For violence is not solely the concern of those who take to the streets but also that of the police with both sides calling upon the same memory of the 1991 transition, as if the threat of a riot would ultimately succeed in containing the march.

Speeches about marches are moral discourses about young people and violence. One frequently hears this reference used both by individuals and groups of protesters who claim to be heirs of 1991, such as students and by those who good-humouredly mock the marchers or criticize them.

It is here that thinking in terms of the moral economy can be a useful way to guide our observations and demonstrate the extent to which the threat of student rioting is inscribed as a form of violent negotiation between students and authority structures. To be sure, the participation of young people in marches and riots is not specific to Mali, and is indeed a familiar model throughout Africa: it is often characterized by a relationship which shifts between wariness and cooperation linking those in power to urban young people, especially students. Students are of course a population that causes considerable fear among governmental authorities, as they are generally educated, urban and aspiring to social mobility (more so than people residing in the bush or peasants); the government often disburses scholarships in order to forestall social protest.

The combination of this situation and the role of students in the transition to democracy have succeeded in encouraging and justifying, at least in their own eyes, the frequent recourse to violence in expressing 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 Toure. Indeed in 1994 a large percentage of the population supported the repression of student violence by Prime Minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, during the movements from December 1995 to January 1996, in 1997, etc. This support continues even today. However they continue to ward influence: the Malian Students' Association (AEEM) took part in the transition coalition and negotiated an agreement to increase scholarship stipends (an agreement that was not fully honored). Both before and after the advent of democracy, numerous protests arose as a result of breaching of the tacit contracts by which those in power pandered to this social group.

The virulence and reoccurrence of student mobilization led to multiplying the number of “blank” or half-completed years of university study as well as a certain sense of impunity or at a blanket right to protest on the students' part. The commemoration of the “martyrdom” of

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9 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.

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

certain students (and the monuments to the glory of those same martyrs) has heightened this sense of entitlement, just as memorializing their sacrifices in 1991 has helped to give more widespread legitimacy to marches. The return of the 1991 slogan An te korolen fe fo kura, explains the aspirations of urban youths in the face of those in power as well as their social elders even today.

Whether this relation to violence is seen as "eruptive" or "spontaneous", it very clearly expresses a register in which students feel entitled to participate, as witnessed in the symbolically laden models of violent student protest in 1993 and the repetition of a violent form of the "democratic gesture". Here we surely must interrogate the relation between the youth and their place in society, even more so as structural adjustment plans throughout Africa have accelerated the crisis of clientelistic redistribution.

5.2. “But everybody wants something!”: when the taste for abundance enters into the political riot

It is necessary to consider the very strategic relation to violence within certain riots as Javier Auyero rightly does in his treatment of the “gray zone”, for violence is not blind and can be highly organized. But that does not prohibit us to consider how the strategic use of violence operates in concert with a range of opportunistic possibilities (Tilly 2003: 23) that lead to material enjoyment.

Let's examine the violence that took place in extremely tense political situations not only in 1991, but also the spring of 1993 (considerable student resistance against state power, leading to the dissolution of the National Assembly) as well as the spring of 1997. One participant in the mobilizations 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. He recounted that in 1997, 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, among other strategic locations.

This highly calculated use of violence which depended on a well run network who circulated details about the homes of those close to the regime, did not rule out taking part in looting that was at its core motivated by a mixture of social envy as well as political loathing of those in power. Therefore violence on these occasions combined a very strategic use of violence with the possibility of material enjoyment of the spoils of violent action.

Here is the eyewitness 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. While at the time he was a young man, politicized and French-speaking, who had begun his university studies, one can nevertheless read in his account the unmistakable taste for material pleasures, which

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13 “We don’t want/we no longer want the old but the new” (in Bambara).
14 When 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”.
15 The man took part in the marches of 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, and the protests in the spring of 1997.
seems to have been inseparable from the protests against the regime that took place in the streets in this period.

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… (…)

J.S. 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…

J.S. 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 president 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 the duality between what people may expect from the state and the sense of being entitled to help yourself to exorbitant goods during the riots. The trophies kept after the looting (cf. also Le Palec 1992) also clearly reveal this relationship to moments of urban euphoria, which are inspired not only by political revolt nor by a concern to meet basic needs but instead express 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.

Thus beyond the time of the democratic transition, rioting remains one of the ways of expressing popular dissent in both the political and social spheres. It is charged with a considerable amount of political sentiment even if this can be understood only after the violence has been unleashed, or is confusedly rooted in what the targets of the violence symbolize.

5.3. Emerging logics and the politicization of indignation: the anatomy of a protest dynamic

During periods of serious political conflict\textsuperscript{16}, street violence erupts less often during manifestly political marches than on instances of popular uprisings triggered by events

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\textsuperscript{16} with the exception of 1993 and 1997.
without any explicit connection to politics. It is however necessary to grasp the political discourse into which they may or may not be inserted subsequently.

Here again 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 “social foreigners”\(^{17}\) who belong neither to the neighborhood nor the various communities which may populate it\(^{18}\), a particular religious group, or a group engaged in the same business activity and/or the same use of urban space (such as evicted street vendors or youths accustomed to using a football field).

