The Question of Agency in African Studies

Edited by

Antonio Pezzano, Daniela Pioppi, Varona Sathiyah
and Pier Paolo Frassinelli

Università di Napoli L'Orientale
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In copertina:
Street traders in Nairobi
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In Memory of our dearest PP

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Preface

The idea and material for this book on the question of agency in African studies came from an international workshop held at the Scuola di Procida per l'Alta Formazione, Conservatorio delle Orfane, Naples, from 3 to 5 October 2019. During three days of interdisciplinary sessions and panels, we tackled the topic from different perspectives that cover many of the approaches to African studies in the humanities and social sciences. The chapters of the book are a double-blind peer reviewed selection that represents the diversity and richness of the papers presented in Procida – one of the last academic gatherings we attended before coronavirus.

The workshop was organised by the Centre for Contemporary African Studies (CeSAC) at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, the American University in Cairo, Cairo University, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, and Université Mohammed V de Rabat. We wish to take this opportunity to thank the additional members of the workshop's organising committee: Livia Apa, Maria Cristina Ercolessi, and Ersilia Francesca, as well as all the workshop participants, the anonymous reviewers, the book's copyeditor, Andy Grewar, and the publishers. Thanks also must go to the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and to the University of Johannesburg for cross-subsidising the publication.

Pier Paolo Frassinelli, Antonio Pezzano, Daniela Pioppi, Varona Sathiyah

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At the last stage of this publication, before printing, our dearest colleague, Pier Paolo Frassinelli, left us in mid-November. Pier Paolo has always dedicated great commitment to his work. His passion, altruism and generosity were evident in co-organising the Procida workshop and the following publication. We dedicate this volume to his memory.

Antonio Pezzano, Daniela Pioppi, Varona Sathiyah

PART I
AGENCY IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES

Introduction
Agency in Social and Political Studies

Antonio Pezzano and Daniela Pioppi

Agency is generally defined as the ability to act according to one's own desired goals. In this sense, agency is more than pure observable action as it also implies the meaning, motivation and purpose that people bring to their activities. Social sciences have long debated the relationship between human agency and social structures. Stances range from the neo-liberal view, according to which free and independent actors act for the greatest individual benefit, to a more deterministic one arguing that agency should be conceived as embedded within society and constrained by the culture, society, politics and economy of the day or, in other words, by the surrounding power structures.

Beyond the agency-structure divide, the *agency* debate has also involved a variety of other issues: the definition of *transformative agency* and the identification of the social group better placed to be the engine of change or, in other words, to "make history" – ranging from elitist or statalist views to the bottom-up approaches of subaltern studies, passing by the "modernising role" attributed to the middle class, or the vanguard role of the industrial proletariat.

In Africa, since the start of the decolonisation process, intellectuals have been concerned with the necessity to conceptualise political agency and the contribution of Africans to history, along with their struggles to achieve emancipation. More generally, social sciences focusing on Africa have followed the twists and turns of the global debate, with African studies reflecting contrasting views and approaches to the agency-structure dilemma. Recently, the debate on *agency* has been revamped on the political and intellectual agendas of the African continent, following the mass popular uprisings in North Africa and their consequent reflections in sub-Saharan Africa, despite – or maybe because of – counter-revolutions or the apparent failure to significantly transform their respective political systems.

The first part of this volume collects nine research contributions in the field of social and political sciences with very diverse spheres of enquiry such as migration and urban studies, religious practices, informal labour, elites, and analysis of public policies. Notwithstanding their variety, all contributions share a strong emphasis on empirical research and an interest in local, often micro-realities and dynamics. Moreover, they also have in common a focus on individual, non-organised or informal forms of collective action rather than more explicitly political, formal and organised collective endeavours. This last aspect is also combined with a relational approach inspired by Bourdieu's concepts of "habitus" and "fields" (Bourdieu, 2019) or, particularly useful in investigating agency in difficult or uncertain situations, by Vigh's concept of "social navigation" (Vigh, 2006; 2009). In so doing, all the contributions firmly avoid any pregiven ontological conviction on or definition of agency and structure, which do not exist per se, but only in their mutual interactions, and only detectable by researchers through their empirical explorations of people's actions.

Reflecting a larger tendency of recent literature on social change in Africa as elsewhere, the shared assumption of the volume's contributions is, in fact, that humans may challenge, react to, or adapt to power relations in a variety of ways, not all conducive to structural change or immediately recognised as such. Human agency can take various forms and is not limited to a struggle for change or to actions explicitly aimed at changing power relations. Agency can produce unpredictable, contradictory outcomes that cannot be easily categorised in terms of either transforming the unequal power order or reinforcing it. Therefore, the mere consideration of processes of active resistance and explicit transformation fails to capture the more nuanced and incremental ways in which structural modifications are activated. Furthermore, all contributions bring to the fore the fact that the outcomes of agency both at the individual and the collective level require to be contextualised and cannot be assumed a priori by the researcher, representing in this way a radical departure from "normative" as well as "militant" approaches that have long influenced social scientists in Africa and elsewhere.

The focus is on the power relations within the explored realities. The authors engage in an analytical approach based on empirical works that reflect on the relationship between the structure and the agency of individual and sometimes collective actors, who give rise to multiple, fragmented and sometimes contradictory and ambiguous identities. Reading through the chapters of the volume, we could take an overview of some of the many possible forms of agency encountered on the continent.

Several chapters concern the agency of migrants. We thus see how migrants, refugees and returnees act in liminal spaces characterised by strong external constraints, not only as agents of resistance, but how they have the capacity of creatively engaging with these constraints. This research topic helps to highlight the power relations at the base of the social actors' agency in relations with the structure/state.

For instance, in Chapter One by Sara de Simone, South Sudanese refugees in Adjumani, Uganda, living in a constantly changing and unstable environment characterised by strong structural constraints, exercise their agency strategically, modifying their identity or pursuing invisibility in certain situations (Bøås, 2013; Thomson, 2013). Even though this agency does not ultimately change the structural condition of the refugees, it contributes to ensuring a space for action that makes their lives more secure and helps them to "navigate" their experiences of exile as well as to challenge the Ugandan state's regulatory role. Chapter Two by Nicola Di Mauro outlines the strategies and tactics of some young Moroccan Muslims in Italy in a mobile transnational space where to achieve a leading role in the religious field is to navigate their "double presence" – to paraphrase Sayad's concept of "double absence" that analyses the fundamental contradictions of the migrant's condition (Sayad, 1999).

Chapter Three by Lucia Ragazzi, on an Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme from France to Morocco, analyses migrants' agency in the return phase, adopting an actor-oriented perspective based on reconstructed life stories and migrancy trajectories. The life stories analysed are representative of different strategies through which returnees confront the structural reality matching ambitions against constraints before their decision to join the AVR project. Such life experiences allow identification of the complexity of the factors influencing the decision-making process, beyond the dichotomy between voluntary and forced return.

Chapter Four by Alessio Iocchi considers the agency of young Nigerien Muslim men in the *fada,* urban informal circles of peers where young men meet for information-sharing, chatting and self-help. Conversations in the *fada* could be a prism through which the researcher could disentangle the complex interaction between the public and the private self and the modes to "navigate" reality as, for example, concerning the lived meaning of being a good Muslim in Niger's Salafi-oriented movements, and how identity is mediated by individual subjectivity and morality connected to the diverse discourses, repertoires and practices of youth belonging to different classes in Nigerien society. The space of the *fada* in Niamey functions as a repertoire

of informal practices of belonging for deprived young people to rescue their powerless position with a sense of empowerment and a feeling of living an Islamically full life, sharing information, solidarity and camaraderie. Through "making *fada*", they actually produce a social space "alternative to the dominant public space" (Banégas, Brisset-Foucault, Cutolo, 2012). The formation and multiplication of *fada* in Niamey is also an indirect response to the incapacity, inability, or unwillingness and disengagement of political parties and state actors to meet youth needs and aspirations to a social and political space. The *fada* are "alternative spaces" to criticise the status quo and denounce youth marginalisation, but at the same time, many *'yan fada* also appear to be embedded ambivalently in "belly politics" (Bayart, 2006) and clientelist practices through which they can have a chance of *bouffer* (slang for "eating"). It is evident in this case that local agency and agendas are articulated in the face of a disparity between resources and ambitions.

The urban space is also the locus of agency in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Particularly in Chapter Five by Erika Grasso, the market of the town of Marsabit is a repertoire of performances and practices and a place where northern Kenyan inhabitants interconnect and navigate their perceived and real marginality and remoteness in practices of "tactical cosmopolitanism" (Landau, 2010; Landau, Freemantle, 2010). Marsabit is a place where gender and ethnic lines are produced and reproduced, but also questioned and negotiated. The ethnographic approach allows us to grasp the entanglement between space and power, through social relations. In particular, the "impossible things market", like the Soko Gabra, allows individual and collective subjects to elude social and cultural constraints in terms of ethnicity, gender and age. The chapter demonstrates how the ethnography of everyday practices and individual trajectories can be a good lens through which to observe the transformative and political potential of ordinary spaces and encounters (Simone, 2004; Massey, 2005; Allen, 2016; Darling, 2009).

The relational approach inspired by the analytical concept of Bourdieu's social field stands out also in Chapter Eight by Edgar Cossa and Orlando Nipassa on the interest groups in the national food and nutrition security policy-making in Mozambique. According to Bourdieu (2019), in each social field there is a conflict between the "suitors" and the "dominants". The power relations between agents and institutions compose the structure and the rules of the field. The position in the field determines the decision-making process. In this case, the groups of interest act to impose external factors, such as private financial investment facilities, on public policies, seeking to make an autonomous social space that secures their interests.

This is also the case of the Cameroonian and South African elites in the urban spaces described in Chapter Seven by Federica Duca. The agency of these urban elites is read as the reflection of a search for autonomy in relation to the city and the nation. Agency analysed in connection with autonomy allows an understanding of how elites make sense of their position at individual and spatial levels in order to maintain their privileges. Their positioning in the urban space is facilitated by the role of mediators such as the residents' associations, in Johannesburg, or by their connections with the political network, in Yaoundé. However, this autonomy vis-à-vis local and national government is relative and depends on the relationship between the elites (as individuals and groups) and institutions which determine the way of belonging to the urban and national spheres and how these spaces are politically, socially and institutionally constructed.

Finally, for Beatrice Ferlaino, the author of Chapter Nine on Moroccan agriculture reconversion projects, "agency is not conceived necessarily as something intentional or subversive, in contrast with structure; instead, it is considered as something which can also be identified in unorganised actions which reproduce social order and maintain stability". The assumption of the author is that agency could also be a "trace of the past", or the product of past policies as in a moral economy framework in which social actors reproduce well-established cultural and social norms "pointing out the mutual influence between individual and structure, between past and present".

We mentioned above the fact that the contributions to this volume, in line with most recent research on social change, place a great emphasis on individual or unorganised forms of agency. Yet, a context in which dominant norms and cultural values constrain the ability of people to make strategic life choices does not allow for structural inequalities to be addressed by individuals alone. Individuals can and do act against dominant norms, but their impact on the general disadvantage is limited and they may pay a high price for their autonomy. Collective organised agency thus plays an important role in creating the conditions for social change and in reducing the costs for individual action. However, it is also true that in contexts of multiple and interacting fields of power we could experience a variety of forms of opposition and resistance, which may or may not assume collective forms, often giving rise to more nuanced situations and to a politics of informality. Also, the reflection on different forms of agency throughout history can highlight the importance of structural contexts in determining or at least influencing the forms and dynamics of mobilisation that in turn have the potential of modifying such contexts. For instance, it has been observed in Africa (as elsewhere), that the general globally

reduced bargaining capacity of labour vis-à-vis capital has favoured the preva-
lence of localised, issue-based or particularistic forms of protest. This reveals
the difficulty of building larger forms of cooperation and solidarity among the
working classes, as well as sustainable alternative agendas in a context of so-
cial fragmentation and the decline of the global labour force, as the spread of
informal work and activities demonstrate. Collective identities are thus con-
structed through the discursive identification of "framing" processes and re-
constructed through interactions with a range of other actors in society. Two
contributions in this volume, Chapters Two and Six, help us understand how
informal actors construct interests and change their frames and discourses,
sometimes by collectively challenging the practices and discourses of domi-
nant actors in terms of claiming rights, sometimes by accommodating their
discourses to appeal to potential allies.

The already mentioned Chapter Two on the Italian Islamic Confederation
(*Confederazione Islamica Italiana* – CII) highlights the crucial role of Italian
and Moroccan institutional devices to control, discriminate against or co-opt
Moroccan migrants, even in what concerns their religious practices. The
young members of the CII thus, in the interplay of uneven and mobile rela-
tions, try to navigate their position in a "force field" (Vigh, 2009) that disci-
plines them locally and nationally. Their social navigation disposes them
strategically in a transnational space, where they try to escape the frustrating
condition of the "double absence" (Sayad, 1999) by building their collective
agency.

However, the most illustrative case of the non-linear process from quiet
and individual resistance to collective mobilisation is Chapter Six by
Mamokete Matjomane on street traders in Tshwane, South Africa. The chap-
ter traces street traders' politics from earlier atomised forms of "subversive
adaptation" to a more collective agency engaging the state in participative
urban governance practices. In this case, collective efforts maintained over
time indeed produced a transformative agency but not in a linear progression
as actors use different modes of agency at different times and scales (Lindell,
2010a; 2010b). The street trader leaders' position in relation to the state is
constantly shifting depending on opportunities and agendas, because there
are "multiple sites of urban governance" (Lindell, 2008) depending on how
the state interacts with non-state actors in the exercise of public authority
(Lund, 2006; Hagmann, Péclard, 2010; Hibou, 2004; Menkhaus, 2008). In
this chapter, the state is viewed through everyday practices in a continuous
reconfiguration of power relations with informal actors. Street trader organi-
sations and their leaders operating on the margins of the state (Das, Poole,

2004) rely mainly on a confrontational approach or clientelist practises, whereas leaders who act as quasi-state bureaucrats rely on cooperation as their position allows them easier access to state resources.

Overall, and to conclude, the contributions collected in this first part of the volume on *The Question of Agency in African Studies* offer at the same time nine rich self-standing empirical case studies on a variety of issues concerning the contemporaneity of the continent. At the same time, they are a collective example of the most recent tendency of research on social and political change that, far from the big overarching schemes of the twentieth century, focuses instead on local micro-dynamics, highlighting the continuous processes of society formation in which agency and structure are multiple, undefined and strongly intertwined, thus producing unpredictable results.

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Chapter 1
"Becoming More Ugandan"
Social Navigation Strategies among Self-Settled Refugees
in Adjumani Town

Sara de Simone

Introduction

Refugees' agency has been the object of several studies questioning the image of refugees as passive victims and vulnerable people. Self-settled refugees, particularly, have been addressed by a wealth of studies focused on major cities of refugee hosting countries such as Johannesburg (Landau, 2006), Cairo (Grabska, 2006; Mahmoud, 2011), Khartoum (Kibreab, 1996), Nairobi (Campbell, 2006) and Kampala (Dryden-Peterson, 2006; Lyytinen, 2015; Pottier, 2015). In fact, however, little attention has been placed on smaller urban centres of refugee-hosting countries, which are the most rapidly growing in the Global South (UNDESA, 2010) and are also the most likely to host large numbers of self-settled refugees due to the proximity of many of these centres to international borders or to refugee camps. Refugees who decide to settle in these towns usually remain scarcely visible to host governments and aid agencies, and their coping strategies are largely ignored.

This chapter seeks to contribute filling this gap through an analysis of the agency of self-settled refugees in Adjumani town, a small urban centre situated in the north-western part of the country. While having hosted Sudanese refugees since the 1960s, Adjumani District has been the theatre of an unprecedented inflow of South Sudanese refugees since 2014, many of which are thought to have left the refugee settlements after having registered and obtained a refugee ID card.[1] The chapter shows that self-settled refugees are very aware of the structural constraints that limit their possible actions, and

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[1] Interview with UNHCR senior staff, Kampala, 1 December 2017.

express their agency through the deliberate adoption of individual strategies of social navigation, at least partly based on their capacity of building good relations with local authorities, Ugandan partners, neighbours and friends. The refugee category is never part of their identity and constitutes a liability rather than an asset for those trying to make a living in the town.

While the kind of agency that self-settled refugees are able to exercise may not be considered as transformative, it asks questions as to whether informal local relationships and arrangements that refugees craft can provide protection to urban self-settled refugees irrespective of legal and formal ones, and the extent to which they differ from those crafted by other vulnerable urban dwellers (Landau, 2014).

The chapter provides a brief discussion of the literature on refugee's identity and agency with a focus on Vigh's concept of social navigation (Vigh, 2006; 2009), and on the concept of self-settled refugees. It then presents the situation of self-settled refugees in Uganda with a focus on Adjumani town and discusses findings on their strategies of social navigation through the adoption of other forms of identity than the refugee one. It concludes by reflecting on the implications of these findings on the understanding of refugees' agency and on the importance of empirical evidence on local practices that go beyond legal definitions and arrangements in the design of effective protection policies.

The chapter draws on fieldwork conducted in Kampala, Gulu and Adjumani District between the end of 2017 and early 2018. During this time, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including representatives of the local government structures (village, municipal and district level particularly), and international and local staff of NGOs involved in the refugee response in Adjumani District. Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with self-settled refugees residing in four villages within Adjumani municipality. These villages were selected based on information about the distribution of refugee residents provided by the Adjumani Town Mayor and backed by local chairmen of Local Council 1 (LC1). Initial respondents were approached based on their reputation for being "active members" of the local community – not the refugee community, but their community of residence. In one instance, an individual interview was turned into a focus group discussion as one of these informants had invited all the refugee women residing in the village to attend our meeting. However, aware of the possible bias that this sampling might entail, my research assistant – who himself had refugee origins – and I expanded our sampling through randomly approaching people selling items at local markets (particularly Awindiri Market, Adjumani's major food market) and at local service

facilities such as health clinics. Ten refugees and ten Ugandan citizens were thus selected in this way, with various backgrounds in terms of experiences of exile, place of origin in South Sudan and available resources, particularly financial. Even though it is not my intent to claim that the findings of this chapter are representative of the entire self-settled refugee population, the stories collected do suggest some common strategies among the people interviewed and provide some food for thought to draw some general conclusions.

Refugees' agency and identity

In the last two decades, a wealth of scholarly literature has shown that refugees play an active role in making decisions over their livelihood strategies (Jacobsen, 2002; Kibreab, 2004), the place where they live (Hovil, 2007) or in the emergence of new forms of identification and sense of belonging (Hovil, 2016; Malkki, 1995). These authors have studied refugees as agents of resistance, even though, as other categories defined by a legal status, they act in a liminal space characterised by strong external constraints. Their capacity of creatively engaging with these constraints has been variously addressed by this literature and gives us an idea of what the contours are of refugees' agency (de Vries, 2016).

Refugees' agency expresses itself also in the making and unmaking of identity. The latter has been addressed by several authors that have emphasised the situational and socially constructed character of identities in refugee communities (de Simone, 2020; Hatoss, 2012; Mahmoud, 2011; Malkki, 1995). Malkki, for example, has shown how different refugee communities may adopt or refuse the refugee category based on their place of residence with very little relation to their legal situation (Malkki, 1995). In some cases, the fact of being a refugee is a foundational identity element used to create a moral community, in other cases it is something that should be concealed or denied in order to become part of a community. This is the case of refugees or migrants who try to explore avenues of integration in the local host society, as it happens for self-settled refugees. In their interactions with local authorities and societies, these people craft some sort of informal social contract sanctioned by their actual behaviour and its acceptance and recognition by local authorities. Lund (2016) speaks of "illegal citizens" showing multiple examples of their relations with the state:

> [E]stablished presence may enable people to acquire identity cards (or proxies such as voting cards, or membership cards of political or cultural

associations); paying for utilities provides customers with receipts documenting and legitimising residence; and people's possession of land — along with the fact that government institutions ignore or tolerate a land market — allows for the gradual build-up of expectations of recognition. Likewise, by forming health committees, market guilds, or parent–teacher associations before there is a clinic, a marketplace or a school, citizens enter the orbit of certain governing institutions and conjure up the exercise of authority and recognition by anticipating the "contract". In order to establish a "contract" of mutual recognition, the inhabitants may be able to act and organise as they anticipate the municipality would expect proper citizens to act (Lund, 2016, pp. 1208–1209).

Claims to refugee identity or practices of invisibility can give access to certain bundles of rights, challenging the state's regulatory role and the very existence of differentiated bundles of rights attributed to different categories of people (Hovil, 2016). The refugee category can thus attribute a specific identity to people but can also be side-lined in favour of other categories or of other forms of identification. The choice of these categories constitutes a form of agency: people can "move 'out of place' and act in a manner that is seemingly outside their limited interests and identities. Just because people are workers, it does not mean that they will claim higher wages through a union. Just because people are poor, it does not mean that they have to be led by others who know what is best for them" (Neocosmos, 2014, p. 147). Just because they have a legal status of refugees, it does not mean that they will use this category to identify themselves and abide by the social and legal norms that define their condition (de Simone, 2020).

Acknowledging the existence of refugees' agency does not mean neglecting the existence of structural constraints to their actions and choices. People are never completely free to make decisions and act as they want. Vigh (2006, 2009) speaks of social navigation to depict the relational and dynamic character of agency. Social navigation refers to the willing action of people living in a constantly changing and unstable environment, emphasising their engagement to reach positions that they perceive to be better than those where they currently find themselves (Vigh, 2009). It implies an assessment of the present social environment as well as an anticipation of the consequences of their decisions and actions in the future, and it acknowledges the existence of social forces that pose structural constraints on agents, even though these constraints may be unstable and constantly changing. Social navigation thus allows us to illuminate multiple forms of agency, including those not directly trying to change "the boundaries of 'what can be done'"

(Beswick, Hammerstad, 2013, p. 481), but rather to ensure some form of survival or improvement in people's living conditions. In many instances, the exercise of agency enables refugees to "navigate" the spaces of others to their "advantage" (Vigh, 2009): in picking up one form of identity or the other, refugees' agency is often about survival and coping, as is the pursuit of invisibility by certain actors in certain situations (Bøås, 2013; Thomson, 2013). Even though this agency does not ultimately change the structural condition of refugees, it contributes to securing a space for action that makes refugees' lives more secure and predictable and helps them navigating their experience of exile.

Self-settled refugees in an uncertain environment

Even though refugees have sometimes been described through the victimising terms of "speechless emissaries" (Malkki, 1996) or "helpless victims" (Branch, 2011), self-settled refugees distance themselves from these images as they willingly decide to opt out of the refugee protection system and settle somewhere else from where they are supposed to stay.

Self-settled refugees have always existed and are the norm in countries of the Global North; however, they represent a puzzling phenomenon for countries of the Global South that are receiving large influxes of refugees from neighbouring countries and that apply sometimes very strict encampment policies. Until not very long ago, they were considered as a challenge even by the UNHCR: while vaguely recognising that the protection mandate of the organisation should extend to all people in a refugee-like situation, the UNHCR refugee policy adopted in 1997 discouraged self-settlement in urban areas and considered it a management problem for both the host government and the humanitarian industry (UNHCR, 1997). This policy was widely criticised since its adoption by a growing consensus in academic literature on the preferability of self-settlement to encampment (Bakewell, 2014; Dryden-Peterson, 2006); nevertheless, a new policy considering "urban areas to be a legitimate place for refugees to enjoy their rights" was only approved in 2009 (UNHCR, 2009a).

This policy acknowledges that over half of the global refugee population currently lives in cities (UNHCR, 2009b) and that these urban self-settled refugees are entitled to protection and assistance by the UN system and host governments. Yet self-settlement in the Global South is generally resisted for various reasons. First, refugees are considered a potential security threat both for the local population, because of their condition of extreme deprivation,

and in terms of national security, due to their possible engagement in fighting in their home country or risks of conflict spill-over. Second, governments usually fear that the increase in demographic pressure in areas which are often already under-serviced and marginal would cause negative reactions from the local population, and competition for scarce local resources. Finally, while the UNHCR encourages the provision of assistance also to self-settled and urban refugees, the delivery of humanitarian aid is much easier if refugees live in camps where they can be easily identified and reached (Bakewell, 2014).

For these reasons, refugees in countries of the Global South often self-settle, breaching the law and finding themselves facing a number of extra challenges, including that of their illegal status. Nevertheless, several studies have demonstrated that if people have any choice, they will usually opt to leave the camps and to move to urban areas, in search of better services, livelihoods, opportunities of repatriation or integration in the host country. In 2001, an assessment conducted by Lucy Hovil (2001) among Sudanese refugees in Arua District demonstrated that self-settled refugees enjoyed better human security than those within settlements for several reasons, including less exposure to physical threats and better access to services, markets and business opportunities. Another study conducted a few years later by the Refugee Law Project (2005) focused on people's perceptions of their quality of life and showed how people were thought to live better lives outside the settlements even though they received no – or very little – humanitarian assistance. These perceptions were confirmed by a more recent study by the International Refugee Rights Initiative, which showed that refugees living outside the settlements described their situation in more favourable terms than those living in the settlements and were more able to pursue independent livelihoods and become self-sufficient in spite of food shortages in the market (International Refugee Rights Initiative, 2015). Even though this analysis might be biased by the fact that people who chose to self-settle are usually the better-off, who have some resources to invest in housing, food, and possibly capital investment, "cities … offer at least faint promises of upward economic mobility and physical freedom" (Landau, 2014, p. 139) and thus remain attractive for whomever can afford to move.

Self-settlement in Uganda

Uganda has often been praised for the openness of its refugee policy (BBC Africa, 2016; Titz, Feck, 2017). In its legislation, the *Refugee Act* and *Refu-*

gees Regulations (Government of Uganda, 2006; 2010), it recognises the right of refugees to move freely on the national territory and the right to work and access basic services on an equal basis with Ugandan citizens. Even though refugees enjoy freedom of movement, they are encouraged to stay in refugee settlements: this is where humanitarian assistance is provided, free services such as schooling and healthcare are made available, and where refugees are given a free plot of land for housing and farming. Yet, an unknown – but likely considerable – number of people leave and move to Kampala or smaller towns in the proximity of the refugee settlements.

Uganda has no specific policy on urban refugees, therefore these people remain in a sort of limbo: they are neither registered as urban dwellers nor illegal migrants, as the majority registers as refugee in one of the refugee settlements before moving to town. Besides the 86 000 people registered in Kampala as urban refugees, there are no official figures of how many refugees reside in Ugandan urban areas. While there are efforts to try to map the refugee population in smaller towns such as Adjumani and Arua,[2] the high mobility of refugees makes it difficult to obtain a reliable picture. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers of urban refugees, especially in urban centres nearby the refugee settlements, are high. During a quick visit to Arua and Rhino Camp in 2018, for example, I witnessed a constant flow of mini-buses and private vehicles taking town-based refugees back to the camp for refugee re-registration.[3] As I also wanted to travel to Rhino Camp with public transport but was worried about the security of travelling on a bumpy road for one and a half hours in a car with five seats packed with ten people, I tried to convince the driver of a collective taxi to accept my payment for three seats instead of only one to have the car less packed. He refused and explained: "My dear, I cannot accept. These are registration days. We must carry all the refugees to the camp. We cannot allow cars to move half empty. We are giving a public service, you see, otherwise they will lose their [food ration] card".[4] And indeed, four to five really packed vehicles left every hour, every day, taking refugees back to Rhino Camp refugee settlement to

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[2] Interview with LC1 Chairman of Paridi village, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018; Interview with Deputy Refugee Desk Officer, Arua Town, 23 May 2018.

[3] In 2018, UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the Ugandan government body in charge of refugee management undertook a massive re-registration of the refugees in Uganda following allegations of officials inflating refugee figures, which resulted in a scandal that involved both government officials and UNHCR Uganda representatives. (See *The Monitor*, 2018).

[4] Personal conversation with taxi driver, Arua Town, 23 May 2018.

re-register as refugees. Similar perceptions of high numbers of town-based refugees have been confirmed by recent studies on self-settled refugees in small Ugandan towns (Dawa, 2020; VNG International, 2018).

Differently from Kampala, where limited assistance is available in the form of protection (UNHCR, 2018) and, in the second half of 2020, of initiatives contrasting the socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 lockdown (Khan, 2020), refugees residing in all the other urban centres receive no or very limited assistance (VNG International, 2018).

Adjumani town is a small urban centre hosting the headquarter of Adjumani District. The district itself was created in 1997, during another period of massive refugee inflow from the then Sudan. According to the National Census conducted in 2014, the Town Council has a population of 42 000, but this number does not account for the new refugee arrivals since 2014. No data on urban refugees residing in the town are available except for those provided by the Adjumani District five-year Development Plan 2015/2016–2019/2020[5] that speaks of 2 054 town-based refugees. However, this number referred to a total refugee population in Adjumani District of 88 000, whereas by November 2020 this number had reached over 215 000.[6]

Consistently with the literature on urban self-settled refugees, life in Adjumani town is more difficult for refugees than in the settlements. In town, their status becomes legally vulnerable: even if refugees enjoy freedom of movement, their presence can potentially be questioned at any time for various reasons (national security, public health, etc.) that leave a relatively high degree of arbitrary power in the hands of Ugandan authorities, as expressed in the *Refugee Act* (Government of Uganda, 2006). Secondly, life in town is more expensive: like Ugandan citizens, the refugees need to pay for basic services such as schools and health centres, for taxes and for rents. Moreover, because they are thought to receive assistance by humanitarian organisations, they are sometimes charged higher prices than the locals for the same services (Stark et al., 2015). Thirdly, the environment in town is generally less friendly than in the settlements, and refugees are often stigmatised and discriminated against on the basis of popular stereotypes (Dawa, 2020). The Dinka, for example, are often described as lazy and "wild",[7] and can often

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[5] Available at http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ADJUMANI-DISTRICT-DDPII-2015-2016-to-2019-2020.pdf (15/12/2021).

[6] See the Ugandan Refugee Response Portal at: https://ugandarefugees.org/en/country/uga (11/12/2020).

[7] Interview with LC1 Secretary Karoko village, Adjumani town, 21 May 2018; LC1 Chairman of Patua village, Adjumani town, 14 May 2018.

have a hard time in finding accommodation to rent, as landlords would say that they "destroy [their] houses".[8] Even the Madi, who share language and customs with the local Ugandan population, are sometimes discriminated against. Several Madi refugee women reported being insulted and called *kevokevo* by Ugandan urban dwellers during a focus group discussion, explaining that *kevokevo* is the Madi expression for someone who comes and goes and who is incapable of taking care of their things.[9]

While the benefits brought by refugee presence in terms of service availability and market expansion are more visible near the settlements, in town the host community rather lamented an increase in the price of housing and other items, as well as growing market competition particularly in low-capital businesses such as trade in second-hand clothes or in beans and maize – refugees' food rations, some of which are routinely sold on the local market as a cash-earning strategy for them. These negative perceptions contribute to explaining urban dwellers' relatively poor opinion of the refugees, and particularly of self-settled ones, as they are seen as competitors for the same scarce resources.

Notwithstanding the various forms of discrimination – which range from the imposition of higher fees to access the same services to limited inclusion in the formal job and house rental markets[10] – refugees choose to move out of the settlements for several reasons. Women often cited access to better and less crowded schools for their children, together with access to health care for themselves or close relatives.[11] Male interviewees focused rather on the availability of jobs and business opportunities.[12] Working in town, however, did not necessarily entail leaving the refugee settlement: commuting between the town and the nearest settlements was common and allowed ref-

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[8] Interview with LC1 Secretary Karoko village, Adjumani town, 21 May 2018. The Dinka also bear the brunt of being often considered the cause of the civil war in South Sudan due to the fact that the President Salva Kiir is a Dinka and that the war has been largely framed in ethnic terms and are therefore also discriminated against by other South Sudanese communities.

[9] Interview with female self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018; focus group discussion of female self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018.

[10] Interview with male self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 4 May 2018; LC1 Secretary Karoko village, Adjumani town, 21 May 2018; female self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 21 May 2018.

[11] Interviews with three female self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 30 April 2018; 1 May 2018; 2 May 2018; focus group discussion of female self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018.

[12] Interviews with two male self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 5 May 2018.

ugees to save money as they did not need to rent a house. Security was also a major concern among refugees residing in town. In informal conversations I had in Adjumani and Kampala, frequent allegations were made by several of my informants about a "black car" of the South Sudanese security forces raiding the settlements at night in search for political opponents and causing disappearances.[13] People concerned about being wanted by the South Sudanese security preferred the anonymity of the town to the promiscuity of the settlements where everybody knew each other and the risk of being identified was therefore higher.

Strategies of social navigation in Adjumani town

As these accounts have shown, refugees typically decide to leave the settlements to address individual problems and situations, sometimes deriving from their condition of refugee. Once in town, they barely ever mobilise their refugee identity and rather try to conceal it, adopting individual strategies to navigate their challenges and to legitimise their presence as urban dwellers (de Simone, 2020).

Whilst various types of refugee associations and local authorities exist in refugee settlements, refugees in Adjumani town seemed to refer directly to the LC1 chairperson of the village where they resided for any problem of everyday life, from theft to the breakdown of boreholes.[14] This relation was an individual one, sometimes trespassing towards friendship, and often becoming a vital support to cope with everyday problems (Simone, 2004).[15] All refugees actively participated, through various forms of support including financial, to local social events such as weddings and funerals; however, thanks to this close relationship with LC1, some were asked to become more involved in community life. People that could count on these relationships and were asked to take on some form of community leadership were more often refugees that had been living in the area since the 1990s or earlier. One example was that of a 40-year-woman from the South Sudanese Madi com-

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[13] All of them have asked not to be mentioned in the research and to avoid giving any information that could lead to their identification.

[14] Focus group discussion of female self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018.

[15] This was confirmed also by respondents who experienced actual barriers in their relations with the locals, such as an elderly lady who did neither speak the local language nor English, who said that in case of any problem she would relate to her neighbour – who spoke both her native language Kuku and Madi – to address the LC1. Interview with female self-settled refugee, Paridi village, Adjumani town, 5 May 2018.

munity that had been living in Adjumani since the 1990s: she became a member of the local Village Health Committee in charge of monitoring the hygiene situation of the village and of making sure that all residents, including disabled persons, had adequate access to health care upon request of the LC1 chairperson. As she was Madi and knew the area quite well for having resided there for years, he thought that she would provide an effective link with the growing non-Madi speaking self-settled refugee community in the area. In other cases, the close relationship with the LC1 chairperson went as far as allowing refugee participation in LC1 (informal) elections,[16] and to acquire a Ugandan ID card through the recommendation of the LC1 of their village of residence.[17]

Social bonds with local authorities or other local entrepreneurs were also important to start an economic activity, which was one of the major reasons for many refugees to move to town. Job opportunities as employees in Adjumani were not many – the government and international aid agencies being the main employers but not keen on hiring non-Ugandan nationals. While citizenship was a requisite to work in public offices, international agencies and private companies usually avoided employing refugees for fear of retaliation form the local community,[18] which routinely accused aid agencies of importing manpower from other parts of the country.[19] Starting up a small business was therefore the most common way through which refugees tried to earn an income; to do so, either they partnered with local entrepreneurs or they relied on relations with local authorities.

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[16] Interview with LC1 Chairman of Paridi village, Adjumani town, 1 May 2018; LC1 Chairman of Minia East village, Adjumani town, 21 May 2018; LC1 Chairman of Patua village, Adjumani town, 14 May 2018. LC1 elections were officially held in 2018 for the first time since 2001. In between, informal elections were periodically organised locally, sometimes just to legitimise the incumbent office holder.

[17] Until the creation of the National Identification and Registration Authority in 2015, holding an ID card released by the LC1 enabled access to services and rights reserved for Ugandan citizens, as there was very limited cross-checking of different databases. It was enough, for example, to be registered for voting in national elections, because the Electoral Commission and the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration would not cross-check the information about people holding such locally issued ID cards as no national registry of released ID cards existed. Informal conversation with Ugandan journalist, Adjumani town, 2018.

[18] Interview with male self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 4 May 2018; Informal conversation with international NGO representative in Adjumani town.

[19] Informal conversation with aid workers in Adjumani town and Gulu.

Susan, a young South Sudanese woman living in Adjumani town adopted the first strategy. In 2016 a local church group gave her some cassava as a gift. She brewed the local beer from the cassava and sold it from her house, and then reinvested her income to buy more cassava. As her brewery business grew, she decided she wanted to expand it and move to the market instead of selling from her house. She partnered with her Ugandan friend Anita, whom she met at the church group, and started buying vegetables from a wholesaler once a week. They moved to Awindiri Market, Adjumani town food market, where they regularly pay market dues but have a higher visibility and earn enough to share the income and support their children. Both claim to have equal rights of working as vendors at the market, yet Susan usually stays a step back from Anita: it is the latter who interacts with local authorities, suppliers and strangers in general – indeed, she was also the one who first agreed to talk to me and my research assistant.[20]

Friendship relations remain vital to enable the start-up of individual business activities. Paul started a carpentry shop in Adjumani Town centre. It was not the first time that he was displaced to Adjumani: in the 1990s, as a youth, he went to school there and his connections endured up to the present day. Two of his friends became LC1 chairmen of villages within Adjumani Town Council. When he was displaced again in 2014, he went back to Adjumani town, rented a house in the village of one of his LC1 friends and started the workshop in the village of his other LC1 friend. The mediation of the latter LC1 helped him to resolve a dispute with his workshop landlord and to expand his business, which employed 12 people – including seven Ugandan nationals. Even though he complained about discrimination against refugee entrepreneurs by international NGOs and government agencies, his business was flourishing and well-integrated in the local economic fabric in spite of his refugee status.[21]

Self-settled refugee women typically undertake smaller informal businesses such as the production of beer, pancakes or beaded jewellery which are then sold informally from their houses without paying taxes or market dues. They consider their participation to Village Savings and Loans Associations, commonly known as *assusu* in the Madi language, as a good strategy to legitimate this kind of business. *Assusu* have been initiated by develop-

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[20] Interview with two female vendors (one self-settled refugee and one Ugandan national) at Awindiri Market, Adjumani town, 9 May 2018. Bjørkhaug, Bøås, and Kebede (2017) report a similar dynamic with Ivorian refugees in Liberia.

[21] Interview with male self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 4 May 2018.

ment projects in the late 1990s and are currently a common form of women's grassroots organisation, enabling their members to borrow small sums of money for extraordinary family expenses such as burials, school examination fees, etc., or for starting or expanding business activities. Being a member of *assusu* increased women's perception of security and acceptance by the local community. Nine out of 17 self-settled refugee women participating to a focus group discussion in Adjumani Town reported being part of *assusu* to carry out their small businesses without being questioned by Ugandan authorities. One of them explained: "People know we do that, it is fine with the local government because they know that we are members of *assusu*, they know who we are and where we live so we cannot do anything bad".[22]

These examples speak to the strategies of social navigation that self-settled refugees adopt to overcome their daily challenges and to ultimately improve their everyday perception of security. As one of my female interviewees put it, they aim at "becoming more Ugandan", leaving aside their refugee identity – which in the town often becomes a liability rather than an asset – and relying on other more individual identities: that of resident, of businessman, of member of *assusu*. They do so in a deliberate way, conscious of the consequences that this has for their capacity of being recognised rights or entitlements – in other words, on their capacity of producing scenarios that are more favourable to them, navigating through structural constraints (Vigh, 2009).

While these structural constraints are not changed or removed by refugees' actions, they are mitigated through a number of locally crafted informal arrangements that are deemed to be more effective than legal or formal ones. All refugees interviewed in Adjumani town, for example, showed that the legitimacy of their residence in town derived much more from their capacity to establish good individual relationships with Ugandan neighbours and local authorities than by any legal document. Even in renting a house or a plot of land, the LC1 witnessing an informal lease agreement was considered more effective in terms of tenure security than a formal agreement that could be brought to court, where refugees believed that they would be discriminated against in the resolution of cases.[23]

The process of "becoming more Ugandan" is a slow one, and one that is accessible to people to different degrees, based on their personal resources, skills, and capacity for building the necessary relations. Nevertheless, most of

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[22] Focus group discussion of 17 female self-settled refugees, Adjumani town, 2 May 2018.
[23] Interview with male self-settled refugee, Adjumani town, 4 May 2018.

the people interviewed considered it as a valid strategy to improve their life conditions, even to the detriment of legalising their position at the national level.

Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the expression of agency of self-settled refugees in Adjumani Town, analysing particularly the strategies of social navigation based on cultivation of relationships with Ugandan local authorities, neighbours and friends and on the adoption of various forms of identity that distance themselves from the status of refugee. It has shown that, despite moving in a context characterised by strong structural constraints, self-settled refugees are capable of improving the conditions they face in their everyday life through a number of informal arrangements that help them to navigate their experience of exile. These entail investing in their local social networks but also distancing themselves from the collective identity of refugees, preferring more individual forms of identification that emphasise their belonging to other diverse communities shared with their Ugandan counterparts. It is worth remembering that opting out the formal refugee assistance structure itself requires some sort of background capital, including financial resources and meaningful social relations – including family ones. Although it is not my aim to claim that social relations with the locals is the only variable at play in the successful strategies deployed by self-settled refugees in Adjumani town, evidence suggests that it can be an important one.

Even though the agency expressed by refugees through these strategies of social navigation is not a transformative one, as it does not ultimately change the specific situation of legal vulnerability that self-settled refugees face, it encourages us to assess more carefully the importance of informal local arrangements in the lives of urban self-settled refugees. These might well be more effective in solving people's everyday problems than the more formalised and legal solutions often advocated by international organisations working with refugees. The observation of these practices suggests that the everyday problems facing self-settled refugees might not be very different from those facing any other urban vulnerable social group (Landau, 2014). This idea is confirmed by the effort of self-settled refugees presented in the findings of this chapter to distance themselves from the refugee community and to rather affirm their participation in some other kind of locally rooted community, of business people, of residents, or *assusu* members. The acknowledgement of these practices as a form of self-settled refugees' agency is therefore extremely important as a basis to inform effective policy-making,

in order to avoid, as Landau warns, the counterproductive outcome of making urban refugee communities excessively visible, especially when they are finding other more discreet yet effective ways of navigating their experience of exile (Landau, 2014).

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Chapter 2
Co-Optation, Social Navigation and
Double Presence of Muslim Moroccans in Italy
The Case of the Italian Islamic Confederation

Nicola Di Mauro

Introduction

Events that have shocked Europe in recent years, the latest being Samuel
Paty's assassination in Paris, the political response to these events – in par-
ticular of the French and Turkish presidents Emmanuel Macron and Recep
Tayyip Erdoğan – as well as the Nice and Vienna attacks of October and
November 2020 have repeatedly brought into the spotlight the issue of the
presence of Muslim communities and their compatibility with the societies
and legal systems of European countries. Without delving into the debate on
the current political agenda, it may be stated that Europe is now a mobile
context for Islamic communities. In spite of a now stable and definitive pres-
ence that several studies have long confirmed,[1] the legitimacy of their pres-
ence keeps being questioned.[2]

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[1] A wealth of data is available on Muslims in Europe, and several sources are available for
reference. Here I refer to a major collection of data and analyses entitled *Yearbook of Muslims
in Europe*, that Brill has published every year since 2009. Concerning Italy, the most reliable
institutes publishing yearly reports, alongside the government ones, are Istat, Caritas-
Migrantes, Fondazione Ismu, and Centro Studi e Ricerche Idos.

[2] The illegitimacy of the presence of Muslims in Europe also becomes evident in the defi-
nitions that are attributed not only to migrants from Muslim-majority countries or with large
Islamic minorities, but also to the children of that migratory experience: "According to Wihtol
de Wenden (2004), the consequence of talking about 'second generation' is that the parents'
origin prevails over any other mode of socialisation. Yet is this really their experience, or is it
a fate they are given by some external observer? The scholar believes that the multiple at-
tempts to define immigrants' children reflect a difficulty of the French society [that can be
extended to our case study as well – *author's note*] to consider them as fully entitled citizens.

Abdelmalek Sayad's work revealed, earlier and better than others, the fundamental contradictions of the migrant's condition [*émigré-immigré*], of the *provisoire qui dure* (temporary that lasts) and of the *ubiquité impossible* (impossible ubiquity) of a "double absence" as in the fortunate phrase used as the title of the work edited with Pierre Bourdieu (Sayad, 1999). In his analysis, the children of migrants occupy an even more critical position than their parents at the symbolic level. In this chapter, I will outline the strategies and tactics adopted by some young Moroccan Muslims in Italy in order to inhabit a dense transnational space and, in a mobile context, to achieve what may be called, paraphrasing Sayad, a "double presence".[3]

In the first section, I will outline the theoretical framework within which I have developed my analysis, referring to Sayad's work as well as to a few studies that consider transnationalism critically (Lacroix, 2003; Salih, 2001), and in particular to the concept of *social navigation* developed by Vigh (2009) that several scholars have applied to contexts other than the Danish anthropologist's one.

In the second section, I will briefly describe the transformations of the Moroccan institutional device, which starts from a control system and ends up devising a co-optation system (de Haas, 2007a) that is useful to reaffirm the country's legitimacy and consensus even among those officially defined as the *Marocains du monde*, with special reference to the religious dimension (Bruce, 2019). Furthermore, another factor needs to be taken into consideration in the case of Italy, namely the role of Italian institutions: due to the lack of a well-defined legal system regulating the relationship between the state and the Islamic faith, in the past few years they seem to have involved Morocco and the Moroccan community in Italy in the management of the religious field.

In the third section, I will analyse the case of the *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII – Italian Islamic Confederation), the main subject of the re-

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According to Rea and Tripier, it is as if in the analysis of immigration in Europe there were a red thread that risks pointing out the *illegitimacy of the presence* of immigrants and their children. In particular, the latter are the group whose loyalty to the receiving countries is mostly questioned" (Frisina, 2007, p. 54 – translated by the author).

[3] The phrase "double presence" with reference to Sayad's work is not new. For the specific topic of young people of Moroccan origin, see Barthou (2013). In 2018, at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" my colleague Chiara Anna Cascino and I held a seminar entitled *Islam and Citizenship. Transnational paths of the Moroccan community in Italy*, coordinated by Carlo De Angelo, one of whose lectures was entitled precisely *Double presence. Citizenship beyond borders*. My analysis in this chapter is partly based on that joint work.

search I carried out in Morocco and in Italy between 2016 and 2019. More specifically, it is precisely in this section that I will try to bring to light the strategies and tactics adopted by the members of the youth branch of the organisation who, being able to use the tools provided by the various institutional devices, share in the management of the religious field and try to give themselves a leading political and religious role. In the conclusions, I will relate a few outcomes of my research to the theoretical framework provided in the first part of the chapter.

Smooth sailing

Vigh's theoretical framework rests on long-lasting fieldwork in Bissau, West Africa and with West African migrants in Lisbon – both fluid contexts characterised by uncertainty and quick changes. With the concept of social navigation, the author insists on the idea of movement:

> [It] highlights motion within motion; it is the act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled, and when used to illuminate social life it directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors and actants, individuals and institutions, that engage and move us as we move along (Vigh, 2009, p. 420).

The success of Vigh's theories has led to their application to different contexts (Triandafyllidou, 2015, 2019; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013; Sand, Hakim-Fernández, 2018; Tuckett, 2015; Østergaard Nielsen, Vigh, 2012; Wijntuin, Koster, 2018), in some cases apparently less mobile than those in the Danish anthropologist's work. In fact, the author himself underlined that all social environments are in perpetual motion; what differs from one case to the other is, rather, the "speed of change" (Vigh, 2009, p. 430). Here I am applying the social navigation to a context that is seemingly not as mobile as others, but is in fact subject to forces, thrusts and interferences that constantly change the agents' position, even though such changes are by no means traumatic. I am referring to the Islamic religious sphere in Italy, inhabited and navigated by Muslim Moroccan migrants and by the children of that migratory experience. Social navigation is, more precisely, a heuristic instrument that enables us to rethink the individual or collective agency:

> Invoking "navigation", we thus tacitly acknowledge that the agent is positioned within a force field which moves him and influences his possibilities of movement and positions. Yet, the consequences of this go

deeper than just mending an analytical flaw and adding external influences to our idea of agency. In fact, taking navigation seriously entails a rethinking of the setting in which our lives are configured and reconfigured and of the relationship between the two. Where many social scientific illuminations of practice position people and their movement within relatively stable and solidified social settings, indicated in the words we use to describe the "ground" upon which we move – social structures, arenas, fields or landscapes – something interesting happens when invoking the concept of navigation: our analytical gaze moves toward the way people not just act in but interact with their social environment and adjust their lives to the constant influence (in *potentia* and *presentia*) of social forces and change (Vigh, 2009, p. 433).

According to Foucault, power is a complex strategical situation in a particular society; it is the outcome of power relations between different subjects in the interplay of uneven and mobile relations (Foucault, 1978). Power, therefore, is not held; it is not reserved for the dominant but is crossed by dispute. The dominated, in a more or less conflictual manner, share in the determination of the complex and *mobile* strategic situation within which they move.

This sheds light on the interactions and interferences not only between different social forces and subjects, but also between local, national and international spaces. Over the years, the debate about transnationalism has been quite lively. Here I am referring to a critical analysis of the idea whereby transnational networks seem to relegate national spaces to a marginal role through a gradual de-territorialisation of activities and resources (Lacroix, 2003). Interestingly, the works of a few scholars who have worked in Moroccan communities in Italy have highlighted the complexity of a dense transnational space, including institutional and non-institutional subjects, organised and non-organised subjects. In his work *Le prigioni invisibili. Etnografia multisituata della migrazione marocchina*, Carlo Capello, who worked in the Moroccan community of Turin, underlined the processes that make it possible to maintain economic, social and symbolic relations with one's or one's parents' country of origin (Capello, 2008). Ruba Salih adopted a gender perspective in her work on Moroccan women in the region Emilia Romagna, clearly showing that the nation-state is far from being weakened:

> Particularly in some specific spheres, notably in the control and discipline of migration, the nation-state seems to be far from weakened. Analyses of diasporic groups and hybrids that ignore or overlook this

very fact, I believe, account for a very partial picture of the nature of contemporary migration and certainly fail to see how modern institutions still discriminate on the basis of gender. The ethnography of Moroccan migrant women thus contrasts with the celebratory stances that empha-sise transnational agencies … The nature and quality of women's move-ments and practices should be understood in light of the nature and quali-ty of their membership in the various contexts (that is the household, the state or the wider society at large). In this way, we can see how transna-tionalism may challenge or reproduce inequalities between genders and between places (Salih, 2001, p. 669).

With reference to this, quoting Sayad once again is quite natural, as he states that it is impossible to think of the epic of migration (*fait social total*) and of the foreigner without considering the "idea of the state" that provides the criterion to distinguish between "nationals" and "non-nationals" that de-scribes the foreigner as *expulsable*, which defines the national order as being perturbed by the presence of the foreigner (Sayad, 1999).[4] Sayad (1999) states that the children of migrant families occupy an even more critical po-sition than their parents – they can neither leave the country in which they are engaged, nor even pretend not to be concerned. They are forced to in-vent:

> Par une sorte de revanche ironique de l'histoire, ce sont, précisément, ceux qui on été et sont encore, à la fois, les premières et les dernières vic-times des idéologies nationalistes, celles "de la terre et du sang", qui sont contraints aujourd'hui, pour réaliser leur identité, de s'inventer de toutes pièces la "terre", le "sang", la "langue", l'"ethnie", (qui n'est qu'un eu-phémisme pour dire la "race") ou la "culture", etc., tous les critères "ob-jectifs" qui peuvent servir de "preuves" à l'identité et de motifs pour la revendication de cette identité (Sayad, 1999, pp. 450–451).