Thus, the Bamako quarter known as Banconi Salembougou experienced several days of rioting in February 2009 which saw several people 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\(^{19}\). In December 2009, again in Banconi, further riots broke out against the town hall for failing to set up speed bumps in the wake of an auto accident in which a little girl was killed\(^{20}\); in February 2011, rioting erupted in the Sikoro quarter after another road accident occurred\(^{21}\). More recently, Malians repatriated from Libya vandalized the civil protection compound in Sogoniko, held up traffic, demanded their bags and suspected the authorities of stealing part of their repatriation grants\(^{22}\). Also in the Sogoniko quarter in February and March of 2010, a group of youths who used a football field that had been sold to a company clashed with police after their sports club leader was arrested\(^{23}\). In February 2010, following an unjustified police violence against one of their colleagues, the apprentices and drivers of Sotrama barricaded certain roads in Bamako, burned tires, attacked police hangars and destroyed two police stations\(^{24}\).

These uprisings must also be understood as emerging from a context wherein violence is a way of managing deviance (particularly theft) within social relationships, as demonstrated by

\(^{17}\) 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.

\(^{18}\) This was the case when various sites known for allowing debauchery were vandalized, for example.


the cases of lynching thieves in markets, or country villagers confiscating the vehicles of cattle thieves.

But 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. The example of “article 320” (for 300 CFA francs worth of petrol and 20 CFA francs worth of matches) of the “accelerated criminal code” is telling: it consisted not only in dousing thieves and criminals with petrol and setting them on fire, but also of protesting against the police and magistrates accused of setting them free.

Uprisings against police violence can therefore engender more politicized protests: the first marches and riots that led to the 1991 transition took place after young street vendors who occupied the Dabanani centre were evicted by the police, the latter being accustomed to extorting from the former. Violent rioting with burned cars followed the police interventions and the widespread evictions, from the hospital centre to rue Al Qods, also set off protests against the police forces.

From a political perspective, what can be said from about these revolts over issues of property, morality and the occupation of space (issues always subject to political appropriation) or about the looting that occurs during urban violence that is not a priori motivated by political grievances?

The riots following the Togo-Mali football match on 27 March 2005 in Bamako, after the national team was defeated 2-1 at the stadium on 26 March, are an interesting example. Upon defeat the public overran the field, threatening to kill some of the players; the police responded with tear gas in an attempt to disperse with the protests. At that point 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 pass, and after either 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). Finally, the rioters attacked shops, particularly those run by Lebanese residents as well as numerous bar-restaurants and small hotels run by Togolese and especially Chinese businessmen (some twenty were ransacked) reputed to be used by prostitutes. Women were raped. The damage was assessed at several billion CFA francs. Certainly the riot cannot be explained simply as the combination of a desire to stigmatize the depravation represented by “the bars” and an equally fierce desire to access material enjoyment in all its forms, as it did not begin within this discourse. 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 prosperous classes and the state as well the expressions of an aspiration for material riches that were beyond the reach of most people. Indeed, all of these topics are staples of everyday conversation in Bamako. Interpreting the riot therefore requires describing the tastes, the loathing and the aspirations it expressed in addition to understanding that these tastes do not depend solely on the chance to enjoy them, even though they express themselves when the opportunity arises. We must also take into account the acutely political dimensions that an athletic defeat was perceived: it is

25 Shops such as the Amandine pastry shop, popular among rich Bamako residents and expatriates, were among the victims of the rioting.
not only that football is a constant topic of discussion and hence of moral development, but the date of the defeat was significant as the riot took place the day after the 26th of March, the anniversary of the 1991 revolution and the fall of Moussa Traoré. This event also bruised an all-pervasive national pride in Mali as the defeat eliminated Mali from the African Football Championship; the repercussions were grave indeed, as the public authorities had made a considerable contribution to support the Malian Aigles team. Judging the failure of the national football team also meant judging the authorities that had paid them and hired their coaches.

Consequently, there is not only the opportunity for material pleasures within the riots that are strategically encouraged and cultivated by opposition groups, there is also the possibility of an emergent critique within the practice of rioting where the participants do not immediately consider themselves as political opponents.

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What good does a concept serve? It is certainly not to manage interpretive routines, or to become a buzzword, or to become an object of theoretical fetishism; rather it is meant to stimulate the sociological imagination and, within a Weberian perspective, to direct observation rather than force the reality into a ready-made mold. With this in mind, the revival of the concept of moral economy is a breath of fresh air in mobilization studies. Faced with the temptation to over- or under-politicize riots, it encourages a return to several social dimensions that have never ceased to be of central importance in the analysis of popular protest. For it is not only necessary to pay attention to the part that rage and anger play in these episodes, we must also consider the social embeddedness of the protest and the idea of implied accords and expectations of the authorities. Doing so encourages the reader to take into account not only whether protests are a priori political in character or not but the way in which grievances themselves may be politicized, which in turn contributes to the often rapid processes of (de) legitimation of the authorities. Finally this approach is a means to reunite avenues of research which have been disjointed for too long and have culminated in a dialogue of the deaf when discussing collective action. Reviving the concept of the moral economy allows us to direct research towards a perspective which takes into account both popular indignations and the conditions within which they are deployed.

(translation V. Digaetano)

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26 It is significant that requests for marches against the management of Malian football can be found in the archives of District III – where most marches occur in Bamako.