So, although the foreigner can acquire the citizenship of another country, a foreigner remains such in the evidence of his/her body, of his/her name and, with reference to the subject of this chapter, in the evidence of his/her "other" religious practice. The young members of the CII inhabit a dense transnational space in which they encounter not only other social forces but also the Moroccan and Italian institutions, and in the interplay of uneven and

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[4] In his essay "*Immigration et 'pensée d'État'*", Sayad relies on the concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu, applying it in his research on Algerian migration in France. Concerning the idea of the foreigner as a perturbing presence, see Di Mauro (2020).

mobile relations they try to navigate in a setting that changes, especially when it is the legitimacy of their very presence that is questioned.

This navigation is definitely smoother than others, with no major shocks, but it still makes it necessary to be constantly on the move to escape the terrible condition of the "double absence", to build one's individual and collective role in the Italian society and at least partly in the Moroccan society, in the European and, finally, transnational space. A number of dimensions are involved in this praxis – from the social to the economic-political, and many more – they are not separate entities, but are connected with one another. Here I focus my attention on the religious dimension, which becomes a symbolic and practical instrument for the affirmation of one's presence.

Co-optation

According to Mohamed Berriane (2018), there are 4 to 5 million Moroccans living abroad – about 12% of the total Moroccan population. Most of them live in Europe. According to the latest *Dossier statistico immigrazione* published by Idos in October 2020, there are about 420 000 Moroccan regular residents in Italy, and about 450 000 according to Caritas-Migrantes. Berriane is the editor of the latest four-year report "*Marocains de l'extérieur*" funded and produced by *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*. The *Fondation* is one of the most important state agencies that make up the Moroccan institutional device in charge of the populace living abroad.

Following the independence of Morocco in 1956, a mass emigration from the country was recorded, first towards north-western Europe, and then starting from the late 1970s, to the Euro-Mediterranean area. At first, Moroccans reached Europe through bilateral labour transfer agreements. Following the economic crisis of the 1970s, the policy of closing borders by north-western European countries and the global neoliberal political-economic restructuring, Moroccan migrants continued to arrive in Europe irregularly, reaching new host countries such as Spain and Italy through family reunification (de Haas, 2007b, 2013; de Haas, Vezzoli, 2010).

Moroccan migration changed, therefore. It was no longer only adult males able to work in factories and mines that migrated: the so-called feminisation of migration began, and families were reconstituted. Therefore, the needs of those who were no longer just workers, including religious ones, emerged in a more complex way. The official definitions of Moroccans abroad also changed. Moroccan workers abroad (*TME – Travailleurs Maro-*

cains à l'Étranger) became Moroccans living abroad (*MRE – Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*), and finally Moroccans of the world (*MDM –Marocains du Monde*).[5]

The Moroccan institutional devices in charge of Moroccans abroad changed as a consequence of the new needs of foreign residents and in the framework of a wider-ranging transformation process. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Morocco experienced a period of political normalisation (Iskander, 2010) after the riots and civic upheaval during the "years of lead"[6] triggered by the harsh reforms imposed by international financial institutions. This normalisation was achieved partly thanks to the co-optation of political and social forces that were previously in opposition to Makhzen (*Maḥzan* – the Moroccan government). In 1997 the USFP (*Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*) won the elections and Youssoufi (*Al Yūsūfī*) – in exile until then – was appointed Prime Minister.

A similar process involved Moroccans living abroad. Until the 1980s, the management of relations with Moroccans abroad was the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and the *Amicales* (guilds, labour organisations tied to the embassies). In his work *Between Courting and Controlling: The Moroccan State and "Its" Emigrants*, the scholar Hein de Haas is quite straightforward in highlighting the harsh control system put in place through embassies, consulates and the *Amicales*: "control and spying networks consisting of Moroccan embassies, consulates, mosques, and government-controlled migrant associations such as the infamous *Fédération des Amicales des Marocains*, better known as "*Amicales*" (*Widadiat* in Arabic) across northwestern Europe" (de Haas, 2007a, p. 17). Later on, the Kingdom shaped new institutional instruments (Belguendouz, 2006; 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2013):
- 1984: Five seats in parliament reserved for Moroccans abroad.
- 1989: Foundation of Bank Al-ʿAmal for the management of remittances and investments of Moroccans abroad.
- 1990: Establishment of *Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger.*

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[5] On the definitions of migrants, once again Sayad (1999) comes to our aid, highlighting how the discourse on the *émigrés* in emigration countries is, at least in a first moment and above all concerning "*immigration de travail*", subordinated to the one on the immigration of immigration countries, the former of which makes use of definitions and categories. On the official definitions of Moroccans abroad by the Kingdom of Morocco, see my article entitled "TME, MRE, Marocains du Monde. Analisi e diagnosi di un dispositivo istituzionale" due in 2022.

[6] "Years of lead" – years of brutal repression by armed forces.

- 1990: Establishment of the *Ministère délégué auprès du Ministre des Affaires Étrangères et de la Coopération Internationale chargé des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration.*
- 2007: Creation of the *Conseil de la Communauté Marocaine à l'Étranger.*
- 2011: Constitutionalisation of the role of Moroccans abroad (articles 16, 17, 18 and 163, Constitution).

In addition to these features, it must be remembered that, in different forms and operating at various levels, all Moroccan institutions participated in the management of the "Moroccans abroad" dossier. Amongst these, the *Ministère des Habous et des affaires islamiques* has taken on an increasingly important role spreading the Moroccan version of Islam,[7] viewing Moroccans abroad as a *vector* (Bruce, 2019). There are quite a number of entities and institutions tied to the royal Ministry extending their activities beyond the national borders; among these is the *Conseil Européen des Ouléma Marocains* (CEOM).

Despite the highs and lows in the lives of the above-mentioned bodies,[8] Morocco uses these institutional devices to "intercept" part of the Moroccan communities abroad and bring them into the Kingdom's political-religious system in the transnational space. In other words, if Moroccans living abroad, namely in Europe and Italy, take the institutional, official entity of Morocco as their point of reference in terms of values and political-religious view, then the Kingdom is able to affirm its own political-religious and value systems beyond its national borders, thus gaining consensus and legitimacy among the communities of Moroccans abroad on the one hand and, on the other hand, acquiring more credit in its relationship with European governments and, specifically, that of Italy.

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[7] I am referring to the official Moroccan version of Islam, as defined in the Constitution: "The Nation relies for its collective life on the federative constants [*constantes federatrices*], on the occurrence of moderate Muslim religion, [on] the national unity of its multiple components [*affluents*], [on] the constitutional monarchy and [on] democratic choice" – art. 1 Constitution, translated (from French) by J. J. Ruchti, available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011?lang=en (22/02/2021). For the official texts see Dahir n° 1-11-91 du 27 chaabane 1432 (29 juillet 2011) portant promulgation du texte de la Constitution, in Bulletin Officiel n° 5964 bis, 28 chaabane 1432 (30-07-2011), p. 4. In the Arabic version of the Constitution, "moderate Muslim religion" ("*religion musulmane modérée*" in French) is *al-dīn al-islāmī al-samḥ.*

[8] On this topic, see in particular Belguendouz's activities and works.

It should also be pointed out that the Islamic religious field is a contested space inhabited by subjects with different references among transnational networks, institutions and agencies of Islamic majority countries, as well as Islamic associations and organisations. In the religious experience it is a dispute among multiple subjects, with different stances and orientations, some of whom have their main field of origin and expression in Morocco and can decide whether or not to adhere to the Kingdom's option.[9] This dispute concerns the Italian space as well, in which the Italian institutional device is clearly the other protagonist in the management of the Islamic religious field.

Article 8 of the Italian Constitution provides that the *Intesa* (Agreement) regulates the relations between the state and the religious faiths other than the Roman Catholic one. As early as the 1990s a few drafts of agreements were submitted by Islamic organisations to the Italian Presidency of the Council.[10] As of today, however, unlike other religious faiths and their organisations, Islam and its representatives have not reached an *Intesa* with the Italian state. Without an organic law on religious freedom that transposes in full the constitutional provisions on the matter (artt. 3, 8 and 19 Const.), the relevant legislation is still that dating back to Fascist times, i.e. Law no. 1159 of 24 June 1929 on *culti ammessi* (allowed worships) and following amendments, which provides for the recognition of the legal person by means of a decree of the President of the Republic for an organism of a religious faith wishing to benefit from the rights reserved for institutions of worship. Paolo Naso clearly states that Italian legislation regarding the relations between the state and the religions other than the Catholic one creates a hierarchy, a pyramid of rights, at the bottom of which lies Islam, which does not enjoy any of the benefits envisaged by the Italian legal system (Naso, 2018, pp. 93–

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[9] I cannot delve deeper into a topic that is not the focus of this chapter. For my purposes, it will be sufficient to say that the dispute in the Moroccan Islamic religious sphere, between the Kingdom and the political forces somehow belonging to Moroccan political Islamism, is one that has taken on various forms outside the national borders, including in Italy. For a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, see Di Mauro (2021).

[10] Drafts of an *Intesa* have been submitted by *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (Union of Italian Islamic Communities – UCOII) (1992), by *Associazione dei Musulmani Italiani* (Association of Italian Muslims – AMI) (1994) and by *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (Italian Islamic Religious Community – COREIS) (1996); a request was also submitted by *Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia* (Italian Islamic Cultural Centre – CICI) (1993). The drafts of the *Intesa* can be found in the journal *Quaderni di Diritto e Politica Ecclesiastica* as indicated by Mancuso (2012). Several texts discuss in depth the topic of the drafts of *Intesa* of the 1990s: see Cilardo (2002).

96).[11] Naso has also related this Islamic exception to a bias against Islamic communities caused by an overlapping of these communities with the *jihadi* trends, and thus to their identification with a risk for security: "this fear has brought about an attitude of extreme caution among policy-makers in carrying out actions and making decisions that might sound in favour of the Islamic community" (Naso, 2018, p. 73, translated by the author).

Proof of this, in my opinion, was the establishment, in 2005, of a specific consulting body called *Consulta* – later *Comitato* (Commission) – for Italian Islam at the Ministry of the Interior, supported in the past few years by the Council for Relations with Italian Islam, the latter coordinated precisely by Paolo Naso, who is my recommended source for the changing fortunes of these institutional tables (Naso, 2018; 2019). The framework of the relations between institutions and Islamic communities is therefore a mobile one. On the one hand, the security-based approach questions the formal recognition of the country's second-largest religious community in terms of number of members after Catholicism;[12] on the other hand, the alternation of political forces determines the priorities of the governments and, with them, the alternation of steps forwards and backwards in the management of the Islamic religious field in Italy.

Since the early 1990s, the issue of the formal recognition of the Islamic religion was gradually brought onto the government's political agenda. In 2017 the *Patto nazionale per un islam italiano* (in full, the "National Pact for an Italian Islam as the expression of an open, integrated community accept-

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[11] The legal person has been granted only to the CICI, whose limit is that it is not representative, in spite of its relations and complementarity – on the basis of a common reference in the Kingdom of Morocco – with *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII), which is made up of regional federations and groups in a number of worship centres. There is no religious staff appointed by the ministry in compliance with the law on *culti ammessi* (Naso, 2019).

[12] It is difficult to estimate the number of Muslims present in the country. There is no classification based on religion. All data is based on the migrants' nationalities and on the percentage of Muslims out of the total population of the countries of origin with an Islamic majority or with large Islamic minorities. It is therefore difficult to take into account the various faiths or beliefs and to understand how many have been converted. In spite of the wide margin for error, it can certainly be stated that, with a population ranging between 1.5 and 2 million people according to the survey, Islam in Italy is the second most widespread faith after Catholicism. However, it should be pointed out that another religious minority in Italy challenges the primacy of Islamic communities – depending on the year and the method of survey. It is the Christian Orthodox minority, which is made up mainly of migrants from Eastern Europe. For updated data, see the above-mentioned *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2020*.

ing the values and principles of the state's legal system") was established. The *Patto*, written with the collaboration of *Consiglio per i rapporti con l'islam italiano* (Council for Relations with Italian Islam), has been seen by many as a major step towards reaching the *Intesa* to which the text makes explicit reference. However, it should be admitted that the *Patto* has produced no result whatsoever and that it seems biased by an evident security-based approach. The then minister Minniti presented the document at a press conference, calling it the "Convenant of the Lost Sheep"; the text stresses transparency concerning funding and preaching, and there are many references to the fight against religious radicalism.[13] The *Patto* was undersigned by the Ministry of the Interior and by the most representative Islamic organisations, including *Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia* (CICI), *Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana* (COREIS), *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (UCOII) and *Confederazione Islamica Italiana* (CII). It seems that these organisations have accepted the approach and cooptation by the Italian government, though in varying forms. It would be more appropriate to talk of a continuous, complex negotiation which emerges at the local level in particular (Giorgi, 2018). However, we may say that the approach of the Italian institutions has contributed to the affirmation of a self-defined moderate option in the Islamic religious field. It looks directly to the Kingdom of Morocco and to the CICI, in which Morocco and its diplomatic corps play a leading role – surpassing the economic power of the Saudis, who sponsored and funded the building of Rome's Great Mosque, where the CICI is based – and to the CII, which supports and spreads the Kingdom's official version of Islam.[14] The CII is an independent organisation set up in 2012, also thanks to

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[13] The Ministers of the Interior appointed after Minniti have not continued that type of work so far. Salvini did not convene a table during his office. Lamorgese met Islamic organisations during the Covid emergency to subscribe a protocol for the re-opening of mosques after the lockdown; in addition, other members of the Government Conte II (XVIII legislature) have resumed relations with the Islamic communities. In particular, I am referring to the Minister of Justice Bonafede and, with him, the Penitentiary Administration Department who have subscribed protocols for religious support to Muslim inmates with UCOII (June 2020), CICI and CII (October 2020).

[14] Over time, the Kingdom of Morocco and Moroccans in Italy have taken on an increasingly important role, not because of their relationship, but rather thanks to the transformations that have occurred within Islam and the Islamic communities in Italy – with reference to this, Conti speaks of a delay of Moroccan Islam on the Italian scene (Conti, 2014). It is no coincidence that the presidency of UCOII, with which CICI and CII have been in – sometimes harsh – contrast, has been given to Yassine Lafram, of Moroccan origin. Another Islamic organisation in Italy is *Partecipazione e Spiritualità Musulmana* (Muslim Participation and Spirituali-

the major support of the Moroccan institutional device, and today is one of the most representative organisations at the national level.[15]

The youth of the Italian Islamic Confederation

In order to be put forward as the model for Italian Islam, the official version of Moroccan Islam should be recognised and practised by the community of Muslims in Italy and, above all, by the Moroccan community. The Moroccan institutional device has dedicated its efforts to this purpose, using all the instruments in its power. These include sending imams and preachers (including women) to courses in Islamic sciences and language for people born or grown up in Italy, coordinated by the Hassan II Foundation; European meetings for young Muslims organised by the CEOM; international conferences for Islam in Europe organised by CCME and the organisation of summer journeys back to Morocco. In this way the Moroccan institutional device has come into contact with a growing number of Moroccan Muslims in Italy, who have begun to recognise themselves in the Kingdom's political-religious action and have chosen to take part and play a leading role in it. This contact takes place in the CII, and especially among its young members. According to Ghoufran Hajraoui,

> Imams here are only self-taught volunteers who take care of religion; they learn by themselves, without formal education. Therefore, if we organise an event, Morocco and the Ministry take care of sending [staff] to educate imams abroad. Again, contextualising it, that is to say, taking into account the social context, providing them with the instruments that

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ty), whose reference is Moroccan *al-ʿAdl wa al-Iḥsān*. The latter is linked to the personality of *šaīḫ* ʿAbd Al-Salām Yāsīn, who passed away in 2012 and who, in his famous open letter addressed to King Ḥassan II in 1974 and entitled 'Islam or the Deluge', had questioned the adherence to the religious principles of the King's conduct and government, which caused him to serve a sentence in a psychiatric prison. Such detention was no hindrance to the growth of the organisation that took the name it still has today, *al-ʿAdl wa al-Iḥsān*, in 1987, after some successful publications and after failing to receive the authorisation to formally set up the group. We may say that in Italy there has been a gradual Moroccanisation of Islam: on this topic, see Di Mauro (2021).

   [15] A great deal of information about CII was given to me by Massimo ʿAbd Allāh Cozzolino, Secretary General of the organisation. More specifically, here I am referring to my interview to him in 2017 at the Mosque of Piazza Mercato, Naples, managed by the Islamic cultural organisation Zayd bin Ṯābit.

are necessary in that particular context. Because being in Morocco is not the same as being in Europe or in the West.[16]

Ghoufran Hajraoui was born in Turin in 1997 and is the eldest of four sisters; she is the daughter of the CII's President Moustapha Hajraoui and one of the leading figures among the Young members of the Italian Islamic Confederation. She graduated at University of Turin with a thesis on the ecological transition strategies of Morocco; she speaks Arabic, the first language she learned at home, Italian, English and understands French. She is married, the nuclear family is in Turin, in Italy there are her other uncles and cousins, especially in Piedmont. Ghoufran's parents arrived in Italy from Bejaad, in the Khouribga province. From her words one can infer the significance of the Moroccan institutional device for Moroccans in Italy concerning the transmission of religious knowledge. Ghoufran sees an opportunity for education and growth in the field of religion. The strategy is to benefit from the resources provided to have well-prepared religious figures and become able to have a new leadership in the Italian setting. With reference to this, an important initiative that involved several academic centres and in particular the University of Padua, is the PriMED project (*Prevenzione e interazione nello spazio Trans-Mediterraneo* – Prevention and interaction in the Trans-Mediterranean space) which, over the last two years, has been providing training courses for imams, Murshidats and Muslim ministers.[17] The CICI and CII are project partners, or more specifically the collaborating bodies of civil society. Some of the young members of the CII took part in the project's initiatives, including Ghoufran herself and Walid, one of the main informants in my research work, who describes the relations between Italy and Morocco concerning the management of the Islamic religious field as follows:

> Things are moving ahead, the world is changing, Europe is changing, and when faced with certain difficulties, what do you do? You ask those who know more or, if you need to solve a problem concerning Muslims, you call or contact a Muslim country. Unfortunately, geopolitics has led to a situation where there are countries with which it's better not to have any relations. In spite of this, there are countries with which there is a certain political convenience, a certain attention to try and collaborate to solve a problem together. There is Italy, and there is this collaboration with Mo-

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[16] Interview with Ghoufran Hajraoui at the main offices of CII in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018 (All the interviews' extracts have been translated by the author from Italian).

[17] Information about the courses is available at https://primed-miur.it (22/02/2021).

rocco. Why? Because, in my view, Italy has realised first of all that most of the immigrants here are Moroccans. Secondly, they have realised that the Moroccan model, which is not a model created by politics, but is part of the society, of the culture and history of the country – it's the closest model to what Italy would like to achieve.[18]

Walid, born in Turin in 1993, is one of the leaders of the CII Youth and adheres completely to the Kingdom's political-religious system. Walid is married to Ikram who lives in the Biella area. Walid's father arrived in Italy in 1989 and was joined by his two brothers and sister as well as by his wife immediately after the wedding. As a child, Walid attended almost all the mosques in Turin. In the last 15 years he has moved to the suburbs of the city and started attending the South Turin Mosque named after Muḥammad VI, King of Morocco, which is part of the Regional Islamic Federation of Piedmont. In his words, the mobility of the Italian context appears evident. With some countries it is better to have no relations, because – we infer – they are carriers of ideals that each time are defined as conservative, rigid or even radical, and are not, in public discourse, compatible with the societies and legal systems of European countries. The compatibility of the Moroccan model with the Italian society and legal system in particular is due to a moderate, tolerant orientation – adjectives that are both used in the official definitions.

> To be tolerant does not mean not to be traditional or traditionalist in the way we view Islam. Morocco has a strong, deeply rooted Maliki tradition. Better, I would say that it is the only school of thought existing in Morocco, which is quite rigid on certain aspects: it isn't very open on all fronts. The Muslim Brothers in Egypt are light years ahead in certain matters, in certain social issues. Here [the word] tolerance is probably meant more as a sort of "warranty seal", a way to say "there is no room for extremism with us. We have our own way of viewing Islam – the view developed by Moroccan Ulemas who study the Maliki school [...], but we will never accept any extremism [...]".[19]

These are the words of 32-year-old Hassan, who was born in Morocco and has lived in Ferrara since 1993. He has a degree in sports science, a Master's on immigration at the Ca' Foscari University in Venice, and a Master's in

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[18] Interview with Walid Bouknaf at the main offices of CII in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018.

[19] Interview to Hassan Samid, Turin 2018, at the CII offices during a meeting of the CII Youth.

studies on Islam in Europe at University of Padua. He has worked since the age of 19 in the social field, mainly with refugees and children. He also is a soccer and gymnastics trainer. Hassan comes from Fkih Ben Salah, a town known for its strong emigration, in the Béni Mellal-Khenifra region. Hassan independently attended the mosque from an early age, until he became head of the Centre for Islamic Culture in Ferrara and its province, a centre that has had the same leadership since the 1990s. He highlights the key point very clearly. Tolerance as a "warranty seal", no room for extremism, which – in the Italian mobile context, where the presence of Muslims is questioned precisely because it is considered a synonym of closeness to Jihadism – becomes a symbolic instrument to reaffirm their being part of the political, social and religious body of the country. When discussing the official version of Moroccan Islam as a model for Italy, Hassan's words express very clearly their strategic re-positioning in the changing context and with reference to the strategic goal of receiving a formal recognition for the Islamic communities:

> To tell the truth, if you had asked me the same question ten years ago, I would have answered, No, that's not good, we need an Italian Islam. But I also think we must be wise and keep our feet on the ground [...]. I come from a mosque that has been a member of UCOII. And this is what we are talking about: we know that this is probably not the best time – let's say – to rely on organisations that have very close relations with Gulf countries. ... This doesn't mean giving up the idea of an Islam independent from other nations. It doesn't mean giving up. Rather, it means to look at the real situation, to consider several factors. The first is that the majority of Muslims in Italy are Moroccan – and this is by no means a secondary factor. Immigration is still strongly connected to Morocco, this is not the Netherlands or France, which do retain some relationship with Morocco anyway: ... here there are people who were born in Morocco ..., there is still a strong bond. On top of that ... Morocco, beside being a socially and politically stable country, is also a country that gives a major contribution to Europe through its intelligence. It is also well structured as an Islamic country, with a solid religious education. In my opinion, it has all that is needed to be a guide for Islam in Italy. I don't think it's a bad thing to help each other .... Of course, this shouldn't be a form of control, but must become a form of support – maybe a guarantee.[20]

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[20] Interview to Hassan Samid, Turin 2018, at the CII offices during a meeting of the CII Youth.

On both the symbolic and practical levels, then, the CII Youth make use of the instruments provided by the various institutional devices, share in the management of the religious field, try to build a political and religious role for themselves, re-position themselves in the changing context and even with respect to their parents' generation, who still make up the main part of the leadership. With reference to this, Ghoufran, the CII President's daughter, clarifies the difference between the so-called first generation who were always concerned with the same things, namely questions regarding practice and worship, and the so-called second generation, who are capable of a more fruitful projection outside the community: "Our goal is also to open mosques to others and turn the whole of the social context into one thing".[21] On this particular aspect it is Ezzedine, another member of the CII Youth, who talks about the definition of a repositioning for his generation, who will have to be able to reshape the symbolic and practical matters they have to handle in order to adapt them to the context in which they operate:

> The differences between the first and second generation lie in the wider knowledge that young people have of the country, of the Italian language and of the Italian society. Because yes – we are originally from Morocco, some were born in Morocco, some were born here – but we grew up here and we are by all means Italian. We reason the way Italians do, we think as Italians, we study at Italian schools and universities. We know the Italian context better. We know how Italians think. ... The first generation think as Moroccans, while young people tend to understand more, the dialogue is easier, as it is easier to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes. We do thank the first generation for the great work they have done at all

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[21] Here is the full text of part of the interview focusing on the above-mentioned issue, to give a better sense of her words.

Ghoufran Hajraoui: "The first generation might be a little more sedentary, they always seem to think of the same things – prayer, Ramaḍān, the celebration – they always rent the hall – they take care of the community. Conversely, the Young, having grown up here, feel that they grew up with Italians … they have that group of guys who are friends, but brothers too … You don't feel that difference that much anymore".

Nicola Di Mauro: "Is it as if the first generation were more concerned with the community, while the second generation were more projected towards the society?".

Ghoufran Hajraoui: "Exactly. Our goal is also to open the mosques to others and to turn the whole social context into one thing only. This is the advantage that the adults obtain from us, so to say … They invest in our energy and in our will to do things. They are often reluctant, they don't want to do certain things … we are a little more confident … The first impact is always a little difficult … We need to find a balance" (Interview with Ghoufran Hajraoui at the main offices of Confederazione Islamica Italiana in via Ernesto Lugaro, Turin, 2018).

levels. They have contributed, for what was in their power, to the opening of worship centres, to the possibility for Muslims to gather. The harder work will be on the next generation, however: to take the legacy of the adults and put it on the agenda of Italy in an Italian Islamic context. So, as we said earlier, the starting point is a moderate and tolerant Islam with its European, Italian peculiarity.[22]

Ezzedine was born in Morocco in 1992 and arrived in Italy at the age of seven to join his father in the province of Turin. He studies at university and works in an engineering company that does quality control on car components. The nuclear family is made up of the parents, two sons and two daughters. The rest of the family is divided between Italy and Morocco. They come from Settat, in the Casablanca region, but they moved to Khouribga before getting to Rivarolo Canavese, a small town in the province of Turin. His view of the European and Italian society is his most evident trait as well as the main concern of the action of CII as a whole. Still, we may state that the young members of CII inhabit a dense transnational space in a more intense manner. They affirm the principle of a different religious existence, travel to Morocco, endow themselves with the instruments they deem necessary and then return to Italy, to be protagonists in the management of the Islamic religious field and in the negotiation with the Italian society and institutions for the full enjoyment of citizen rights.

Double presence

This chapter shows how the national institutional devices, with all their ideological legacy, occupy the transnational space in which power relations between dominant and dominated intensify, especially when we talk of migrants and children of the migratory experience. In this space, the interplay takes place of *uneven and mobile relations* mentioned at the beginning. In this dense transnational space, the young members of CII move, changing their positioning. What the fieldwork seems to bring to the surface most clearly is their concern with the legitimacy of the action in the religious field, in a context in which Islam has become an issue of security (Cesari, 2012). Faced with the hypothesis of being left out of the processes concerning the management of the religious field, the CII Youth choose to adopt the

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[22] Interview to Azzedine Ramli at the mosque named after Muḥammad VI, King of Morocco, in via Genova, Turin, 2018.

option provided by the Kingdom of Morocco, accepting the idea of an Islam that describes itself as moderate and tolerant. Thus, they enter into a complex relation with the Moroccan institutions and at the same time, share with them in the management of the Islamic religious field in Italy producing a complex strategic situation that is itself the outcome of power relations between different subjects. The young members of CII are positioned within a force field which moves them and influences their positions and possibilities for movement. They not only act within their social environment but interact with it, and with all actors crowding the transnational space. Their agency lies precisely in their interaction with institutional, social and political subjects, with religious communities, with society. This constant interaction constantly reconfigures their positioning and determines the next movement.

This interaction allows the youth of CII not only to establish relations with the institutional subjects that determine the management of the religious field. In a context without resources in Islamic religious terms, Ghoufran, Walid, Hassan and Azzedine have access to the resources, religious knowledge and symbolic matter that are necessary to gain leadership in the Italian Islamic religious field. As Azzedine stated, these are made available by the Kingdom of Morocco as a starting point; the strategic aim is to give life to an autonomous religious experience fully within the Italian context – a minority context for Muslims, a secular context with a Catholic majority. This goal is achievable thanks to the tactical positioning that I have tried to describe in this chapter, of aligning themselves with the moderate, tolerant form of Islam officially promoted by Morocco, compatible with Italian laws and religiosity. In this way they reaffirm the legitimacy of a presence that is constantly questioned.

The result for now seems to be a *double presence*. On the one hand, young Moroccans in Italy recognise their role as they take on the burden of a religious and symbolic legacy reproduced beyond Morocco's national borders. On the other hand, in the Italian society they live in they reaffirm their own being as an integral part of those political, social and religious bodies. In conclusion, however, it can be stated, that this is not a mere reproduction of their original position – which might even risk reproducing power relations and inequalities. The words and actions of the CII Youth show a will to shape the symbolic matter they make their own in order to give life to an entirely autonomous religious experience – independent even from that of their parents. In this sense they tactically reconstruct their individual and collective profile so as to be able to strategically determine the management of the Islamic religious sphere in Italy.

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Chapter 3
The Complexities of Return Migration
Agency in the Life Stories of Returnees to Morocco within an Assisted
Voluntary Return Programme

Lucia Ragazzi

Introduction

The concept of *return* in the field of migration has been examined in diverse ways, and with increasing attention. In particular, since the 1980s, the issue has been gaining greater impetus in academic literature. However, interpretations are rarely unequivocal, as return is a widespread as much as a poorly measurable phenomenon, while the existence of very different types of return and little quantitative data on a large scale make it hard to compare the variety and complexity of its forms in an organic way (Cassarino, 2004). This research aims to contribute to the literature by proposing the use of *agency* as an interpretative tool for analysing life stories. It will do so by taking a closer look at narratives collected in the frame of an Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme from France to Morocco, that is presented here as a case study.

In recent years, return has become one of the pillars of the European migration strategy, as expressed in the Directive 2008/115/EC (European Union, 2008), commonly known as the *Return Directive*. The latter provides a definition of return as:

> the process of a non-EU national going back – whether in voluntary compliance with an obligation to return, or enforced – to his or her country of origin, a country of transit in accordance with EU or bilateral readmission agreements or other arrangements, or another non-EU country, to which the non-EU national concerned voluntarily decides to return and in which he or she will be accepted.

The centrality of return in the European strategic migration policy reflects the priority of increasing the flow of returns, with a preference for voluntary returns rather than forced ones. The preferred mode is through the AVR scheme. In the definition of the European Commission, a voluntary return programme is a "programme to support (e.g. financial, organisational, counselling) the return, possibly including reintegration measures, of a returnee by the state or by a third party, for example an international organisation".[1]

In this chapter, this reflection is applied to the case study of a return project from France to Morocco, carried out by the Italian NGO CEFA (*Comitato Europeo per la Formazione e l'Agricoltura*) as a service provider for the *Office Français de l'Immigration et Intégration* (OFII) of the French Ministry of the Interior. The author of the study worked as a project officer in the OFII project for one year between 2019 and 2020, assisting in the daily running of the activities and participating in the assistance and reintegration services provided to returnees. As a personal initiative, in the summer of 2019 the author, along with the field assistant also involved in the project, collected interviews to project participants on their experience of migration and their decision to return. This study is the result of the combination of the project data and an analysis of these life stories, with the vantage point of a practitioner in an AVR project. The study takes into consideration a database of data from 67 beneficiaries and makes a comparison with autobiographical narratives of selected beneficiaries. The analysis is therefore based on two levels: database and life stories. It identifies general trends, in particular regarding the reasons for departure and return, in order to understand and deconstruct the decision and the experience of return, using an actor-based perspective to highlight the determining factors beyond the categorisations imposed by the fact of being framed in a specific AVR project. In so doing, it allows to reflect on various aspects of the decisional process leading to return, from personal aspiration to structural limitations, and appreciate how they weight into the level of agency expressed with this choice.

This chapter will first introduce categories and concepts often associated with return migration in either academia or policy-making, suggesting how some of these entail problematic dichotomies that might hamper the understanding of the complexity of the itinerary that leads to the decision to return. It then introduces an actor-based perspective as a tool to overcome the oversimplification induced by such categories, before outlining the structural

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[1] Glossary of DG Home of the European Commission, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary_en (4/2/2021).

reality of AVR projects in Europe and AVR projects run by CEFA in Morocco, whose functioning has a role in shaping the options presented to migrants in their mobility path. The study continues with the case study analysis in its two building blocks, database and life stories analysis, and concludes with findings on the relevance of an actor-based perspective in the frame of voluntary return migration.

Return migration beyond the bureaucratic perspective

This study was carried out in a phase of increase in the rate of returns. As the number of return decisions[2] had increased from 404 715 in 2014 to 491 195 in 2019, according to Eurostat (2020a; 2020b), the statistical office of the European Union, the number of people who actually returned to their country of origin had increased from 129 155 in 2014 to 142 320 in 2019. As for AVR programmes, between 2014 and 2017 the rate of people who returned voluntarily to their country of origin had almost tripled (approximately 26 100 in 2014, 76 000 in 2017) (Díaz Crego, Clarós, 2019). Attention to the phenomenon among international organisations and academia has increased accordingly, highlighting some controversial points related to their rationale and implementation.

Among the problems that have been highlighted, the concept of voluntariness that constitutes the basis of AVR programmes appears particularly crucial. In the policies underlying assisted return projects, voluntary return is defined as "the assisted or independent return to the country of origin, transit or third country based on the free will of the returnee". Voluntariness is therefore merely identified in the lack of coercion. Following this logic, any type of return that takes place without the use of force is considered voluntary. The result is a particularly broad notion of voluntariness within which different degrees can be identified: from the return of a person who independently chooses to leave the host country to return to the country of origin, to that of a person who chooses to return because of the absence or expiry of a residence permit. In the second case, the alternative of risking a forced return expresses a very different level of agency (Black, Gent, 2006). In support of this logic, it is interesting to note that Dutch authorities use the notion of "independent return"

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[2] The glossary of DG Home of the European Commission defines a return decision as "an administrative or judicial decision or act stating or declaring the stay of a non-EU national to be illegal and imposing or stating an obligation to return". Available at https://ec.europa.eu/immigration/glossary_en (9/12/2021).

to indicate cases where a person chooses to return even when he or she is required to leave the country anyways (Beltman, 2012).

In the institutional discourse on return, there is a common narrative associated with return migration that sees the returnee as a development agent to the country of origin. Return thus becomes not only an effective instrument for the reduction of the migrant population in the territory of the EU, but also an innovative asset for the promotion of peace and development at an international level. This logic sees the migrant as depositary of both the right and the responsibility to improve the conditions of his country of origin through the experiences and skills acquired during his/her migratory experience (Van Houte, Davids, 2014). Policies that promote voluntary return place a particular emphasis on its sustainability. As Black and Gent note, the institutional approach tends to see return as a durable solution achieved through an effective reintegration on the socio-economic front. Although voluntary returns produce generally better results than forced ones in terms of social and economic reintegration, a growing body of research on the subject has drawn attention to the need to analyse the circumstances that determine the choice of return on a case-by-case basis. This allows one to identify how the results of reintegration vary according to the returnee's motivations, the resources available, and his "preparedness" (Black, Gent, 2006).

Identifying return durability as a proof of success reveals the assumption considering the return to the country of origin as a permanent fact that ends the migration experience, of which it would represent a sort of balance sheet. However, this vision does not necessarily correspond to the experiences of many people joining voluntary return projects, who may continue to be involved to various degrees in transnational activities and may consider re-emigrating in the future (Black, Gent, 2006). It appears that in the context of migration policies, return is linked to a series of categorisations that impose its placement in fixed concepts, such as the dichotomy between voluntary return and forced return, and the idea of it as a permanent decision. The tendency to frame return in a rigid classification is also present in the approach of some major migration theories, of which Jean-Pierre Cassarino offers an insightful analysis (Cassarino, 2004). In particular, his study explores how the neoclassical theory and the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) propose a dichotomous vision of return as either success or failure, as they see return as a final moment of evaluation of the migratory experience as ultimately fruitful or not, compared to the objectives supposedly set by the person at the time of departure.

These categorisations do not give space for the complexity and fluidity of migrants' experiences insofar as they do not take into account a number of

collateral factors whose combination is crucial to determine the choice of return, the manner of carrying out return and, consequently, the possibilities of reintegration and future choices. In particular, the success/failure paradigm loses efficacy when conditioned by the situation of irregularity, which may lead to "forced" choices that "interfere" with the initial project or with its natural evolution. It is therefore necessary to adopt a paradigm that highlights the decision-making process that led to the decision to return, as well as the factors that have interfered with the migration experience and the level of choice of the person during his/her mobility path.

Adopting an actor-based perspective

As stated above, adopting an actor-oriented perspective allows consideration of the complexity of factors that determine the migrant's agency in his/her choice to return. Several authors have reflected on how to analyse migrants' agency in the return phase (see for example de Bree, Davids, de Haas, 2010; Cassarino, 2004). This study was particularly inspired by the framework elaborated by van Houte, Siegel and Davids (2016) in their analysis of the return of Afghan citizens from Europe.

The authors identify a framework that analyses human behaviour as the result of the interaction between the structure in which a person is set and individual agency, which is in turn the result of the balance between one's desires and capacities. The framework highlights the role of these factors in influencing the individual's level of agency in the decision to return. The general trends emerging from the database and the individual stories allow the merging of two levels of analysis by focusing on the decision-making process implemented by the person, how it is determined by the structure and what level of individual choice is exercised in the decision to return. In particular, the analysis of the relationship between desire and capacities is of particular relevance in the case of voluntary return, where, as already pointed out, variable levels of voluntariness can be exercised.

Applying this line of analysis to the case of an AVR programme in Morocco, the study takes into account, at a structural level, the role of return in European policies and AVR programmes, which will be quickly outlined, with reference to those implemented by CEFA in Morocco. Given that the study focuses on the decision-making process preceding return, mostly based on circumstances experienced in Europe, the role of Moroccan institutions and the impact of factors related to the broader national context of Morocco will not be examined here.

Return and Assisted Voluntary Return programmes in Europe

Return in European policies

As explained above, the centrality of return in the European migration strategy, and the subsequent importance of AVR programmes such as the OFII device of the French Ministry of the Interior, has been stated in the Return Directive, on the basis of which member states should issue a return decision against non-citizens found to be irregularly present in their territory. The European strategy has placed "a humane and effective return policy" among the four strategic objectives of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) set up for the 2014–20 period and financed with a total of 3 137 billion Euro.[3]

With return gaining an increasingly crucial role in the management of migration, voluntary return is considered as a preferable option over forced return both because it requires fewer resources and because it is politically and morally more acceptable. The implementation of return projects currently falls mostly on member states. Nowadays, the programmes financed by the different countries are mostly implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), but also by other civil society organisations. It is interesting to note that despite the common objectives established by the directive, the programmes differ on the target group of migrants, the modalities of assisted return, and the funding body within the member state.

In particular, programmes can address two types of returnees: those who reside in the host country with a residence permit, and those who do not have a residence permit. This last group includes those who are still in the process of obtaining a residence permit, persons who have exhausted legal means to reside legally in the country, or persons who are in an irregular situation, staying in the country without a legal permit (Beltman, 2012). Depending on the country of reference, AVR programmes can be centrally controlled or outsourced to external entities such as IOM. As for the scope of this study, the OFII device targets migrants that have no legal status in France, or that have been denied asylum. Therefore, people joining the project do so as an alternative to returning to their country of origin without the support that comes from the AVR project, or to staying in the country irregularly, but do not have the alternative of staying in the country with a residence permit.

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[3] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund_en (4/2/2021).

AVR projects carried out by CEFA in Morocco

Italian NGO CEFA has been following AVR projects in Morocco since 2011, managing the return of Moroccan citizens from Italy, France, and Germany within the framework of various projects and services (see Appendix). Between 2011 and May 2019, a total of 229 people had returned to Morocco with CEFA's assistance: 175 from Italy, and 54 from France, while an AVR project from Germany had just started at the time of this research. In all projects, the majority of beneficiaries were males between 30 and 54 years, showing that the group that benefits most of the AVR device is of working age. Younger beneficiaries were the second group, while people in retirement age were the least represented, although still present. All projects provided aid for socio-economic reintegration through a business startup fund (this kind of aid, of variable size, is provided in the form of goods and services). However, not all returnees benefitted from this type of aid, as some of them only applied for emergency aid (for immediate necessities such as medical expenses, housing, furniture and such) provided shortly after the arrival.

The OFII case study

The *Office français de l'Immigration et de l'Integration* (OFII) was created in 2005 by the merger of the French IOM mission and the *Service Social d'Aide aux Emigrants* (SSAE) (Beltman, 2012). OFII offers two types of aid: voluntary return aid and humanitarian return aid (ARH). Since May 2016, CEFA has been a service provider for the implementation of the support offered by OFII. The service provision lasted for a first round of three years (OFII 1) and was then renewed for another three years in May 2019 (OFII 2). Return aid can be provided on three different levels: emergency aid (level 1); support for training and employment (level 2); support in the realisation of a business start-up given in the form of goods and services (level 3). Among the companies created through the business start-up support (*Activités Génératrices de Revenu* – AGR), the most widespread are those in the field of commercial activities (shops, dealers, street vendors, etc.). For constructing the database of the OFII case study, 54 beneficiaries from OFII 1 and 13 beneficiaries from OFII 2 were included, for a total of 67 beneficiaries. In the case of OFII 2, as the project was ongoing at the time of data collection, the dossiers of beneficiaries that had only joined the project very recently were not included, as the information provided would not have been comprehensive. For brevity, the chapter will refer to the case study simply as

"OFII", as it takes into account beneficiaries from both OFII 1 and OFII 2. The database includes demographic and general information on the migratory trajectory (year of departure and of return, duration of stay abroad) that returnees provide at the time of first contact with the project operators in Morocco. Each person indicated the main reason for their departure to France, a brief summary of the migratory experience and the main reason for returning to Morocco. In these succinct summaries, some keywords indicating the main motives for leaving and returning were recurring. Therefore, they have been clustered in the categories of "primary motives for leaving" and "primary motives for returning" as visible in the graph made for this study.
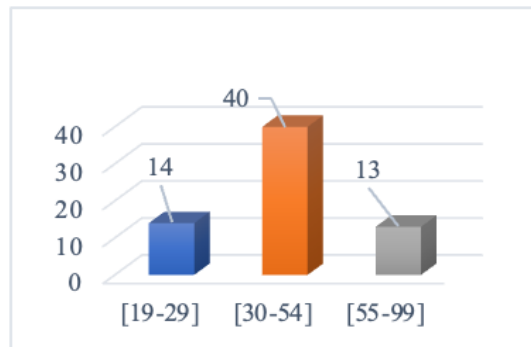
Figure 1: Distribution across age groups, OFII case study

In terms of demographic data, the average age of returnees at the time of joining the project was 41 (the youngest was 20, the oldest 73). The average age at the time of departure from Morocco was 35 (youngest 14, oldest 71); the average age at the time of return from France was 41 (youngest 20, oldest 72) (see Table 3 in the Appendix). These statistics provide relevant information on the population groups mostly involved with return migration. They also show how variations occur depending on the country of destination, for example with regards to gender: of the returnees of all of CEFA's AVR projects combined, only 12% were females, but this number was a lot higher in the case of the OFII project, where women returnees were 42% of the total (see Table 4 in the Appendix).

The general trends on the primary motives of mobility that emerged from the data indicate that the majority of people who went to France left with the intention of finding better employment opportunities and improving their life

standards. With a fairly large difference in numbers, the second group in size is composed by people who left for family reunification (marriage with a French national or a Moroccan resident in France, reunification with children or a parent); the third group is that of people who left for study purposes (see Table 1 below). As for return, the most common factor indicated as a reason for returning to Morocco was being in an irregular administrative situation (forthcoming expiry of the residence permit or return decision already in place), followed by unemployment (intended as difficulty finding a job and the significant economic difficulties this entailed) (see Table 2 below).

Table 1: Primary motives for leaving Morocco, OFII case study

Employment	40
Study	9
Personal reasons	2
Family reunification	12
Health issues	3
Other reasons	1
Total	67

Table 2: Primary motives for returning to Morocco, OFII case study

Unemployment	21
Irregular administrative situation	28
Exhaustion	4
Divorce	3
Family reasons	7
Personal reasons	2
Other reasons	2
Total	67

While the database analysis allows an overview of the main difficulties that lead to the decision to return, these data alone are not sufficient to reflect the complex reality of migration trajectories, and the intertwining dimensions influencing the decision process that leads to return. The picture emerging from the database might suggest that the reasons behind one person's mobility choices might fall into "fixed categories", motivating them because of only one factor, be it economic or health reasons. This logic can lead to an oversimplification of mobility choices that echoes the problematic dichotomies commonly applied to return migration as previously discussed, and that this study aims to overcome. The narratives of OFII returnees give additional information on the reasons for return, hence providing a precious

insight into return migration trajectories, which show the variations within the categories applied in the database, resulting in an in-depth appreciation of the true complexities of the choice to join an AVR project.

Return through the life stories

Individual stories provide a holistic depiction of the process that brought about the decision to migrate in the first place, and then led to the choice of joining an AVR project. They also give more details on the circumstances in which such choices matured: was the decision taken before or after getting to know of the existence of a project that could support the return by providing services and economic incentives? Did it happen with regret and a sense or failure, or rather a feeling of ownership of a new phase of life getting started? These nuances not only enrich the database but highlight the true complexities behind the choice to return. Looking at the variations on how events and feelings shaped this decision shifts the perception from a generalised category of voluntary return to a more complex, diverse one.

As explained above, data from the database show that the most common factor influencing the decision to return was being in an irregular administrative situation, followed by unemployment and economic difficulties. However, despite identifying a prevalent reason for his/her mobility choices, the interviewee was often able to identify multiple, coexisting priorities that played a role. In the case of the decision to leave Morocco, for example, while the database shows a limited range of possible reasons for migrating (employment, studies, personal reasons, family reunification, health), some stories showed how the desire to improve one's living standard and look for a job in France was often encouraged by the presence of family members already in the country. Similarly, the decision to leave for family reunification could be carried out under the pressure of health needs, etc. As for return, while legal constraints and economic instability are indicated as the most common reasons, some stories show that both factors played a role, even if the one was considered more determining than the other. Indeed, a situation of irregularity could be intersected at different levels with other reasons given in the database, as the absence of a residence permit makes it difficult to find a job, increases the risk of exploitation or puts a person in a situation of overexertion, anxiety and lowering of life quality that produces the physical or mental *épuisement* (exhaustion) that some people indicated as the main reason for returning. Finally, the situation of irregularity can be induced by a divorce: in this case, both factors contribute to the decision to return.

Five narratives were collected in the summer of 2019, in the form of semi-structured interviews. The size of this sample is relatively small in comparison to the number of returnees considered in the database, for several reasons. Of the people joining the project, those that were considered by the project manager and field officer as particularly vulnerable (because of health or family reasons) were not contacted, in order to avoid the risk that having to disclose their experience could have negative repercussions on their wellbeing. Returnees who had only very recently joined the programme were also not included, to avoid the risk that they could feel in any way pressured to agree to do the interview at a delicate moment of their return process. Some of the returnees that were approached did not agree to share their experience. Others were geographically too far from the interviewers, as the project takes place in the entire Moroccan territory.

The narratives were presumably influenced to a certain extent by the context in which they were collected. One possible influencing factor was the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as the language spoken. While it was made explicit that the interviews did not in any way influence the assistance received within the project, and that interviews were voluntary and were not part of the programme activities, the professional involvement of the interviewers in the project might have influenced the answers received, either for praising of criticising the project outcomes. Some interviews were done by the (female, Italian) author in French, and some by the (male, Moroccan) field assistant in Moroccan Arabic. Therefore, the language in which the interviews were done, as well as the gender and nationality of the interviewer might have influenced whether the interviewees felt at ease and willing or able to freely tell their stories. Finally, from a gender perspective, all the interviews were collected among male returnees. In part, this reflects a general trend of AVR projects, where most of the beneficiaries are male. Therefore, the narratives express a male perspective that might not be representative of the experiences of female beneficiaries of the programme.

Within the scope of this study, two of the life stories collected will be compared in an in-depth account of the decision process leading to return. The life stories sketched and analysed below are representative of different kinds of agency in the context of return, as they illustrate different ways through which returnees matched the context, ambitions and constraints in the phase before their decision to join the AVR project. Such comparison highlights the complexity of the factors influencing this process, as well as the variations on how agency could be expressed in the structural reality returnees had to navigate.

Abdel

Abdel[4] went to France with a student visa after completing a study cycle in Morocco. After completing his second university cycle in France, he did several jobs in various associations. Already during his studies, he started having economic difficulties, and later lost his residence permit and remained in France without a regular permit for about two years. During his studies, he had met and married his wife, who had also come from outside of the EU for her studies, and they had a baby. They had applied for a family residence permit, which was refused. Although their lawyer had presented them with the option of continuing the application for the residence permit through an appeal, for which they had reasonable chances of succeeding, the couple decided to leave France and resettle in Morocco, with the idea of starting a business of their own (after what were for Abdel seven years in France). Once they arrived in Morocco, they started collecting resources for their business, borrowing from relatives, working and using the OFII support. By the time of the interview, the business was quite successful, and Abdel was considering expanding it. He claims to have very good memories of France, where he grew as a person, gained titles and competencies, and started a family. He has relatives in France and reads the French news daily. While he is not planning to go back to France in the foreseeable future, he does not rule out moving his business, or a part of it, to his wife's country of origin.

> The lawyer proposed to make an appeal, to stay a few more years because my wife was pregnant, but then we calculated how long we would stay without papers. Life in France is expensive and all. We didn't want to make our daughter suffer and suffer ourselves too ... So, we didn't appeal, we took the decision to come to Morocco, to start something, to start a new life, because basically what I told to myself is that if we are motivated, if we have self-confidence and faith, we can succeed wherever we are, be it in France or anywhere in the world. So here we are, we have decided to come to Morocco with a project in mind. It took a little time, it has been hard but finally it came true and for the moment it's working, it's working well.[5]

Abdel was well-acquainted with French culture and society, and being married in France and having a baby born in France, his application for a

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[4] Names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Cities and other relevant details that could reveal the interviewee's identity have intentionally not been specified.

[5] All the interviews' extracts have been translated by the author.

residence permit could have been successful in the long run. Nevertheless, he decided to go back after thorough reflection, which brought him to believe that this choice would be the most beneficial for his family and his personal development. While the primary reason for choosing to return to Morocco was the situation of legal irregularity in France, Abdel's choice expresses more than just a reaction to the rejection of his residence permit. His decision balanced intertwining elements from the economical and emotional spheres. In particular, he believed that the uncertainty deriving from a long legal process with an unknown outcome would have negatively affected the wellbeing of his family. The stability derived from having a residence permit and the ability to plan life in the long term was for him a necessary condition in no matter what country. At the same time, his decision was motivated by the ambition to succeed professionally and see that his efforts and qualities were matched by a rewarding working situation, which he did not see as a realistic possibility if he had stayed in France.

> I wasn't one hundred percent determined to stay in France. If there were any opportunities, like finding a job, I was going to stay in France. But as I told you, life is complicated. ... I said to myself: I am a man, so wherever I go, in France or in Morocco, I just need to have the papers, a residence permit, a national card, to be able to look for a job. I want to do something with my life, I want to work, I want to earn my living. France was not the solution, Europe was not the solution, I look for a chance elsewhere.

Abdel's (and his wife's) decisions were the balanced result of a well-calculated choice between their possibility of achieving their aspirations in their situation in France. Their choice was not a mere reaction to the legal constraint, but the expression of their ideas on how they could have achieved their desires for their family and their personal aspirations to the maximum extent. In this sense, their agency shows in this ability to react to a constraining situation by creating opportunities for themselves in a proactive way. Indeed, Abdel explained that he would have returned to Morocco even without the financial help of the AVR project. This resulted in a higher level of ownership of life upon return and optimism in the long term.

> I've calculated things: if I stay in France, will I succeed in France? If I stay in Morocco, will I succeed in Morocco? So, I studied both sides, then I made the decision: it's better for me to go back to Morocco, and even if I'm going to start from zero, I'm going to succeed. ... And everything I had imagined, everything I had planned, I did.

Bilal

Bilal went to France with a tourist visa for a third country. He left with the idea of finding a job and staying in the long term, and eventually remained in France for 16 years. He applied several times for a residence permit, which was always refused. He simply continued his life in France, where he did manual labour jobs, in which he specialised and received training. Despite having children in Morocco, he had always considered return as an option for an indefinite future, but never actively tried to return as he was still hoping to manage to get his papers in France. He eventually opted for returning to Morocco when a friend told him of the existence of the OFII economic support. In Morocco, he started a business that worked well. He has an affectionate memory of France and does not rule out returning there as a tourist, but he plans to stay in Morocco.

Despite the impossibility of obtaining the papers, which was an evident structural constraint for succeeding in his aspiration to have a stable life and career in France, Bilal's agency was not completely limited by the legal factor. Indeed, he did not return to Morocco specifically because of the denial of a residence permit, as he had been living undocumented in France for a long time. He opted for return pushed by the incentive of the economic support that, together with his willingness to start a new business, would have given a positive boost in his life.

> I decided to return to Morocco. Even if I stayed in France for another ten years, there I have a good housing, I have a living. But in terms of papers ... that's it. In fact, I would never have thought of setting up a small company in Morocco. I had never thought of that.

Without the economic support of the project, he explained, he would not have decided to go home, or rather he would have done so later in life. His narrative suggests that despite the evident challenges posed by his legal status, for Bilal the option of going home was far worse, if balanced with the working conditions and the social network that he had constructed during his years in France. In this sense, Bilal's agency was expressed by the ability and choice to resist the constraints of the situation of irregularity he was experiencing. He stayed in France until he found the conditions for returning that he believed were in line with his desires and that he could turn into an opportunity, making return a choice that was as proactive as possible.

Upon return, he judges his experience positively, seeing its outcome as a combination of his own qualities, the experiences and knowledge acquired in

France and the willingness to work hard, suggesting a feeling of empowerment and ownership of his own choice to return.

> Anyway, I didn't lose anything, even France gave me a lot, in terms of work, and in terms of training. And I hope that one day I will return to France to visit people. ... I feel good here [in Morocco]. If I go to France I go as a tourist, to see my friends and neighbours, because I have left well. But for the moment I'm fine in Morocco.

In these life stories, the returnees decided to return because of difficulties that arose in France – such as the difficulty in obtaining a residence permit – in the absence of which there would have been no previous intention to return to Morocco, or there would have been in a longer time frame. In this respect, these people decided to return under the pressure of negative factors, rather than because of a proactive thrust (*push factors* rather than *pull factors*, using a formulation by de Bree, Davids, de Haas, 2010). Nevertheless, even in cases where a situation of irregularity or economic difficulties left little room for negotiation, they still showed a certain degree of agency when deciding to return by joining an AVR project. Comparing the two narratives of return highlights different ways in which returnees handled their options, desires and personal opinions when their room to manoeuvre was limited by structural factors. In their own ways, both stories highlight how, even in cases where the lack of legal capacity had significantly diminished the level of options available, returnees have adapted to these constraints by reformulating their priorities to see return as the best prospect in the current situation. From the case studies it also becomes clear that Abdel and Bilal have different social backgrounds and life experiences. Their evaluations were influenced by deeply personal factors, as well as social conditions such as the existence of a support network in the country of return, which appears to be more present in Abdel's case. For example, he mentioned that he could borrow money from relatives for kickstarting his business. Other elements such as the level of education seem to have influenced the returnees' ambitions and priorities as Abdel, upper educated, stressed the importance of having a perspective of recognition of his personal and professional qualities and achievements.

The life stories analysis highlights how negative and positive factors that might appear similar on paper were weighted differently in different situations. A case in point is the factor of the restriction by legal capacity. While the lack of a residence permit was the major factor that determined the decision to return for both Abdel and Bilal, it was perceived differently by the

two, and played a different role in the decision process. In his narrative, Abdel made it very clear that having a residence permit was an imperative precondition for him for living in France. Not having the certainty of being able to get one in the near future was not compatible with what he considered acceptable for his and his family's wellbeing and for his aspirations of career and personal development. This factor was more important for him than simply being in France, which in his judgment would have been less constructive then going back to Morocco and starting anew. In the case of Bilal, on the other hand, the lack of a residence permit was a disempowering factor that eventually led him to return to Morocco, but in a very different time frame. Being in a situation of legal irregularity was not a factor that brought him to consider the idea of living in France as unacceptable, and indeed, he stayed illegally for many years during which he worked and built a network of friendships. In this respect, despite having to accept the uncertainty of being repeatedly denied a residence permit, living in France still had an added value compared to simply returning to Morocco empty-handed. Rather, he exercised a sort of resistance to his situation, until the possibility of return with economic support came into the picture, changing the balance between priorities and making the lack of a legal permit a more prominent negative factor if compared to the prospected situation he could have had in Morocco at that point.

In this respect, the OFII programme was another factor that, despite having a similar role on paper, was perceived differently in the two stories. Abdel's choice to return to Morocco was the result of his and his wife's evaluation of their situation in France regardless of the possibility of receiving economic support for leaving. After taking the final decision, Abdel became very determined and immediately started implementing it, planning his business and collecting the necessary money by working and borrowing from relatives. As he explained, he only heard of the OFII support from his lawyer at a later stage, and while the economic support was a great help to his business, he had already made up his mind, and would have persevered even without it. The OFII support was not the determining factor, while the main driver behind his choice to return was to fulfil his desires and expectations in a country where he had the ability to do so. On the contrary, the OFII support was a decisive pull factor for Bilal. While he had never ruled out the idea of going back to Morocco at some point in life, it was only when he heard from a friend about the OFII support that his idea to return became a concrete prospect for him, and he took the initiative to make it happen. In his case, the AVR programme was a determining pull factor that brought him to

take the decision to leave by rebalancing his priorities with the perspective of starting a business and a new phase of his life, rather than returning empty-handed.

Conclusion

As a reaction to current migration flows, European institutions have identified return as an effective tool in their migration policy. This has produced an impetus in the rate of voluntary and non-voluntary returns, and an increase in funds allocated to return projects. Nevertheless, the reflection on this phenomenon, both in the policy and in the academic sector, proposes a vision sometimes anchored to dichotomous categories that leave little room for understanding the complexity and fluidity of migrants' experiences. Adopting an actor-based perspective is an effective way of gaining a deeper understanding of the decisions and experiences related to return, adding more nuances to the dichotomous vision of voluntary versus non-voluntary return, or of return as a mere symptom of the failure or success of the migratory experience. An approach that uses agency as an interpretative tool appears particularly effective in the effort of problematising the interpretation of data on return rates, which are often the most visible outcome of the policies implemented, but which alone do not express the positioning of this phenomenon in the life itinerary of the returnee.

What emerges is a picture where the decision to return was built on a delicate balance of expectations, personal priorities of health and economic wellbeing, legal constraints, family needs, and chance. In this picture, return appears as the expression of one's modalities to navigate the context that had arisen in France. Life stories help to overcome the currently normalised, but in fact problematic dichotomy that sees voluntary return as the opposite of forced return, rather than two phenomena linked by a nuanced and sometimes overlapping continuum of experiences. At the same time, using the returnees' narratives to illuminate the "grey area" of the decision process leading to return challenges the idea of return as the evidence of either the success or failure of the migratory path. While in a situation of legal constraint, returnees were able to match the reduced range of options available with their aspirations. In this perspective return, while being far from an ideal outcome, emerges as a choice that led to an improvement of their current situation. In many cases, it is apparent how institutional migration policies have concrete implications for migrants, whose decision to return is to some extent determined by

their administrative situation. A restriction by legal capacity, however, although it may determine a strong limitation on the level of individual agency, is not the only element to influence this decision. Getting a closer perspective of migrants' life stories shows how a complex balance of factors interacts differently with the structural reality for each individual, depending on their personal priorities and situations. Returnees' narratives reveal the presence of an agency level that, however variable, is involved in determining individual choices in relation to their administrative situation, the obstacles encountered during their stay in the country of destination, their desires and needs.

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Appendix

Overview of Assisted Voluntary Return Projects Carried out by CEFA

Project	Target group and type of aid
REMIDA I 2011–2013	Open to Moroccans with permission to stay.[6]
REMIDA II 2012–2014	Open to citizens from Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal and Sri Lanka with permission to stay.
ERMES I 2014–2015	Open to citizens of Moroccan, Tunisian and Albanian nationality. Open to both legally and illegally staying migrants.
ERMES II 2016–2018	Open to Moroccan, Tunisian, Albanian and Senegalese citizens. Open to both legally and illegally staying migrants.

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[6] With regard to the target groups of these projects: the Return Directive concerned the repatriation of third-country nationals, also addressed individuals in a situation of irregularity. In Italy, however, Law No. 94/2009 was in force until 9 October 2013. This law introduced the offence of *reato di clandestinità* (crime of illegal stay) for irregular migrants. As a result, anyone who had contact with irregular migrants was supposed to report them. In this situation, Italy has developed guidelines for projects regarding migrants in a situation of regularity only. It is in this frame that CEFA managed the projects REMIDA I and II. Subsequently, the law was no longer in force and the guidelines changed. As a result, the new project in which CEFA worked, ERMES, could also be addressed to people without a residence permit.

Provisions of services OFII 2016–2019, 2019–2022	Since May 2016, CEFA has been a provider of services for the AVR project implemented by OFII. The service provision lasted for 3 years and was renewed for another 3 years in May 2019.
Alma RVA January 2019–July 2020	Funded by the German Cooperation (GIZ), in the framework of the "Repatriation Programme: towards new opportunities" of the German Ministry of Cooperation and Economic Development (BMZ), addressing Moroccan citizens returning from Germany to Morocco. Open to both legally and illegally staying migrants.
UNO ("Una Nuova Opportunità") 2019–2021	Targeting Moroccan, Tunisian, Senegalese and Nigerian citizens. Open to both legally and illegally staying migrants.

Table 3: Distribution across age groups of AVR projects in Morocco from 2011 to May 2019.

Project	19–29	30–54	55–99	ND	Total
Remida (2011–2014)	8	60	3	6	77
Ermes (2014–2018)	15	72	3	8	98
OFII (2016–2019)	12	32	10		54
Total	35	164	16	14	229

Table 4: Distribution across gender of AVR projects in Morocco from 2011 to May 2019.

Project	F	M	Total
Remida (2011–2014)	3	74	77
Ermes (2014–2018)	8	90	98
OFII (2016–2019)	16	38	54
Total	27	202	229

Chapter 4
"Living According to the Book"
Discussing Islamic Practices and   Identities in a *Fada* of Urban Niger

Alessio Iocchi

This chapter attempts to achieve several goals. Drawing from discussions about the questions raised by Boko Haram's violence, I propose a discussion on how a group of young Niamey-based men perceive and articulate their space of agency and attune it to related discourses on political Islam, religion and, broadly speaking, social justice. I also aim to reflect on the performative role of the small rituals associated with the space of the *fada*, an informal circle of peers where young men meet to chat, share information, make tea and smoke together. At the same time, this particular space frames and blurs broader discussions about the participants' role as adult men, about their duties as workers and sons, and their views or interests as Muslim citizens. Such discussion allows us to understand how the transformative power of youth agency is increasingly channelled into forms that emphasise the role of the individual and the self at the expense of collective organised claim-making practices.

Methodologically, this essay is developed on participant observation and years of ethnographic research in West Africa's Sahel (Nigeria, Niger, Chad) that formed the basis for my comprehension of these local dynamics. Moreover, the chapter is based on years devoted to the understanding of the many nuances of Boko Haram and the socio-political effects of their activities in the West African region. It draws on a period of fieldwork in Niger's capital city of Niamey in October and November 2018,[1] through participant observation that allowed the author to look into the debates, jokes and exchanges taking place in a *fada* animated by young men from the city and region of Maradi (southern Niger): taxi drivers, chauffeurs, auto-repairmen, self-

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[1] A scheduled round of fieldwork that was supposed to take place between March and April 2020 had to be cancelled because of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

employed traders, civil activists and students. While the chapter is built around a spontaneous conversation we had on the evening of 19 October, I had the chance to be part of the *fada* almost daily throughout my stay in Niamey, thus being able to capture the interesting discussions of this tiny fragment of Nigerien youth and their ideas about what means to be a good Muslim today in a country like Niger. It was through this "deep hanging out" that inner codes were (partially) decrypted and that I was able to acquire some familiarity with the specificities of Niamey's socio-political environment while, at the same time, being entrusted with a sort of honorary role as "listener" – mostly because the kind of confidences heard in the *fada* were not to circulate locally but, at most, in faraway Europe.

The arguments will be structured as follows: a preliminary reflection about political Islam in the Sahel, outlining the study's theoretical framework, will be followed by a brief description of the genesis and role of the *fada* as a relatively new space of engagement for young men's agency that both reproduces and breaks with Niger's broader clientelist patterns. Drawing from these hints on patron-client relations, I look at young men's articulation of their agency in the quest for reforming the self and society in Niger in light of the prominent role played during the last few decades by Salafi movements of reform. Finally, the chapter's main argument is built upon the narrative thread constituted by a particularly heated and vibrant exchange in the *fada* in which I had the chance to participate. The discussion started with recent news about Boko Haram and led to the urgent terrain of individual and collective agency, piety, morality, political engagement and *la débrouillardise* – "making ends meet" in Francophone Africa's parlance. Some concluding remarks will reconnect these notions within the broader frame constituted by the discussion on the identity of Muslim youth in times of political and social crisis.

Identity and Islamic practice in the Sahel

Hodgkin's early invitation to be aware of how the West's obsession with "Islamic fundamentalism" has progressively viewed Muslim societies through the mirror of Western distortions – the "good and bad Muslims" described by Mamdani (2002) – has left scholars with a haunting interrogative. While Hodgkin argued that "local political oppositions are more important than wider intellectual movements for the formation of individual organizations" (Hodgkin, 1990, p. 78), such a statement cannot be generalised. Most of all, it needs to be revised in light of the many nuances unfolded by recent schol-

arship on *jihad* and political Islam in the Sahel and West Africa that sketch a multifaceted picture of the entanglement between local politics and wider intellectual movements (Brigaglia, Iocchi, 2020). Employing the emic representation of political Islamic movements to understand their cause (*da'wa*), we see that initiatives of reform within the field are not only based on a programme or an agenda, but are performed in relation to societal movements, allies or oppositional forces at different scales. Agents of change in Muslim societies employ a set of practices (translation, contestation, negotiation, reinterpretation) in the process of structuring their identity vis-à-vis allies and counterparts. But most importantly, they employ those practices to mediate between "words and worlds" (Bayat, 2007, p. 6), that is, how they translate their reformist programme into social reality. In this sense, each tradition of reform is marked by distinctive local conditions which, to say the least, determine the success or failure of a given movement. It is nonetheless also true that, in line with Asad's (1986) early theorisation, discursive practices and processes are an integral part of Islam: therefore, in an era of globalised exchanges the Islamic discourse is shaped by and spelled accordingly to those Islamic actors that dispose of a comparative advantage, in terms of authority and financial means, vis-à-vis lesser endowed actors. Relating to a pre-9/11 elaboration proposed by Rosander and Westerlund (1997), political Islam and matters of reform, albeit locally, cannot be viewed in isolation from the structural inequality of means within the Muslim world. Muslim Africa plays a rather marginal role, financially speaking, compared to the better endowed Gulf and Middle East countries (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar). This mismatch has never implied an un-mediated or un-negotiated acceptance of foreign agendas, though, as instead the latter are appropriated, articulated and declined according to interests and visions which are obviously locally embedded. In fact, the challenge for contemporary scholarship on Islam in Africa is to understand how local agency and agendas are articulated in face of a disparity between resources and ambitions. In West Africa, the rise and diffusion of Salafi-oriented movements and organisations over the course of the last decades is strongly connected to dynamics of interest, wealth and power that are transforming the territorial scope of the "Islamic centre" and that realign West Africa with the modern trends of the *umma*. While such trends are shaped by and emanating from the affluent Middle East, they are also critically analysed and digested by the African Muslim public.

Since the violent events of 9/11, Sahel's Islam has been experiencing the uncustomary light of "geopolitical relevance": several initiatives between the

United States, the European Union and single countries as well as regional organisations in the Sahel have been taking place in the frame of a wider military cooperation which has delivered training, equipment and – most importantly – funding at an unprecedented scale.[2] Scholarly speaking, the main issue arising from such attention has been what William Miles has wittily defined as a "*reductio ad* Al-Qaidum" (Miles, 2008, p. 2), in which any of the nuanced and diversified phenomena of Islam, political Islam and Islamism evolving in West Africa and the Sahel cannot be studied without "the shadows of the tumbling World Trade Center towers" (Miles, 2008, p. 2) looming in the background. While the debate is seemingly far from being exhausted (Zenn, 2020; Thurston, 2020), a broader tendency to consider the forces of the West African post-colonial state and of contemporary Islam as mutually influencing and mutually transforming has led some scholarship to re-consider as crucial the relational dynamic between ideology, theology and politics at different scales (Idrissa, 2017; Loimeier, 2018).

Salafi-oriented movements share an anti-esoteric episteme, and combine doctrinal patterns with social reform agendas, thus making any separation between ideology, theology and politics of limited heuristic value. Such movements started to gain and hold legitimacy in the Sahel starting from the early post-colonial period and became increasingly politically relevant from the 1990s. Concretely speaking, such groups have developed a distinct critique of a number of local syncretic practices (*bida'*, innovations) and adopted a terminology of purification (*iṣlāḥ*) with a direct reference to the foundations of faith and in condemnation of earlier generations of scholars deemed to "blindly imitate" (*taqlīd*) established authorities. Following Loimeier's line of thinking (Loimeier, 2018), modern Salafi groups can be distinguished between those that evoke a major engagement in politics (*siyasa*) and the transformation of the state, and those whose main thrust lies instead in the renovation of personal development (*tarbiya*). Beside these, there are also *jihadi*-Salafis that refuse paths of accommodation with the state, hold an oppositional stance towards most other Muslims (in this sense they can also be defined as *takfīri*), and engage in violent mobilisation and warfare. Of interest, is also another tendency represented by an increasing number of Salafis that demonstrate a relative proneness towards individual religiosity, the pious self, and piety, rather than upfront social reform. Among this last group,

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[2] For an overview of the different region-building projects developed by international interveners, jihadist groups, regional governmental elites and local communities, see Baldaro (2020).

we can count the *sunnance* in Niger, which will be the special focus of the following parts of this essay.

Such theoretical framework about political Islam and the Sahel is the backdrop to a study that has its core on the socio-political condition of youth in neoliberal times, and especially in the individual and collective experiences of Muslim youth in the post-9/11 scenario (Herrera, Bayat, 2010; Janson, 2014; Masquelier, Soares, 2016; Masquelier, 2019). At the intersection between Islam, anthropology and politics, studies on hybrid or alternative modes of Islamic modernity (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Brenner, 1996; Deeb, 2006; Göle, 1996; Mahmood, 2005; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; White, 2002) have provided the lenses through which to disentangle the very often complex interaction between the public self, the private self and the modes to navigate reality (Vigh, 2006). Therefore, subjectivity, morality, religiosity and agency form the main terrain of investigation of the present study, in an effort to enrich the discussion opened by Abdoulaye Sounaye's research on *sunnance* in Niger (Sounaye, 2015). Departing from several notable efforts to re-conduct the practices and processes forming the moral personhood within a wider anthropology of morality (Asad, 1993; Hirschkind, 2006a; 2006b), I will explore notions of fragmentation and ambivalence, following trajectories that are subjected to continuous renewal and redirection. The realm of contradictions, in short, is at the basis of the life-experience of modern-day young people trying to fend for themselves against the backdrop of various intimate and micro-situated as well as massive public events. Such vastness of events has prompted a push towards self-disciplining, a radical re-representation of the self in connection to global and local instances (Marsden, 2005; Janson, 2006) or attempts to redraw the space according to new practices of belonging (Masquelier, 2019) – the latter being most evident in the relation between *sunnance* and the *fada*.

"Faire *fada*"

It is at the *fada* that young Nigeriens first engage with the realm of politics. *Fada* are, in fact, an unavoidable stop for those who seek to run for office. No organisation – religious or secular – can today bypass the role of the *fada,* as they appear as an integral part of the Nigerien urban landscape. These spaces, which literally translate as the "court" (of the *sarki*, or Sultan), usually serve as gathering points for young unmarried men (*samari*) in urban settings. Today's *fada* are the new avatar of the *samariyya* groups or *clubs des jeunes* (youth clubs) organised during Niger's Kountché's regime (1974–87)

in order to prevent subversive associations of young people and students, and therefore draw political and civic activism under the regime-approved "*société de développement*" (development society) frame, which in Niger meant harsh authoritarian rule (Issa, 2008). The present form of the *fada* saw its rise in the early 1990s in the city of Zinder, and *fada* have now multiplied at the national level at an incredible rate. While long viewed with suspicion due to their structural relation with the so-called *palais*, jargon for bands of juvenile delinquents, today the magnitude and force of the *fada* have earned them a broad popular tolerance, to the point that some authors have identified them as "*des parlements de la rue*" (street parliaments) (Banégas, Brisset-Foucault, Cutolo, 2012) where new modes of communicating and bonding are developed.

The latter aspect constitutes the very essence of "*faire fada*" (making *fada*) in today's Niger. Presenting the contours of liminal spaces "alternatives to the dominant public space" (Banégas et al., 2012, p. 8), daily or banal preoccupations (dress habits, music, etc.) are shared in these circles, and issues are discussed that are more "political" or, increasingly, to do with identity and morals. The relation of the *fada* and institutional and electoral politics hovers between contestation and accommodation. The bone of contention is represented by the clientelist practices that constitute the basis, on different scales, of many socio-political dynamics in the country, and from which *fada* cannot be immune. At the political level, corruption in Niger is generalised and it is not a mystery to anyone that some politicians in office accumulate wealth by siphoning off state funds. It is also true that these same individuals invest massively in clientelist networks that serve to ensure the legitimacy of their positions and allow for small-scale wealth redistribution. While the *fada*, as "alternative spaces", denounce and criticise such practices, many *'yan fada* appear to be also embedded in a politics of conviviality in which the chance for *bouffer* (slang for "eating") can be viewed ambivalently. At election time, representatives from the political parties pay visits to many *fada*, collect phone numbers, and use them to keep in contact and ensure that *'yan fada* are mobilising to vote. Therefore, in some circumstances, selected *fada* can emerge as "extensions of the political apparatus" (Masquelier, 2019, p. 195). Nonetheless, the majority of the *fada* – aware of the gift-giving practice of parties and conscious of their role as "spaces of rupture" vis-à-vis embedded microclientelist practices – discuss and enforce norms that require attendees to avoid participation in money-for-ballots activities. This is because clientelist behaviours are unanimously viewed in the *fada* as deeply connected to politicians' rapaciousness, and widely criticised and boycotted.

At a completely different scale, the tactic of everyday resourcefulness (*la débrouillardise*), that ensures bread on the table in many households and provides daily capital for many *'yan fada*, is tolerated and monitored in order to prevent dangerous mix-ups with politically-motivated patron-client relations. In fact, young people in Niger – including *fada* members – are mostly abstentionist in electoral politics. It is also a fact, that patrimonial networks of politicians and officeholders work on a pervasive scale in the country. Thereby, the kind of disapproval towards institutions and politicians is mixed up with the prominent moral ambiguity represented by the need to navigate the broader patrimonial network of Niger's society, where trickery, trust, and loyalty are bargaining chips for both predation and redistribution. For such reasons, the discourse of reformist Islamic organisations, including the Salafi-leaning Izala and *sunnance*, resonates widely in the *fada*. The envisioned governance that sharia law would provide is viewed as more convincing – or, at least, promising – than the empty rhetoric of "good governance" that has dominated Niger's political parlance since the multiparty turn without yielding any significant improvement of social conditions. In sum, the *'yan fada*'s engagement with the state and politics is varied and even contradictory. On a first, immediate level, they employ the space of the *fada* as an arena to "voice" their claims and express the many forms through which they feel excluded from the benefits of institutional politics, morally condemning discourses and practices of the latter. Secondly, the *fada* function as spaces for self-help, through small rituals that help to "heal" the damage created by institutional politics. Finally, *'yan fada* are susceptible to support those same representatives of institutions which they usually despise, if the latter offer channels or avenues for survival and to exercise their agency.

Framing Islam and Muslim youth in Niger

A shared political culture developed since Niger's independence in 1960, saw political movements uniformly in favour of a secular developmental state that would leave the practice of Islam to local religious authorities, in the name of the French *laicité* model. The two main political forces of the early post-colonial era, the *Parti Progressiste Nigérien* of president Hamani Diori and the opposition socialist Sawaba movement of Djibo Bakary agreed that the state needed to overview, channel and structure Islam in Niger. Despite the different political turnabouts that occurred in Niger in the following decades, such policy was in fact reiterated in a balanced model of promotion

and control. After the turning point represented by the Sovereign National Conference of July-August 1991, though, the country saw a gradual expansion of Islam in the secular frame of the state.

The diffusion during those years of the *masu wa'azi* (masters of sermons), a major figure of the northern Nigerian Salafi-oriented Izala movement, meant a significant rupture.[3] Spreading out into the country from the commercial hub of Maradi, Izala penetrated the commercial community of the *alhazai*, the group of wealthy merchants that became Izala's main donors, establishing a network of national preachers, organising campaigns (*wa'azin kasa*), and generally improving the standards of Quranic and Arabic learning. Stressing frugality and simplicity, Izala implicitly moved against the customary practice of well-off individuals caring for dependents and clients, instead promoting a trade conduct that maximised profit, cut off the financial burden of social obligations and allowed for greater and faster class mobility. Thanks to the entrepreneurial figures of the *masu wa'azi*, the movement carved out a space of its own in the "*Islam de marché*" (Haenni, 2005). Disposing of wealth and trans-local links, and able to exert influence in the broader society, supporters of a Salafi-oriented agenda gradually expanded in Niger in the early 1990s transition period from a military to a liberal and multi-party regime, especially during the accommodating presidencies of Ousmane (1993–96) and Tandja (1999–2010). At the same time, an effort of "domestication" of Salafi-oriented activism by institutions was also made simpler by internal splits, such as the one that opposed the pioneer generation of Izala scholars led by *shaykh* Yahya Muhammad (d. 2010), and the younger one championed by 'Umar 'Isa Suleyman – a group known as *Kitab wa-Sunna*, mostly composed of Nigeriens who studied at the Islamic University of Say (such as Suleyman himself) or Medina in Saudi Arabia (Sounaye, 2012, p. 430). Such fragmentation has fostered the development of a large spectrum of youth movements. Such groups – most often clubs or cultural associations – are the offspring of the civil society movements formed after the fall of Seyni Kountché's regime (1987) and combine social activism with the well-rooted practice of urban socialisation that occurs in

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[3] While it appears to be relatively under-studied in Niger, a rich literature has been devoted to the study of Izala in Northern Nigeria: Loimeier (1997) and Kane (2002) document the rise and establishment of the group investigating, its doctrinal background and mercantile milieu; Ben Amara (2020) focuses on the internal articulation, feuds and infightings, while Thurston (2016) delves into the broader influence of Medina University graduates in the spread of Salafism in the country.

the *fada* (Masquelier, 2019) or, like in neighbouring Burkina Faso, around the so-called "*grins du thé*" (Kieffer, 2006).

The younger generation groomed under Izala's wing, like the *sunnance*, appear to have learned from the errors of their predecessors. They insist on the need to purify the Islamic landscape of *mallaman bid'a* (masters of innovations), and to rely on the Quran (*kitāb*), the Sunna and Hadiths. They mostly settle and work in urban settings and, in one word, they are the modern face of Islam in Niger. A natural by-product of Izala, the *sunnance* movement emerged as a Salafi-oriented group that has made significant impact since the early 2000s, especially in urban settings, and especially in Niamey. Their impact lies in the new way in which they articulate their faith and provide avenues to exercise agency in a Islamically pious manner: less concerned with public display of religion and piety, they are also not interested in political Salafism, and centre their practices and devotion in the individual sphere. Compared to the earlier Izala and Kitab wa-Sunna scholars, *sunnance*'s criticism of Sufi *ṭuruq* (brotherhoods) or of *mallaman zaure* (traditional scholars) as "regime men of service" and holders of unorthodox or syncretic views seems relatively soft. This tendency is coherent with other less strict habits that instead used to be the lever of Izala's criticism against Sufi *ṭuruq*: *sunnance* do not demonise gift-giving, expenses and extensive celebrations on occasions of naming ceremonies or weddings, as well as the *mawlud* (Prophet's birthday) celebrations, and give a less strict definition of what is and what is not *bida'*. In particular, the "preaching campaigns" that were the symbol of Izala's socio-religious engagement in *sunnance* circles are repurposed as chances not only to expand the base of adherents but also to perform publicly and engage in socialisation spaces, such as the *fada*, that are an integral part of the urban experience, especially in Niamey.

"Living according to the Book"

In the neighbourhood of La Poudrière, not far from the central Boulevard Mali Bero, but sufficiently out of sight, Kabiru and his friends gather in their *fada* usually for the sunset prayer (*ṣalāt al-maghrib*), after a day spent working or managing businesses.

They began to reunite in this dusty corner just outside the premises of Kabiru's family house as teenagers, in the mid-1990s, when a kiosk was opened by an elder Maradi-hailing fellow who has since returned to his town. "We sort of grew up here, all together. Making tea, chatting and listening to the cassettes," sums up a foul-mouthed member of the *fada*, a music

and dancing enthusiast known as Baggio in honour of his teenage football idol.[4] Sitting on plastic chairs, with the buzz coming from a radio as a soundtrack, Kabiru and Baggio are exchanging jokes when two other friends materialise. Nasiru and Umaru appear visibly tired after a day of working in the heat. After having practiced any kind of job in his youth, the now thirty-something Nasiru works as a factotum for his uncle, a merchant with affairs in Katsina and Kano (Nigeria), and travels frequently. Umaru, on the other hand, worked mostly in menial jobs before finding his way to Gheddafi-ruled Benghazi (Libya), where he worked on the docks as a specialised labourer. "After Europe chased away Gheddafi, things got troublesome for me": he attempted his way by boat to Sicily but was repatriated to Niamey and for some time struggled before securing a job as truck-driver for a Turkish construction company. "But it was a matter of time, and terrorism also came down to Niger," adds Umaru, equating terrorism with the political situation in Libya.

Discussions about terrorism in Niamey cannot but be monopolised by Boko Haram. Despite the relative remoteness of the war-front, security issues have impacted Niamey through a multiplicity of forms that are deeply felt even by ordinary residents: checkpoints, no-go zones, and a multiplication of foreign military vehicles or airplanes roaming the streets and the skies are the visual match to the incessant buzz of news concerning attacks and victims throughout the country, especially in the provinces of Tillabery and Diffa. A rumour about the most recent Boko Haram-related attack came through the usual channel of the *radio trottoir*: Baggio had heard that a common acquaintance's relative, a man employed by a French company in Diffa to build boreholes, had been kidnapped in broad daylight and his family was asked to pay a ransom.[5] The news prompted an animated discussion in the *fada.* Nasiru pointed that "these [kidnappers] are just savages, they do

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[4] Given that I was never told the real name of this speaker, Baggio is the only informant of this essay signaled through his "true" nickname.

[5] I have found no mention of this incident in local news, while Tunis magazine *Jeune Afrique* reported an incident occurred at the end of November 2018 – later than this conversation – in Diffa to (presumably the same) French drilling company Foraco. See https://www.jeuneafrique.com/669757/politique/niger-huit-morts-dans-une-attaque-de-boko-haram-contre-une-societe-de-forage/ (26/11/2020). Kidnapping has long been a common tactic employed by *jihadi* insurgents, as the cases of al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb or Boko Haram in the Sahel and Lake Chad attest. With regard to the Islamic state in West Africa Province (known as al-Dawla), this appears now as an activity to collect fast cash in view of the closure of banks and other formal banking operators.

not know true Islam, they fake their faith because of their lack of education and civilization." Baggio, instead, believed that "the problem is that they [Boko Haram] fear the work of the engineers, because they don't understand [what they do]. They just want to chase away civilised people and do their own businesses; these are like wild beasts. We should leave them killing each other and when they're done killing themselves, the army should go and reclaim the lands."

The discussion reached a moment of stasis when thinking about those who are not able to migrate and settle as refugees in the camps run by NGOs but are forced to remain and produce food for the needs of the insurgents.[6] "For them, doesn't apply what is written in the Book [the Quran], that you shall leave the land ruled by the misguided?" The limits of individual determinacy and agency are thereby identified by Nasiru in the fate of those who cannot escape coercion and violence, while judgment appears suspended when Baggio points that the children-soldier of Boko Haram are known to be the cruellest and are rumoured to go and kill their parents first during raids. "Abducted and brainwashed, I cannot believe that they just don't understand that they are taking a man's life," shrugged Kabiru, "there will be no mercy for them." "The worst part is knowing that they [Boko Haram] are raising children with a lust for blood, children that are able to continue the fight for years." Nasiru, who acts as a mentor for many of his younger cousins, is deeply upset by the way youth in Diffa gives no value to life: "only Allah can claim life back from you." The *fada* friends agree that using religion (*addini*) to justify violence is the evidence of the cultural backwardness of syncretist people like the Buduma.[7] "Generations of kids growing up with this idea that Islam is only about restrictions and that it is permissible to use violence to enforce restrictions, this saddens me the most" nods Umaru.

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[6] Accounts and reports about entire swaths of territories seized by the insurgents in Borno (Nigeria) and Diffa attest to the economic significance of the *jihadi*-type of governance. In fact, insurgents connected to al-Dawla around Lake Chad are known to have regulated a sort of secure market environment that not only allows peasants and local producers to operate but also attracts economic agents from beyond the Dawla-controlled territories and refugee camps. For an overview, see Iocchi (2020a).

[7] The doxa about the presumed backwardness of the Buduma people is widely reiterated throughout the Lake Chad micro-region or implied in several stories and rumours. Such imaginary suits well with the news about the ethnic composition of terrorist militias in the area but appears also the umpteenth revitalization of a century-old de-humanizing stereotype. About rumours on Buduma and the war on Boko Haram in Lake Chad, see Iocchi (2020b).

The *sunnance* milieu to which Umaru and Kabiru gravitate around promotes a sense of belonging and of self-worth through the reinforcement of trust-bonding and positive behaviour, practices framed within a broader focus on the Book and the Sunna. The most common *sunnance* events for networking and proselytisation are the *ziyāra*, gatherings organised in the neighbourhoods of Niamey which are open to everyone and attract vast numbers of attendees, usually high-school and university students or youngsters recently arrived in Niamey, individuals who are not interested in the style of traditional Izala and Kitab wa-Sunna, increasingly viewed as formal, serious or "puritanical". Among *sunnance*, sermons and preaching are provided in a frame that does not view the materiality of social relations in deplorable ways: in fact, Baggio, Kabiru and the other friends joke about how one of the most popular preachers connected to the *sunnance* environment, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Alarama, in the mid-to-late 1990s, performed as a dancer in Kalley-Est.[8] "We are not *matsolo* [stingy]," laughs Umaru, who, despite attending *ziyāra* and *sunnance* meetings has not given up the tradition of celebrating *mawlud,* and recently participated in a lavish wedding party which his friends were still teasing him about. Following the *sunnance* creed, the 'y*an fada* argue that organising one's life according to the Quran and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad does not mean to renounce to playfulness. Kabiru adds that the kind of internal struggles that occurred within Izala associations, Kitab wa-Sunna and all the formal Salafi organisations (*kungiyoyi*) fosters rivalry and selfishness and thereby undermines the true meaning of *da'wa.* Divisions and arguments, within and between formal Salafi groups in the country as well as in northern Nigeria, have led Kabiru to call into question the *ḥusn al-niyya* (the finest or innermost intention) of preachers "that act the same way as our politicians (*'yan siyasa*)."

The formation and multiplication of *fada* in Niamey is framed as the indirect response to the incapacity of party politics to absorb youth's desire to engage the social sphere and carve out a space, symbolic or not, for their agency. While most young men and women feel marginalised by a political establishment that solicits youth participation only during election time, the space of the *fada* functions as a refuge for the dispossessed, as a canvass for new powerful imaginaries of success and also as a repertoire of praxes that

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[8] A neighborhood in Niamey. Sermons performed by Alarama are extremely popular, especially in Niamey and among the migrant community: his cassettes can be found throughout Niger as well as in Fada Ngourma (Burkina Faso) or even Lomé (Togo) and Cotonou (Benin). See also Sounaye (2013).

convey information-sharing, solidarity and camaraderie for whoever feels stuck in a powerless positions and needs to make ends meet by themselves (*se débrouiller*) in the largely informal and competitive job market of Niamey. When coupled with attendance of the *markaz* (Islamic centre), youth's belonging to a certain *fada* can bring that sense of empowerment and the feeling of living an Islamically full life. "If we wanted to get rich, drive a Mercedes and live in a sumptuous villa, we would have entered the Nassara or the Tarayya parties,"[9] sums up Baggio, who as a teenager gravitated close to the local section of late president Tandja's party. "But our aim in life is to be good Muslims in the first place, and this is why we follow the Sunna of the Prophet and not *'yan siyasa*." This appears also as a sideswipe towards another *fada* in La Poudrière, called *La Victoire* (victory), that is known for having received many gifts from Niamey politicians seeking re-election, showing the party banner and parading in the street during the 2016 elections that confirmed Tarayya's Mahamadou Ioussoufou in power. Unlike Baggio, Nasiru and Umaru do not condemn *La Victoire* for having sided with the victorious Tarayya and for having opted for material gifts instead of spiritual elevation. "In Niger, we don't have much to eat [*bouffer*, slang for enriching], so one has to do what one's got to do not to starve." When access to resources and the dividends of privileged positions must be shared among many clients, the webs of dependence to party politics become crucial axes to pursue an active effort "to not get stuck" in passivity and victimhood.

Issues of corruption and embezzlement, or even election-rigging, are viewed as morally wrong as long as the person involved does not distribute adequately among the broader circles of clients. But how is it viewed to be a client? Is it morally unacceptable? Nasiru and Umaru have a quite concrete stance and tend to accept such practices because the logic of "negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation" (Olivier de Sardan, 1999, p. 25) is embedded not only in politics but in any aspect of sociality. Entering patrimonial networks is a sought-after condition for many young Nigeriens that aim to share the spoils of power, but this does

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[9] The *Mouvement National pour la Société du Développement*, MNSD-Nassara, a liberal-conservative party founded during Kountché's years, governed Niger for long periods of time in the early 1990s and between 1999 and 2010 under Mamadou Tandja (d. 2020). The *Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme*, PNDS-Tarayya, on the other hand, is a left-leaning party that stayed as the opposition for most of the 1990s and early 2000s before a *coup d'etat* in 2010 averted Tandja's plan to reform the Constitution and seek a third mandate (the so-called Tazartché, or "continuity", movement). The Tarayya would go on to win the 2011 elections and is still in power.

not diminish the condemnation for *’yan siyasa* who are incompetent and unable to foster job-creation and broad development. "If you are a big man, you have to show it with gifts or glamour and that’s when people will follow you. If you just do the talk people will think that you have nothing to give them. This is how you become a politician, people will have to need you," explains Kabiru, talking about how Nigerien youth views a party career. Promises are nothing if not supported by redistributive practices in the very same way as "politics is just crookery without a development programme." People, and especially young unmarried men (*samari*) in the *fada*, expect a politician to do some *magouilles* (backroom arrangements) when in office because survival tactics are part of the game, embedded in the political process and in wider patrimonial relations. A crystallisation of clienteles, nonetheless, can be a double-edged sword. The *fada La Victoire* pops up again in the conversation, as it is deemed unanimously by the group members as an example of the kind of relation between *’yan fada* and politicians in which the latter "bring tea, bring things" but, at the end, they "just leave you in the street." *La Victoire* is known for having supported a noted local politician for years, but none of his promises of jobs and opportunities have materialised as instead all of the *fada* members are engaged in various forms of *débrouillardise* and, despite having mobilised for him, they saw no benefits in the longer term.

The focus on "development" is crucial. "Development", be it subjective or as part of a shared project, keeps youth from a motionless life: "that’s sitting idly [*zaman banza*] and that’s why our elders come to think that young men are good for nothing." *Fada* members connect personal agency as good Muslims to a broader frame of societal development in the country. For such reasons they view with relative favour politicians aiming to introduce an agenda of reformist Islam in the state structure, as it is considered a pattern to establish forms of good governance and reverse "injustice, lawlessness and disorder," as Kabiru frames it. For young urban *débrouillards* in Niamey, the point is exiting a condition of inactivity that in the medium and long term hinders their aspirations as future breadwinners, husbands, fathers and respected members of society, keeping them in a state of "waithood" (Honwana, 2012).

As the night advances, the buzz of generator sets increases and almost deafens the pop jingles coming from the radio. The moment has come to perform the *ṣalāt al-ʿishāʾ* (night prayer) and the *’yan fada* start to unroll their praying mats. The corner of the street suddenly turns into a huge congregation of people, of any age and class, praying together and animating this oth-

erwise barren space with life and a sense of belonging that overshadows the severity of the topics discussed few minutes before.

Between *la débrouillardise* and development: Concluding remarks

In the *fada* of La Poudrière, a conversation about the latest Boko Haram attack in the country easily slipped into a wider reflection about the nuances and meanings of being a good Muslim while navigating a job-starved terrain where, in many ways, clientelist networks represent a much-needed parachute. Attempts to define the exact nature of a complex and still partially unpacked phenomenon like Boko Haram have provided the stage for a round of cultural stereotypes about distant ethnicities whose belonging not only to the community of believers but also to the national "development society" of Niger appears still under question. On the other hand, Boko Haram's embracing of *jihadi*-Salafism appeared completely out of the question. While the Islamic credentials of "the terrorists" are undermined by a choir of voices from the political and clerical establishment, *'yan fada* seemed more bothered by the kind of questions that the mere existence of Boko Haram entailed for them as young men and peers of many of Boko Haram's rank-and-file soldiers.

What does it mean to be a good Muslim today in Niger? In order to fully understand the complexity of Muslim identity in contemporary Niger, it is not enough to question the claim of faith but, rather, it is necessary to appreciate the ways in which the interpretations of Islam as an orthopraxis and the different strands of religious knowledge are understood and critically mediated by individuals. The diverse classes of religious knowledge that are part of the repertoire of Nigerien Muslims and the way these classes are connected to a subjective – emotional and intellectual – experience inform the production of a discourse on morality, on permissibility and on potentiality, or, in a word, on agency. The interpretative effort of reformist Islam, and Salafi-oriented movements specifically, is appreciated by Nigerien youth and *'yan fada*, but it is also critically engaged. While the Book and the Sunna of Prophet Muhammad, in line with the Izala-oriented lecture, form the backbone of the religious experience for many *'yan fada*, the severe attitude displayed and the sort of puritanism inherent in the communication and channels of socialisation of mainstream Salafi groups are not. Instead, the *sunnance* movement is perceived as media-savvy, modern and even "inclusive", in accordance with what Nigerien youth think "a good Muslim" should be. The harsh – and even confrontational – stance displayed by Izala-oriented

groups, especially towards Sufism or public celebrations, is viewed as part of the broader social issues that have fostered the rise of violent groups such as Boko Haram. A more "inclusive" and open way to define Muslim-ness, in which the stress on prohibitions and impositions is downplayed, opens up opportunities for individual as well as community "development" and helps to prevent "the kind of chaos that is spilling out from Nigeria," in Baggio's words.

As Jean and John Comaroff note with regard to Africa, the "diminishing of the capacity of governments – if not the market forces they foster – to control adolescent bodies, energies, or intentions" (Comaroff, Comaroff, 2005, p. 22) has long been a hallmark in Western-designed programmes of social engineering that treat youth, and especially Muslim youth, as a category in need of political containment, ideological monitoring and economic re-purposing. What emerges clearly from the analysis of the ambitions, values, beliefs and attitudes of young Muslim men in Niger, their primary concern – as that of any other youth in the world, Muslim or not – is to question the consolidated (economic, political, religious) framework in which they live, and not to uncritically join it. *'Yan fada*'s main concern, in sum, is to navigate their chances and exert their agency in pursuit of jobs and fortune, through *la débrouillardise* or clientelist relations, as well as in trying to give their own lives and the social landscape they inhabit a sense of stability, justice and equality.

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Chapter 5
Living in a Cosmopolitan "Small Town" in Africa
Urban Space, Individual Trajectories and Everyday Practices in
Marsabit, Northern Kenya

Erika Grasso

Introduction

> [Marsabit] is a cosmopolitan town. It has all the tribes, even Kalenjin and Jaluo ... the tribes from down Kenya, too. In our county we have fourteen tribes and nowadays all the faces of the fourteen tribes are in Marsabit town and this is true also for other Kenyan groups. We have all other communities. There are forty-two tribes in this town, even if in small number. It is a cosmopolitan town.[1]

Sitting across from me in his office, this is how a public official described Marsabit, the capital city of Marsabit County (Eastern Province, Kenya). Part of the wider Kenya urban system, Marsabit plays a pivotal role among the northern regions, yet it seems little more than an overgrown village. It has a population of about 20 000 inhabitants (County Government of Marsabit, 2017) and, along with the border town of Moyale, it is the only urban centre in Kenya's largest county.[2] It is a place of much ambiguity and ambivalence: a multi-ethnic space and a connection point between centre and periphery. Furthermore, from the point of view of its residents, Marsabit has a cosmopolitan nature.

Marsabit County, like all northern Kenya, is often perceived and described as underdeveloped and as a place of tribalism, religious radicalism

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[1] A.D., interview, Marsabit, July 2014.

[2] Marsabit County covers 70 944.2 km² and has 459 795 inhabitants (KNBS, 2019). The whole area is scarcely populated (6 inhabitants per km²) and just about 22% lives in urban contexts (in the centres of Marsabit and Moyale).

and "blind" tradition. [3] Recent devolution processes, infrastructural improvements and new private and public investments have initiated a slow change that challenges these narratives. The effective distance between the centre of Kenya and its peripheries has been lessened, and Marsabit has been transformed. Despite that, though, the town is still perceived as small and remote, just as the region that gave birth to it appears to be shaped by and a victim of "remoteness" and tribalism. This stereotypical image is the result of a myopic understanding of urban space. Between two poles of attraction (centre/periphery), Marsabit represents a good example of those "small towns" (Baker, 1990) that constitute the African urban system and that are impacted by substantial processes of change and growth (Hilgers, 2012).

Compared with Nairobi and other cosmopolitan centres that have dominated the literature on cosmopolitanism, Marsabit is "small", "dusty" and "lost in the middle of nowhere", as I have been told many times in Nairobi. Despite that, Marsabit County's own citizens' definition of the town as cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic is appropriate to better understand the urban centre. Actually, Marsabit is a place of "super diversity" (Vertovec, 2007), inhabited by (individual and collective) subjects from various national, cultural and economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, it offers services, opportunities and connections with other national and international centres. In this sense, in order to comprehend this secondary centre role, it is essential, on the one hand, to take into account processes and elements apparently peculiar to "global cities" as defined by Saskia Sassen (2005) and, on the other, to explore global processes in smaller and less wealthy centres (Myers, 2003). Moreover, beyond the scarcity of services and the delayed development of infrastructure which characterise the town and region, Marsabit has a peculiar history. It is a history that preserves meanings which need to be investigated and understood through its inhabitants' terms (Mbembe, Nuttal, 2004; Pieterse, 2010). I argue that Marsabit's multi-ethnic and ambiguous nature (both central and peripheral at the same time) makes it a "marginal centre" (Remotti, 1989) or a "critical centre" (Wood, 2009). It is a definitive point and a resource for Marsabit

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[3] Northern Kenya has been historically neglected by central governments in both colonial and post-colonial times (Anderson, 2014; Carrier, 2016; Lochery, 2012; Schlee, 2007). Stereotypes about northern regions and pastoralists are still widespread in Kenya as the result of a history of marginality, perceptions, policies and state perpetrated violence (Carrier, 2016; Oded, 2000; Schlee and Shongolo, 2012; Whittaker, 2014). They are grounded in a common and historically rooted understanding of pastoralists and Muslims as "alien" within the Kenyan nation (Carrier, 2016).

County's citizens. Calling it "cosmopolitan" enables them to circumvent ethnic and moral boundaries and the constraints that shape it and, through the urban space, to cope with marginality and insecurity. In particular, those who occupy precarious positions from an economic, ethnic and gender point of view find in Marsabit a space in which to experiment with possibilities that would otherwise be impossible.

This contribution proposes to investigate the Marsabit urban space and its sociality from within, attempting to overcome the short-sighted narratives that have often involved African urban centres and their inhabitants, especially those centres considered "small" or "secondary". The ethnography conducted in Marsabit allows us to acknowledge the urban space as a repertoire of performances and practices (Fabian, 1978; Barber, 1997) and as a place of "everyday cosmopolitanism", using Asef Bayat's terminology (Bayat, 2009). Practices and relationships inexorably transform the space of the city, a "place" made meaningful by those who inhabit it and a site where vulnerable subjects are able to better affirm their self-determination, experiencing an agency not even thinkable in the "traditional" spaces of households or rural villages.

Therefore, it seems necessary to give voice to those practices through which places take on their meaning (Feld, Basso, 1996). From this perspective, Marsabit is a junction of connections and inter-connections in which northern Kenyan inhabitants' "activity spaces" (Schöfelder, Axhausen, 2010) intertwine, shaping the urban space in its *ville* and *cité* dimensions (Sennett, 2018). Marsabit is shaped by subjects' experiences; it is useful, then, to take into account that their agency is strictly connected to creativity and change (Rapport, Overing, 2000; Lavie, Narayan, Rosaldo, 1993) and that ideas and practices are part of an ongoing process through which subjects shape the world they live in:

> The essence of the process of social life is that it is continuous. People did not create their society once and for all, for everybody else born afterwards to be born into a predetermined world. By learning the world into which they were born, and by continually thinking and acting in it, people continually create and change it (Holy, Stuchlik, 1981, p. 16).

In the Marsabit urban space, individual and collective subjects find much more than just facilities. The town allows them access to an essential space, full of the relationships that allow them to navigate perceived and real marginality and remoteness, and that often empower their social agency. In this context, it is possible to observe "tactical cosmopolitanism" practices and

rhetoric (Landau, 2010; Landau, Freemantle, 2010). Like the migrants in Johannesburg studied by Loren B. Landau and Iriann Freemantle, Marsabit County dwellers "practically and rhetorically draw on various, often competing, systems of cosmopolitan rights and rhetoric to insinuate themselves, however shallowly, in the networks and spaces needed to achieve specific practical goals" (Landau, Freemantle, 2010, p. 380). The ethnographic gaze allows us to grasp the daily practices and discourses that give life to places, indissolubly linked to the ordinary, and to the individual and collective experience of the subjects, as proposed by the perspective of "ordinary ethics" (Lambek, 2010; Das, 2010; Fassin, 2012). I presume that this approach is helpful in overcoming the widespread narratives that describe Marsabit as "only" the capital of a remote, dangerous and underdeveloped region. Seen from its inner urban space, Marsabit is far more than that.

The "impossible things market"

In a café in the heart of the town, Guyo and I were chatting, surrounded by customers of all sorts: women in long, colourful dresses, children, and men in elegant suits or traditional dress. Drinking *chai* and eating *sambusa,* Guyo is a Burji in his fifties, born and raised in Marsabit, and has retraced the history of his home. "It's a small town, an accidental town that grew by accident" he says to me, with a wink.[4]

Sitting on a volcanic mountain covered with forest and surrounded by arid and semi-arid lowlands inhabited by groups of nomadic pastoralists, Marsabit looks like a quirk of history, "an accident" to use Guyo's words. The British colonial administration founded it in 1907 as an administrative centre and trading post in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of the British East Africa Protectorate (Witsenburg, Wario, 2008; Brown, 1989). At that time, the arid lowlands that divide the green central Kenya highlands from high Ethiopian plateaux appeared on colonial maps as an empty, blank and unmarked region (Brown, 1989), yet it soon became a pivotal buffer zone for the maintenance of the protectorate's northern and eastern borders (Oba, 2013; 2017).

Urbanity began to appear in northern Kenya soon after the colonial territories, resources and people were taken over. In the beginning, Marsabit was nothing more than a small outpost that began to grow thanks to the presence and the initiatives of various groups of people other than the pastoral and nomadic groups that historically inhabited the region. For a long

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[4] W. G., interview, Marsabit, May 2015.

time (at least until the 1930s), the pastoralists (namely the Gabra, Rendille and Borana) were forbidden to settle in the town. The town first developed and matured thanks to the presence of colonial officers, Goans, Somali and Indian traders and some groups of refugees, as well as Burji and Konso farmers from southern Ethiopia.[5] In the early twentieth century, the new-born colonial outpost showed a clear division between neighbourhoods – those inhabited by European colonial officials, military corps, Goan or Indian employees and the farmers from Ethiopia. In the centre, called the Boma, Somali and Indian traders gave life to the market area, setting up commercial and artisan activities. Nomadic pastoralists had access to the Boma where they found facilities and products from outside the pastoral economy. British, Somali and Indian merchants founded the "impossible things market"[6] in the very centre of the "only" town of the region. Since its inception, Marsabit has been a place where different worlds encounter each other; urban spaces have been imagined and "created" by "others" who founded and inhabited it, and it began to be a significant place, intrinsically linked with "otherness" (Grasso, 2020a). Bit by bit, Marsabit became essential to both the colonial power, to establish a market economy and tax system (Berman, 1990), and to the local population to better navigate change, as well as social and ecological crises.

Nowadays, the "impossible things market" still offers ideas, goods and services that cannot be found outside the town, making Marsabit a cosmopolitan "small town". In this sense, Marsabit's centre maintains its "other" nature, hosting traders, public officials and a large number of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. The centre of Marsabit is a place inevitably different from the ecological and social environment of the local nomadic pastoralist groups, but equally essential to their survival. In this area, first occupied by the Somali and Indian "impossible things market", shops, carpenters' and artisans' workshops are operated by people mostly from the central and southern regions of Kenya or from other African

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[5] In the late nineteenth century, among the first settled inhabitants of Marsabit mountain were Gabras who had escaped the aggression of the Abyssinians during Menelik II's expansion attempts southwards (Witsenburg. Wario, 2008; Oba, 2013). After the foundation of the town, British officials encouraged Burji and Konso farmers to move to Marsabit from the border town of Moyale to start farming to supply the administration (Witsenburg. Wario, 2008).

[6] I draw the concept of "impossible things market" from Alberto Salza who kindly shared with me his years experiences and reflections about northern Kenya's pastoral societies in long and fruitful conversations in his house in Turin.

countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia. The surrounding parts of the town are organised into "substantive" areas that, while not openly declared, are ethnically demarcated and disputed (Grasso, 2020a). The urban centre is a site of alterity and super-diversity and is connected to other spaces navigated by nomadic pastoralists, namely the lowlands, to Nairobi and other political and economic centres, and to other African regions (Somalia and Ethiopia). Since its inception, the Marsabit urban space has embodied an ambivalence due to an ongoing negotiation between "there" and "here", "modernity" and "tradition", "Kenyan" and "un-Kenyan".

One afternoon I was passing by the Catholic mission in the very centre of Marsabit to greet some friends. In the kitchen, Patricia – a woman from central Kenya – and Darare – a Gabra woman – were arguing heatedly about female circumcision. Patricia was furious; she could not convince her friend that that type of ritual should no longer be practiced for the sake of girls and women: "It is no longer legal in Kenya. We are in Kenya. Marsabit is in Kenya and mutilations are illegal here too".[7] Darare was quietly sitting at the table, firm in her convictions: "I know it is not good, but we do like that, it is our tradition. Nobody will marry my daughter if she won't".[8] The negotiation between the "there" and "here" takes place thanks to the everyday interactions between people who come from different backgrounds. These encounters are less frequent in rural spaces and are the basis of Marsabit's cosmopolitan and ambiguous nature. In the urban space, subjects can choose to fulfil or to question economic, gender and ethnic lines, depending on the contingencies. Boundaries and feelings of belonging are questioned, or reaffirmed, through contact with "others". Facing Darare's "traditional" convictions, Patricia underlined their common national identity. In a different way, when she talked about Meru, her home place, she usually referred to it as "Kenya" reproducing the idea that "Marsabit is not Kenya" as I have often been told during my stay in the country. The urban environment allows both to reaffirm this belief and to question it. Aid workers, students, farmers, artisans and employees from local communities and from "elsewhere", in fact, inhabit the urban space and act in it, often overcoming local ethnic lines and contributing to bring about change in the city streets.

Western tradition associates the ease with which one comes into contact with otherness and strangers with urban life and cosmopolitanism (Sennett, 2018). In this sense, the "impossible things market" is the true heart of

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[7] A. O., conversation, Marsabit, April 2015.
[8] G. G., conversation, Marsabit, April 2015.

Marsabit urbanity. It is the area occupied by formal and informal trades and artisan activities, cafés, restaurants and offices on the main streets of the old Boma. The goods and services it offers appear as "impossible" because they are somehow extraneous to the rural and pastoral world. The heart of the city offers access to opportunities that are unthinkable outside the urban context and allows subjects not only to think, but also to try to create a "good life" (Teppo, 2015). In the region, the "impossible things market" is a peculiar feature of the urban phenomenon. It makes Marsabit a cosmopolitan centre where different subjectivities can relate, offering spaces for ethnic, economic and gender coexistence apparently not possible in other centres.

Marsabit's cosmopolitan image is strongly connected to the multi-ethnic nature of its urban space. In the region, sub-counties and settlements are ethnically characterised according to lines that reproduce colonial mapping. The town is the only space in which conflictual relations between groups that compete for resources apparently do not preclude their spatial coexistence and in which violent conflict rarely breaks out (Grasso, 2020a). In this sense, the Marsabit urban space plays a pivotal role in individual and collective subjects' trajectories. Its cosmopolitan image is nourished by narratives that depict its nature – a place inhabited by all ethnic communities – ignoring the actual political competition and conflict among the major ethnic communities (Gabra, Borana and Rendille) and their allies. I argue that, when ethnic conflict is endemic, ethnic identities have a strong spatial dimension (Watson, 2010) and by not openly declaring and underlining the tensions that exist, the town is able to make its space "open" and accessible to all.

Ethnicity, as it is possible to observe in northern Kenya, has its origins in the colonial past. The colonial power took advantage in the NFD, mapping and defining "tribal grazing areas", limiting shepherd communities' movements and controlling access to resources. As evidenced in other African regions, in the colonial past these identities were more fluid and flexible. In northern Kenya, ethnicity acquired a spatial nature: "The most important form of change, and the root of other changes, has been the territorialisation of ethnicity. Groups that did not have bounded territories now have them" (Schlee, 2013, p. 858). This is the case, then, in the presence of "substantive areas" in the Marsabit centre. The urban space reproduces the county's ethnic polarisation and embodies colonial and post-colonial understandings of identities and power. Nevertheless, it is something that emerges from everyday practises and is never openly declared. The silence around ethnicity that I experienced in the town made

me think, at first, that it was possible to consider Marsabit sociality as going beyond ethnic narratives that all too often monopolise discourse on northern Kenya. Urbanity took time to reveal itself fully to me, but I discovered that it is not possible to comprehend Marsabit and its inhabitants' life experiences without considering their relationship with alterity and their ethnic feelings.

Ethnic belongings are multiple and fluid, although they are rarely declared in everyday speech and narratives. They are a complex and multiform expression of the peculiar experience of modernity, based on market and state, of actual and changing realities. Like other African societies, Kenya experiences fragmentations dictated by ethnic and religious affiliations in which the ethnic discourse is closely linked to the political one (Berman, Eyoh, Kymlicka, 2004). In their everyday life, subjects are entangled in an ongoing negotiation and re-definition of self that is strictly connected with ethnic belonging, in both the private and public (individual and collective) dimensions. The complex relations between power and individual agency are nourished by diverse narratives and speech that refer to two distinguished forms, namely "moral ethnicity" and "political tribalism" as defined by John Lonsdale (2004). Marsabit County has seen an ethnic configuration and endemic ethnic conflicts that are rooted in the colonial past, but which are also expressions of post-colonial power relations between diverse institutions (local and national), marginality as experienced among pastoral and Muslim Kenyan communities, and the competition for natural, economic and political resources.

In northern Kenya, as demonstrated by Elizabeth E. Watson (2010), the engagements with space are implicated in the construction, performance and experience of identity and in the way in which relations are constructed and negotiated. In this sense, the Marsabit urban space is conceived and informed by lines of ethnicity and local affiliations and, at the same time, connected and stretched out towards elsewhere. Ethnicity is something that strongly affects the everyday life of Marsabit's residents and that has a spatial and urban dimension that, while never openly declared, contributes to the construction of urban space in its material (*ville*) and social (*cité*) dimensions (Sennett, 2018). Space is linked to social relations in the construction of subjectivities and relations to others (Massey, 2005; Ingold, 2007). In the urban space, Marsabit's residents engage in relations not only shaped by ethnic rhetoric, but which are potentially open to new and different ideals and expectations (Grasso, 2020b; Zingari, 2020). They are an inexhaustible source of control, sharing and conviviality (Bjarnesen, Utas, 2018). In this sense, the town enables Marsabit County citizens to reaffirm

their belonging and to take part in ethnic competition and, at the same time, to access national and international connections and to feel closer to the Kenyan national community.

   Returning to Guyo and the words that opened this chapter which defined Marsabit as an "accidental town", it is possible to say that Marsabit is a quirk of history, given the exceptional nature of the urban space in the region. In a context ideally dominated by the culture and ethnicity of nomadic pastoralists, Marsabit is an exception, a place built on movements, words, sounds, histories and practices that have a generative power (De Boeck, Jacquemin, 2006) and that constitute an infrastructure (Simone, 2004b) that enables subjects to interpret and act despite uncertainties (Mbembe, Nuttal, 2004; Trovalla, Trovalla, 2015; Hoffman, 2007). In the following paragraphs, I will explore how the "accidental" and "other" nature of Marsabit affects the trajectories of its subjects, enabling them to navigate marginality and to affirm their agency. In particular, women's voices are worth listening to in order to see that Marsabit is a place where gender and ethnic lines are produced and reproduced, but also questioned and negotiated. In this sense Marsabit is a site of "condensation, acceleration and intensification" (Dilger et al., 2020, p. 9) that connects subjects and spaces and questions the rural-urban, tradition–modernity dichotomies as well as the despondency theories on African urbanity. Far from being just an overgrown village or only the capital city of the one of the poorest Kenyan counties, Marsabit is a place in which the dimensions of the *ville* and the *cité* produce new imaginaries and new hopes for the future. Marsabit is a place where it is possible to think of and to give meaning to the idea of a "good life" (Teppo, 2015).

Movements, connections and self-affirmation: Women in the centre

Marsabit, and in particular the market at its heart, is meaningful, not just for the economic and functional value of its services. The Marsabit centre (and its market) is a place in which subjects test their social existence through the relations that come into being (Guingane, 2001). Nevertheless, the market is the result of the society of which it is an expression (Aime, 2002) and, although defined as "cosmopolitan" and egalitarian, it reproduces ethnic and gender lines and relations that are rarely openly expressed. At the same time, it is an "[...] infrastructure [...] capable of facilitating the intersection of socialities so that expanded spaces of economic and cultural operation become available to residents of limited means" (Simone, 2004b, p. 407).

In the market area, Turu sits every day at her stall where I often stopped to buy scarfs, incense or perfume and to chat with her.

> I am happy to have this place at the market. Now my son helps me a little – you saw how good he was giving you the change – and the baby can stay here with me. And with what I earn here, I pay school fees and we can eat. I kicked my husband out of the house! He has married a second wife ... You know what? He is free to stay with her all the day. My businesses make me independent! This is important! Look, we're all women here...[9]

In Turu's words the urban space emerges as a place where economic independence and self-affirmation become possible. The young Burji woman briefly mentioned her husband, emphasising that her place of informal trading, at the heart of the Marsabit market, gives her the possibility to overcome her subordinate position. Turu belongs to that part of the population not involved in the county pastoral economy and not even part of the urban bourgeoisie that in recent decades has established itself by navigating the tumultuous waters of ethnopolitics and the arrival of huge external investments in the region. In this sense, and being a woman, Turu occupies a position of substantial marginality in the panorama of economic development and political competition in the region, but actually finds in the urban space a site in which to affirm her own subjectivity and to try to achieve her expectations for the future. Her story is common in Marsabit and mirrors the experience of Arbe. Like Turu, Arbe conducts some activities in the Marsabit centre. Her little shop opens every morning in the heart of Soko Gabra,[10] a place of meeting and trading often frequented by the Gabras. Arbe belongs to the Gabra household where I lived for many months during my fieldwork in Marsabit. At home, it was possible to see that her position was vulnerable. She usually sat in her room taking care of the children. I often noticed her silences upon her sister's husband's arrival and her exclusion from dinners in the main house. Her everyday life practices and movements

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[9] M. T., interview, Marsabit, October 2014.

[10] Between 2005 and 2006 the violent clashes between Borana and Gabra affected Marsabit County and Marsabit urban space. In 2005, after the attack on Turbi village where Borana men killed 95 Gabras (Mwangi, 2006), the tension in Marsabit increased and Gabra merchants, no longer feeling safe to share the market space with other groups, founded a Gabra Market (*Soko Gabra* in Kiswahili). Today, on the northern side of the urban centre, Soko Gabra is the urban space reference area of all Gabras who live in town or who pass by Marsabit. It is one among the "dense" or "substantive" areas that shape the urban commercial hub.

in the private space of the household greatly clashed with her attitude outside home. I took time to understand Arbe's role within her family. She appeared to me to be both independent and submissive at the same time. Although the Arbe's family belongs to the urban bourgeoisie and takes part to the continuous exchange of ideas and capital between the pastoral and urban world and involved in the ethnic competition of economic and political resources, the young woman, like Turu, places herself in a position of vulnerability in urban sociability.

Framing Arbe's individual experience within the context of her daily movement allows us to glimpse how her ambivalent attitude was the results of a non-linear life trajectory with the urban space playing a great role in it. When I met her for the first time in the early 2000s, Arbe was a young unmarried mother of a baby girl. We met again ten years later. She was a woman in her thirties who had given life to two children outside of marriage and was about to become the second wife of a Gabra man through a traditional wedding. Arbe was moving along a life trajectory that did not fully comply with ethnic and religious gender roles and family expectations. This puts her in a precarious position in comparison with the other women within the family. Visiting Arbe in Soko Gabra and following her movements, I saw I was not observing the whole picture. Marsabit's inner space offered her a meaningful counterpart to her everyday life experience. In fact, Arbe is a true entrepreneur. From her small shop she is able to connect travellers to northern areas of the county, to organise meetings and to entertain her customers selling fruits, snacks and whatever is needed for a long journey in the desert. Travelling with her from Marsabit to her small village of origin, I observed the woman, whom I thought shy and modest, taking the lead in the group of women with whom we were travelling. On this occasion, Arbe proved to be an integral and active part of a wider ethnic network. Leaving her family courtyard, Arbe accedes to a social and relational infrastructure that connects urban and market spaces with those of rural and ethnic communities (Grasso, 2020b). Following Arbe's everyday trajectories between her house, Soko Gabra and the northern villages, it was possible to glimpse the complex relations between spaces, objects, people and practices and subjects' attempts to navigate them. Multilevel conjunctions make the urban space a real "infrastructure" that attracts the subjects and, at the same time, expands their possibilities of accessing wider economic and cultural spaces even when in marginal conditions (Simone, 2004b).

Assuming the entanglement between space and relations, subjects move between and across spaces that not only reproduce the power relations of

their specific context, but that are also gendered and imbued by symbolic meanings (Massey, 1994). Although it is hard to find gendered lines in terms of space occupation or commercial specialisation, in Marsabit, women's engagement with the urban space often translates to self-affirmation and likely to power and control of resources. Marsabit's urban core is frequented by women whose trajectories unravel between the private spaces of households and families, and the public urban space of the market. The latter emerges as an essential infrastructure that makes "other" spaces, ideas and imaginaries available to those who accede to households and courtyards. Allowing them to retain strong ties with families' rural and pastoral backgrounds and, at the same time, being closely connected with urbanity. Subjects find in the spaces that constitute Marsabit urbanity in its public and private dimensions arenas in which to affirm, negotiate and question gender, ethnic and generational lines and identities (Grasso, 2020b).

Arbe's ambivalent position in her household and in her small shop in Marsabit centre allows us a glimpse of what will become clearer in the next section where I will deepen the connection between urban space, individual agency and ethnic belonging. The Marsabit urban space is a site of great ambivalence. It is an infrastructure that allows individual and collective subjects to get away from the town "lost in the middle of nowhere" and, at the same time, to keep alive closer ties with rural spaces, "moral ethnicity" and tradition. Individuals like Arbe and Turu navigate this ambivalence, finding in the urban space a place in which to affirm agency and fulfil their expectations. In this sense, Marsabit is shaped by individuals' experiences and relations. Its urban space and its neighbourhoods and households, "like voices, are local and multiple. For each inhabitant, a place has a unique reality, one in which meaning is shared with other people and places. The links in these chains of experienced places are forged of culture and history" (Rodman, 1992, p. 643).

Although women's presence and their role in the private domain of family and household grounds in traditional gender roles is more evident, their engagement with the urban space is less visible yet undeniable, as outlined by Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, for women involved in the informal economy of Nairobi:

> Women are important in both production and reproduction spaces. In production spaces, a good number of women are engaged in small-scale manufacturing and trade, mainly in the informal sector. They also work in factories, offices, hotels or households. Women's role in reproduction

entails renewing the labour force through birth and the nurturing of young ones. Thus, they contribute to the growth and expansion of contemporary cities (Kinyanjui, 2014, p. 45).

The women I met in Marsabit were involved in the production and reproduction of spaces through their trajectories' ongoing movements within, across and outside of the urban space. Ongoing movements keep connections alive between the urban and rural spaces, questioning classical dichotomies that depict the first as the site of development and modernity and the second as static, traditional and underdeveloped. Goods sold in Marsabit come mainly from Moyale, Isiolo, Meru and Nairobi, places where Turu constantly goes to supply her trading activity. Dansa, Arbe's sister, is a Gabra woman involved in local politics and development projects. She constantly moves between Nairobi and other centres of the country on one side, and small villages scattered in the northern area of Marsabit County, on the other. During her journeys she finds materials and inspiration for the creation of costume jewellery and handcraft produced by the micro-credit groups that she manages among the Gabra community. From her small shop, Arbe also participates in the movements of people, ideas and objects through the town. Her little store in Soko Gabra is not just a fruit and vegetable shop, but a real reference point for those who need to travel to the north of the county or who come from that area. For Turu, Dansa and Arbe, as for many other women and men, the "impossible things market" and the urban space are a fundamental junction in life's trajectories.

Talking with Marsabit's inhabitants one may wonder if the nomadic attitude to movement still pervades subjects' understanding of self and still affects everyday life and ordinary practices. Turu told me her story, working on her old sewing machine under the market canopy that today has been replaced by a "modern" mall. Turu's family, as well as many of the Marsabit families, has Ethiopian origins. The memory of the migration of groups such as Borana, Burji and Konso from southern Ethiopia to Marsabit mountain survives thanks to the transnational connections – cultural, political and commercial – between subjects who recognise themselves as originating in other regions of the Horn of Africa or part of the wider Oromo nation. Turu often travels, crossing the closer international boundary with Ethiopia looking for goods and affordable prices on the other side of the border. Like many others, Turu's experience of space is grounded in the apparent ongoing movement and shift between "here" and "there", between her household, the town and "other" spaces. Subjects' "activity spaces" – their spatial and so-

cial references – reach vast distances that extend from the Marsabit centre and stretch across the region and beyond. Turu recalled her brother emigrating to the United States and her relatives in Ethiopia. The fruit that Arbe and other women sell on the streets of the "impossible things market" comes from the Meru region at the foot of Mount Kenya. The incense and perfumes that Turu and Stefania display and the fabrics they sew under the market canopy, as well as most of the livestock marketed in the county, arrives in Marsabit after crossing the Ethiopian border. The stories told by the Marsabit inhabitants bring out interesting connections. Marsabit is a centre par excellence, no longer just amongst the nomadic routes of pastoral groups, but also among the existential trajectories of the inhabitants of the county of which it is the capital. The next section will show how urban space is closely related to ethnic belongings and appears as a site in which they are affirmed but also questioned.

Rumours, ethnic lines and trajectories

In less than a century Marsabit has become a "cosmopolitan" town in which recently a shopping mall, "just like ones in Nairobi"[11] has replaced the old market hall (Grasso, 2017). Individual trajectories confirm that subjects' movements, imagination and expectations embody Marsabit ambivalence. Being the political and economic hub in a wide and marginalised region, Marsabit is a pivotal junction of a wide range of movements of people, goods and ideas that connect the peripheral centre, not only with the rural space that surround it, but also with Nairobi and other national and international centres. The town and its inhabitants navigate a marginal condition in which they move from the "far away" dimension to the "cosmopolitan" in an ongoing negotiation between the "pastoral world" and "modernity" through which they try to achieve their expectations and desires.

Arbe's family finds its roots in the arid lowlands that surround Marsabit Mountain and divide it from the Ethiopian border. Arbe and her sister Dansa were born in a small village north of Marsabit from nomadic pastoralists. Thanks to the Catholic Church, which was very active promoting welfare policies among nomads between the 1970s and 1990s (Grasso, 2019), they attended the high school in Marsabit, like many of the children of the no-

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[11] A. O., interview, Marsabit, May, 2015.

madic communities. They established themselves in Marsabit as part of the first generation to have had access to education, to settle and to engage in activities outside of the pastoral economy. Marsabit is an essential element in understanding the changes that have affected the individual and collective stories of the members of the pastoral communities of northern Kenya. The urban space is the place of the "impossible things market", of those services and the connections that link the rural periphery to the centre of the country. This is evident when we look at the trajectories of Dansa and Arbe's family members. Dansa says: "Roobe will finish his studies in Europe and then who knows ... Oba will graduate soon and he will help me managing my development aid projects, D'iba wishes to become a pilot, next year he will start the courses in Nairobi." Following Marsabit inhabitants' "spaces of activity" it is possible then to draw lines that connect northern Kenya to "other" spaces apparently far and unreachable.

As mentioned above, the town's essential role in individual and collective experiences is due to its capacity to make possible a dialogue between the rural and "nomadic" world of the villages and its urban space. Furthermore, it is worth considering the cultural meanings of spaces and resources (Wood, 2009), as well as the history of the town and the local sedentarisation processes (Fratkin, Roth, 2005). Rather than the classic dichotomies of urban/rural and nomadic/sedentary, it shows how pastoral contexts, such as that of northern Kenya, are characterised by flexibility, vocation to change and "plasticity" – dimensions through which nomadic and sedentary groups move and give meaning to places and territories (Semplici, 2020).

Marsabit is at the centre of a network of villages that have been ethnically connoted since the colonial era (Grasso, 2020a) and affected by processes of ethnic territorialisation (Schlee, 2013) in which the domains of space and ethnic belonging overlap. In this context, "primary identities" connect, not just subjects' self-definitions, but also political and economic dimensions besides those of space and environment (Bassi, 2011). In different and complementary ways, in urban and rural space, multiple and changing identities overlap at multiple levels and on the basis of diversified classification criteria (Bassi, 2010).

Dansa and Arbe's household often hosts relatives and acquaintances who share the family's pastoral background and ethnic belonging and who need access to the urban space. The private spaces of courtyards emerge as a place to reactivate bonds of "moral ethnicity" that refer to those processes through which cultural identities, common affiliations and leadership are acknowledged by subjects placed within a complex network of social obligations that

protect individuals when they are most vulnerable or in need (Lonsdale, 1994).

In a different way, the Marsabit urban public space offers different considerations (Grasso, 2020b). Defined as open and egalitarian, it conceals the ambiguous nature of the "marginal centre" (Remotti, 1989). The urban space, even when it maintains and reproduces ethnic lines and constraints – as in the case of Soko Gabra where Arbe operates – makes it possible to better navigate marginality and subaltern positions. Marsabit town is a crucial junction also in Dansa's trajectories. Due to her political activities among her ethnic community, she constantly moves between Marsabit, small Gabra villages and Nairobi, connecting the remote desert areas inhabited by Gabra and the capital city. Marsabit, even in this case, is the essential hub that makes this possible. Arbe operates mainly in Soko Gabra – the Gabra "substantive" area – and among Gabras, while Dansa's political activities are closely related to her connection with the Gabra elite. Ethnicity intrinsically shapes the trajectories of the two sisters within and across the Marsabit urban space and makes clear that urban infrastructure is closely related to ethnic belonging. The ambiguous discourses that describe the Marsabit centre as an open space unaffected by ethnicity embody the ambivalence of urban space. The narratives that define the town as "cosmopolitan" hide the truth that relations shape the urban space and that ethnicity has a great role in it. Nevertheless, to refer to Marsabit as an "open – and cosmopolitan – space" makes the "impossible things market" accessible.

At the very beginning of my fieldwork in Marsabit, a rumour drew my attention to the market space. A friend of mine heard whispers that a Borana woman had been assaulted in her home by some men from her own clan. Apparently, the reason was that she had shopped at a Gabra shop. It was the post-electoral period at the end of 2013 and the region was affected by an escalation of the conflict between the Gabra and Borana communities. "Tribal politics" had acquired violent dimensions in the town of Moyale and on the Ethiopian border. Marsabit was apparently immune from this violent conflict. At the same time, it had real consequences in the practices of its most open space, the market. Nobody talked openly with me about that episode. Marsabit inhabitants agreed that the town was the safest and freest space in the County. Nonetheless, through certain indiscretions I learned the opposite, like when talking with Kame.

Kame is a good friend of Arbe. Like her, she runs a small shop in Soko Gabra. Kame started her business in the central market area and after a while she moved to Soko Gabra. When I asked why she moved, she replied that in

Soko Gabra business was better: "our clans know that this market is for the Gabra, that we have the fabrics for the Gabra". Kame let it slip that there were also Borana and Burji among her customers. However, despite that, she insisted that: "Here all the shops are Gabra".[12]

Walking through its streets it was easy to grasp how ethnicity affects the Marsabit urban space in its *ville* and *cité* dimensions. The built space of the centre – the *ville* – reproduces ethnic lines that only a trained eye can recognise. The road that divides the market signifies a line between the "impossible things market" and the streets crowded by buildings and shops, owned and run by subjects closely linked with local ethnic communities. Here the signs and the names of the shops, both in the Borana language and in English or Swahili, refer to toponyms (local and not), as well as Arab-Muslim traditions and nomadic ones.[13] On the other hand, the *cité*, the way people act and interact in the urban space, is shaped according to substantive areas to which subjects refer for their movements in and out of the town and for their encounters with each other. Soko Gabra is among these areas that appear "dedicated" to the community, even if it is hardly openly declared (Grasso, 2020a).

Cosmopolitanism and ethnicity concur to shape not only the Marsabit space, but also its ambiguous imaginaries and the narratives and practices of urban space, as the experience of Liza illustrates. Younger than Turu and Arbe, Liza, a young woman born in a peripheral neighbourhood of Marsabit, is a further example of the extent of the role of urban space as infrastructure. Yet Liza's experience also demonstrates its ambivalence. When I met her, she was in town after temporarily interrupting her university studies in Nairobi. Daughter of a "mixed couple", her feelings of ethnic belonging were less strong than those usually expressed by inhabitants of northern Kenya. Following the traces of this family history, one gets lost in the grey areas of the unspoken. Despite her appearance as an independent and strong woman, she seemed to me vulnerable. The Marsabit centre offered her some opportunities to overcome marginality through social networks that elude ethnic

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[12] A. G., interview, Marsabit, November 2014.

[13] The toponyms lead back to specific places in the county or in Ethiopia: Moyale Modern Hotel, Kargi Investment, Forole Hardware, Keisut Building, Badassa Hotel, Chalbi Bar and Restaurant, Sagante Shine Shop, Yaballow Whole Saler, Abyssinia Collection, Dire Dawa Shop. Other signs lead back to the Islamic religion and to the Arab world: Al Subra, Al Nasser, Al Miinawar, Gaza Trade, Al Haji Electronics, Al Amana, Taqwa. The last reference appears to be that of the pastoral world and nomadic life: Gala Building, Dadacha Enterprise, Aleso Zone, Jaldesa Shop, Malle's Retail Shop, Nomads Hotel, Wato General Retail Shop, Oasis Hotel, Ibse Cafè.

belonging. At the same time, finding a place in urban sociality seemed almost impossible to her: "I had that interview yesterday. They made me wait for hours with no reasons. The guy treated me in a very creepy way. Nowadays in Marsabit it is not possible to get a job if you are not a Gabra or a Rendille".[14] On some occasions she had been a victim of men's harassment and cat-calling, an unusual phenomenon in the public spaces of the town. She moved to Nairobi trying to navigate a wider and more complex urban marginality. Not having a clear ethnic affiliation, Liza's family and position in Marsabit sociality were not traceable. Her way to challenge the dress codes and gender roles in the open space of the town exposed her to a greater precariousness and excluded her from the networks of "moral ethnicity".

As Liza's history shows, to access the urban "infrastructure", subjects deal with social and cultural diktats that usually refer to the pastoral tradition and ethnicity. If Marsabit is, as highlighted above, a pivotal junction and resource in individual life experiences, in navigating it, it is essential to negotiate individual positions in a wider sociality that account not just for the urban space but also rural and "ethnic" spaces. Although Marsabit rarely forgives individuals' "mistakes", its multi-ethnicity and its connection to elsewhere offer its inhabitants wider and freer spheres of agency. It is not a case that "un-linear" trajectories pass through the town, a junction for those who leave villages to settle down or head to Nairobi, central Kenya or other places "elsewhere". Arbe's case is an illustrative example. As a teenager in town, she met the soldier who seduced and later abandoned her and her firstborn. In the same "cosmopolitan" space she is experiencing ways to self-affirm, otherwise impossible within the limits of her household. Like Arbe, Turu also held a subaltern position in her family sphere of influence. Her shop in the market and the connections and interactions with other women and subjects enable her to challenge this.

Thus, cosmopolitanism and ethnicity appear to be both part of a shared vision of the urban space and, in a subtle game of signing and countersigning, open up the city as a site of negotiation of feelings of belonging (local and national) that facilitates access to wider and diversified trajectories. The town not only enters into a relationship with the rural spaces that surround it, but also acts as infrastructure that connects those same spaces with other places and other imaginaries, allowing the citizens of northern Kenya to navigate the actual and perceived precarious and marginal positions within the national panorama.

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[14] P. L., conversation, Marsabit, September 2014.

Conclusions

My subjects' experiences of the urban space, their individual trajectories, show how urban space is the result of social relations. It is a repertoire of performances and everyday encounters that crystallise and circumvent cultural and ethnic constraints. They include but are not limited to relations between urban and rural (Ferguson, 1999) and between local and global (Weiss, 2005). Marsabit is the result of a collective history and of individual lives. In its space, individual and collective trajectories intertwine, making available individual expectations and opportunities.

The public official's words with which this contribution opens and that define Marsabit as cosmopolitan, acquire meaning in the light of the sociability within the urban space. Marsabit satisfies the definition of a cosmopolitan centre because it hosts subjects and relations that come from diversified backgrounds and that, since its foundation, make it a place of diversity and an essential hub that connects northern Kenya's rural areas with "other" spaces and "other" subjectivities. This condition of "super-diversity" makes the town a place of "everyday cosmopolitanism", "a place where various members of ethnic, racial and religious grouping are conditioned to mix, mingle, undertake everyday encounters and experience trust with one another" (Bayat, 2009, p. 13). In this sense the urban space emerges as a place that simultaneously fulfils and circumnavigates social and ethnic dictates. In its centre, Marsabit sees people with different ethnic and economic backgrounds interact and create a place of much ambivalence (Grasso, 2017). As Neil Carrier argues for Nairobi's Somali neighbourhood East Leagh, to understand the Marsabit urban space you need to take into account the different dimensions (local, national and global) that intertwine in intricate ways (Carrier, 2016). In this sense, it is interesting to give attention to the cumulative experiences of the town that contribute to its collective history (Di Nunzio, 2019). Since the town's inception, its collective history is made by subjects who can easily be considered "cosmopolitan". In particular, it seems possible to affirm that those that occupy a more vulnerable position – women, for example – emerge as able to navigate the ambiguous nature of the urban space. They interact in the "impossible things market" as if they were "indifferent to the difference" to use Ash Amin's terms (Amin, 2012). In this sense, the urban core emerges as a site in which we glimpse the "acceptance of mixity and mobility, [the] ties with distant and different others, and [the] care for worlds beyond the familiar and the near" (Amin, 2012, p. 15). The "impossible things market" is the counterpart of other urban spaces – both in

the Boma and in other urban neighbourhoods – in which ethnic lines are more evident. Urban space emerges then as the arena in which different worlds come into contact and are involved in an ongoing dialogue.

The sociality of the centre of Marsabit shows that the urban space is an essential resource for city dwellers, as it also is for the inhabitants of the whole county. I argue that access to the urban space and to its facilities is a priority for individual and collective subjectivities. They accede to the space of the centre, according to their relative position in the highly complex and entangled networks of social relations. In fact, while the dimensions of "moral ethnicity" and "political tribalism" (Lonsdale, 1994) are at the core of the everyday life experience of individual and collective subjectivities, urban space is nevertheless built and experienced according to ethnic belongings (Grasso, 2020a). Despite this, the "impossible things market" offers to individual and collective subjects ways to overlap social and cultural constraints in terms of ethnicity, gender and age. Urbanity condenses local and global discourses involving subjects like Turu, Arbe, Dansa and Liza. In Marsabit urban space, those subjects who occupy a vulnerable and precarious position in the local sociality (in terms of ethnic, economic or gender belonging) are those who better can be defined as "cosmopolitan". Urbanity allows them to question the narrative of local community constraints affirming their agency and achieving their expectations. Individual trajectories and movements not only show the economic and political role of Marsabit, but also that the town is both a place and a particular kind of experience (Simone, 2004a) by which to navigate marginality, ethnic constraints and the hidden sense of "remoteness" of northern Kenya. Everyday practices emerge as a space to reproduce, shape or circumvents structural constraints (Bayat, 2009; Meth, 2010) and could be a good lens through which to observe the transformative and political potential of ordinary spaces and encounters (Iveson, 2013; Simone, 2006; Watson, 2009). For these reasons, I propose to integrate the relational approach to power and space (Massey, 2005; Ingold, 2007; Allen, 2016; Darling, 2009) with deeper reflections on individual trajectories and ways to navigate marginality.

The voices of Marsabit's inhabitants, therefore, appear appropriate and useful as a change of lens with which to look at the town, enabling to us to overcome the stereotypical vision of small African towns and, in particular, of northern Kenya. If we stop thinking of Marsabit as a small town and start to recognise its deeply cosmopolitan nature, it allows us to access the complexity of the urban experience that characterises the place. The cosmopolitan outlook of the urban experience in Marsabit should therefore be recognised as a system

of broad skills acquired through experience and, above all, through travel (Vertovec, Cohen, 2002). The trajectories of the inhabitants of Marsabit are thus seen to be informed by cosmopolitanism, understood as practice and competence, as suggested among others by Vertovec and Cohen (2002). Recognising this gives back to the town of Marsabit all the complexity that characterises it and reveals its true nature as "other" and as a "resource".

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Chapter 6
From the Margins of the State to Quasi-State Bureaucrats: The Shifting Nature of Street Trader Leaders' Agency in Tshwane, South Africa

Mamokete Matjomane

Introduction

Street traders have been engaging in "atomised forms of resistance" (Bayat, 1997) for decades, with limited collective claim-making to relay their interests to the state. In recent years, however, urban studies scholars argue that street traders have begun to rely on collective claim-making to influence the governance of their activity in various ways. This chapter reflects on the ways in which street trader leaders in Tshwane exercise their agency in various encounters with the state. In other words, it assesses how street trader leaders exercise agency in a context of shifting relations with state actors, captured in three phases between 2012 and 2018. The first phase was characterised by street trader leaders operating on the margins of the state, seeking inclusion into the City's governance structure through confrontational encounters with officials. The second phase was marked by some street trader leaders operating as quasi-state bureaucrats facilitated by formal electoral processes and cooperation with officials, and the third phase was distinguished by heightened hostility between trader leaders and officials during a transition to opposition party administration and the end of term of office of elected leaders.

The three phases depict relations between street trader leaders and state actors and ways in which these facilitate various manifestations of trader leaders' agency. The chapter argues that the ways in which street trader leaders exercise agency is influenced by their position in relation to state power as well as their socio-economic conditions. There is a profound difference between agency exercised by leaders on the margins of the state and

quasi-state bureaucrats.[1] While leaders on the margins are generally confrontational, quasi-state bureaucrats tend to be cooperative in their encounters with state actors. Therefore, the position of traders in relation to state power enables or constrains various forms of agency of street trader leaders, resulting in the status quo (or power relations) being transformed or reinforced.

The chapter is divided into seven sections. Following the introduction, Section Two presents a brief context of the case study area. Section Three presents a brief note on methodology adopted to gather data. Section Four delves into literature on the agency of ordinary people using the lens of collective claim-making and the participation of non-state actors in urban governance. These concepts are used to decipher state-society relations and reveal ways in which these encounters enable or constrain various forms of non-state actors' agency. Section Five presents the landscape of street trader organisations and trajectory of Tshwane Barekisi Forum. Section Six explores the manifestation of street trader leaders' agency in Tshwane. Section Seven offers conclusions on ways in which the agency of non-state actors is influenced by their position in relation to state power.

Tshwane in context

Tshwane is one of the three metropolitan municipalities in Gauteng, the wealthiest province in South Africa. It was proclaimed as a metropolitan municipality in 2000, amalgamating more than fourteen major areas that previously formed part of the greater Pretoria administration (City of Tshwane, 2018).[2] In 2011, as part of the vision to reduce the number of municipalities in Gauteng, neighbouring areas that were lacking in development were incorporated into Tshwane. This has resulted in Tshwane becoming the largest metropolitan area on the African continent in terms of surface area and the third largest in the world, with a population of approximately 2.5 million people (City of Tshwane, 2018).[3] Tshwane is the second largest con-

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[1] Leaders on the margins of the state have no formal recognition and no established working relationship with state actors. Quasi-state bureaucrats refer to street trader leaders that have been formally incorporated into the state apparatus through elections and are recognised by officials as representative of traders.

[2] These areas include Pretoria, Winterveldt, Temba, Soshanguve, Mamelodi, Mabopane, Atteridgeville, Akasia, Ga-Rankuwa, Centurion and Garsfontein.

[3] Tshwane is the third largest metropolitan municipality in the world after New York in the United States of America and Yokohama/Tokyo in Japan.

tributor (25%) to the Gauteng economy after Johannesburg (City of Tshwane, 2018).

The informal sector plays a critical role in the municipality's economy due to its contribution to the tax base and employment creation. It is "one of the biggest contributing sectors in fighting poverty and unemployment" (Business Support Operations, 2013, n.p.) in the municipality. According to Business Support Operations (2013, p. 21), informal traders "contribute an enormous amount of money to the revenue of the City … it has been estimated that they contribute 250 million in rands to [the] fresh produce market of the city".

Various strategic documents indicate that the municipality is moving towards a culture of tolerance as opposed to restriction due to the crucial economic role played by street traders.[4] This comes after long periods of hostility towards street traders which culminated in Operation Reclaim, a clean-up campaign implemented in 2012. The campaign saw the eviction of street traders in the inner city, resulting in heightening hostility between state actors and street traders (Mudzuli, 2014a; Security.co.za, 2014). During this time, the inner city was characterised by a series of "ungovernability" marches led by various street trader organisations challenging the evictions. A well-documented case illustrating the hostility characterising this period is an instance of one street trader being shot and killed while refusing to vacate his trading space (ENCA, 2014; EWN, 2014a).

A brief note on methods

This chapter is informed by extensive data gathering conducted in three Gauteng metropolitan municipalities (Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Tshwane) as part of my doctoral studies. While data was gathered in the three metropolitan areas, only results for Tshwane are used to inform the findings of this chapter. Between 2016 and 2018, data was gathered in the form of desktop research, key stakeholder interviews, and targeted engagement workshops with local government officials. A selection of relevant data sources including official documents and media reports were gathered and analysed before the actual fieldwork started. This was to develop a picture of the dominant street trader leaders, their practices and relationship with the state so as to guide the fieldwork focus. This was an interesting methodology

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[4] These documents include the Tshwane Informal Trade Apex Body creation, City of Tshwane Informal Trading Policy and the draft City of Tshwane Informal Trading Allocation Policy.

to adopt as it informed creative ways to gather data and frame dialogues with various stakeholders.

Key informant interviews with street traders, their leaders and state officials were conducted between 2016 and 2018. These interviews were mainly face to face, complemented in some instances by telephonic and/or skype interviews. The interviews focused broadly on understanding various aspects related to the role and influence of street trader leaders in urban governance and street trade management. Various workshops with local government officials were undertaken as part of a research project which I was part of during 2018.[5] The project's aim was to understand the role of local government in the informal economy and insights from this process were used to inform current findings in interesting and complementary ways. The dialogues provided qualitative input by allowing officials to reflect specifically on the status of informal trading as well as challenges and successes in their own local areas. These were complemented by a long trajectory of involvement in research on street trading in Johannesburg as part of the Centre of Urbanism and Built Environment Studies' (CUBES) work on informal trading.[6] The combination of methods enabled me to gather rich and various responses from different stakeholders contributing to a nuanced understanding of the role and influence of trader leaders in street trade governance.

Agency of "ordinary people"

The question of agency has long dominated sociological debates. Agency in this context is understood to refer to the ability of people to act, particularly in the context of existing power structures, through resistance, counter forces, subversion or deflection of powerful structures (Ahearn, 1999; Lonsdale, 2000). Ahearn (1999, p. 13) argues that "some scholars use agency as a syn-

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[5] The workshops with local government officials were conducted as part of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) research project which was undertaken in 2018 investigating the role of local government (i.e. in supporting, managing, regulating etc.) in the informal economy. The workshops were held in Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces to gather sufficient and geographically representative insights from officials working directly with informal traders.

[6] CUBES is an urban research institution located within the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (South Africa). It is interested in researching how civil society is affected by urban realities such as informality, housing and urban governance. My research involvement on street trading in this platform was from 2011.

onym for resistance, most practice theorists maintain that agentive acts may also involve complicity with, accommodation to, or reinforcement of the status quo". Therefore, while the dominant form of agency manifests in resistance, there are various other ways in which stakeholders take action, hence agency does not always equate to confrontation.

In sociology, the most important question is not whether agency exists but the extent to which it is exercised (Hitlin, Elder, 2007). The context within which people act is crucial as it either facilitates or hinders agency. People's ability to act influences and is in turn influenced by larger social, political, cultural and economic structures such as gender, class and race. Therefore, "the extent of agency and the objectives that people value depend in part on the environment in which the individual lives" – the structure (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 402). The question then is "how human agency can ever be exercised, especially against the odds" (Lonsdale, 2000, p. 12).

Scholars have largely been interested in the agency of "ordinary people" in society. This is in part a move away from literature that portrays ordinary people as helpless. The agency literature challenges the notion that ordinary people are passive recipients of development without participating in any way through various means such as subverting or challenging exclusionary practices. Ibrahim (2006, p. 398) argues that "[u]nlike the stereotypical view, the poor are not passive, but rather actively undertake various mechanisms to cope – and eventually overcome".

Agency of informal actors: From state avoidance to engagement
For a long time, urban studies scholars neglected studying the political dimension of street traders, including their agency (Lindell, 2010a; 2010b). Street traders' agency was seldom investigated and in cases where it was considered it was interpreted in uninspiring ways, painting them as passive recipients of top-down decisions by state actors. A dominant conception of street traders' agency adopted the lens of atomised forms of resistance. This section presents debates on the specificity of street traders' organisation and mobilisation tactics, their engagement with the state and participation in urban governance. Understanding the ways in which street traders mobilise and participate in governance practices offers tools to analyse their agency in interesting ways. The following sub-section traces street traders' politics from an earlier conception of atomised forms of resistance to a more developed literature considering ways in which they rely on collective claim-making to influence governance practices.

The politics of informal actors: From atomised forms of resistance to collective claim-making

Scholars such as Scott (1985) emphasise informal actors' individualistic forms of resistance and claim-making. He argues that in contexts where open protests and confrontation tactics are absent, individual resistance takes place as the main form of political struggle. Bayat (1997, p. 57) takes a similar approach by viewing traders' struggles as taking the form of "quiet encroachment", which is an everyday practice of ordinary people who appropriate space for their convenience. This "quiet encroachment", similar to Scott's (1985, p. 33) "quiet forms of resistance", is covert resistance characterised by small-scale individual action rather than overt collective claim-making on a large scale. Illustrating Scott (1985) and Bayat's (1997) covert claim-making, Bromley (2000, p. 18) posits that "[v]endors disappear when they think they may be subject to persecution, and they reappear when the inspectors and police have given up". Lindell (2010b, p. 2) argues that it is a widely held view that the street traders would "…act in a quiet and atomized fashion to address their immediate need … [r]ather than engaging in collective demand making".

However, Lindell (2010b, p. 2) counters this long prevailing view by arguing that although these everyday practices of ordinary people are essential, they "are not the only kind of political practices in which informal actors engage, or even their preferred mode of politics". A recent body of work on collective claim-making is emerging and contradicting the thesis of quiet and atomised actions of the poor. Transformative agency goes beyond individual actions but is produced and maintained through collective efforts that manifest over time (Haapasaari, Engeström, Kerosuo, 2016). The collective efforts of informal actors have thus come into focus in recent times with scholars such as Lindell (2010b, p. 8) arguing that "[w]e witness today [in African cities] ... the emergence of collective initiatives articulating a concern for vulnerable groups in the informal economy, engaging with key centres of power and contesting unfavourable policies and regulations in visible ways". The shift from quiet and atomised resistance to the ability to collectively mobilise is not a linear progression as actors utilise different modes of agency at different times and scales (Lindell, 2010b, p. 8). Lindell argues that "[t]his is a more fruitful way of looking at the agency of informal workers than assuming that they prefer, or are consigned to, one particular kind of political practice or another".

This body of work emphasises the ability of informal workers to collectively mobilise through organisations with leaders at the forefront (Lindell,

2010a; 2010b). Street traders form organisations and exercise their agency as collectives in interesting ways, sometimes resulting in institutional reforms and social change more broadly (Motala, 2002; Benit-Gbaffou, Katsaura, 2012). Organisations in the informal sector have become avenues through which street traders' collective visions are developed and articulated. Street trader organisations and their leaders play an important role in governing traders' practices, and act as mobilising agents interfacing with state actors. These leaders represent the interest of traders in a structured way, especially in institutionalised platforms of engagement with authorities (Lindell, 2008; 2010a; 2010b).

There are various ways in which street traders exercise agency. This is to some extent dependent on the ways in which the street traders relate to the state, the extent of their participation in urban governance and their socio-economic conditions. The following sub-section builds on Das and Poole's (2004) "margins" of the state and Lund's (2006) "twilight institutions" concepts to depict the relationship between the state and non-state actors in urban governance. There are street trader leaders who operate on the margins of the state and those that act as quasi-state bureaucrats with varying relations with state actors. While these distinct leaders' positions depict two extremes on a continuum, trader leaders' position in relation to state power is constantly shifting depending on opportunities and agendas.

Participation of non-state actors in urban governance
There are "multiple sites of urban governance" (Lindell, 2008) where the state together with non-state actors work collaboratively or in parallel to exercise the public authority state mandate (Lund, 2006). Literature on public authority from below is useful to unpack the exercise of public authority by state and non-state actors in urban governance (Hagmann, Péclard, 2010). While the state continues to play a crucial role in governance through various means, its authority is extended by non-state actors, particularly in spaces where state reach is limited (Hibou, 2004; Lund, 2006; Menkhaus, 2008).

There are a number of concepts that explain the participation of non-state actors in urban governance. These concepts explain how state and non-state actors engage, and how they negotiate public order and their relationships with each other. For the purposes of this chapter, Das and Poole's (2004) "margins of the state" and Lund's (2006) "twilight institutions" are used to unpack the position of street trader leaders in relation to state power and how it impacts on their agency at varying points.

The concept of the margins of the state considers non-state actors who operate at the boundary between the state and society and how the state can be viewed from the margins (Das, Poole, 2004). Actors who operate on the margins of the state "are a necessary entailment of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of the rule" (Das, Poole, 2004, p. 4). While these actors operate at the state-society boundary, state practices run through everyday life at the margins. A view from the margins reveals how the state and its modes and practices are constantly being constructed and reconfigured. This creation and recreation of the state effectively renders the margins as spaces of power that constantly move in and out the state. Actors on the margins of the state are not recognised by state actors and the interface between the two is mainly characterised by hostility (Das, Poole, 2004; Joshi, Moore, 2004), with each side pushing for different and sometimes contradictory agendas. Actors in this domain find ways to facilitate their access to the state, often through unorthodox relations with officials such as clientelism.

According to Lund (2006), the concept of twilight institutions depicts a situation where non-state actors exercise public authority alongside state actors. Non-state actors exhibit the twilight character of state actors and act in ways that have an impact on public decision-making processes. Twilight institutions mainly operate independently from the state, sometimes challenging its practices, and the relationship with officials is not formalised in any way. These institutions adopt locally engineered systems that are often informal and sometimes contradict official practices of the state. I build on this concept and use quasi-state bureaucrats to depict non-state actors, street trader leaders in this instance, who enjoy a certain level of recognition by state actors and inclusion in the state apparatus. Their inclusion is based on contracts as well as other types of agreements, formal or informal and written or unwritten (Migdal, 2001; Hibou, 2004). The relationship between quasi-state bureaucrats and state actors is mainly characterised by negotiation and cooperation with limited opportunities for confrontation.

While antagonism between authorities and street traders is captured in many cities across the world, it is imperative to note that "relations between informal actors and the state are complex, varied, and temporal. The political subjectivities of informal workers are not fixed, nor are the attitudes of state actors towards them" (Lindell, 2010b, pp. 3–4). The following section illustrates ways in which street trader leaders exercise their agency in the Tshwane metropolitan municipality and how this was impacted by their relationship with the state at different points between 2012 and 2018.

Landscape of street trader organisations and the trajectory of the Tshwane Barekisi Forum

The terrain of street trader organisations in Tshwane is dominated by organisations operating in the inner city, which is where street trading is prevalent. There are also other organisations that operate in the more peripheral parts of the city, which are often smaller than their inner city counterparts. There are a number of street trader organisations operating in the inner city of Tshwane, the main ones being Tshwane Barekisi Forum, Tshwane Micro League, Tshwane National African Federated Chamber of Commerce, Tshwane Informal Traders Forum and Tshwane Informal Trading Cooperative. These organisations generally have strongholds in the inner city and have larger constituencies as opposed to their counterparts in the peripheries.

The Tshwane Barekisi Forum (TBF) was established in October 2012 in the midst of constant harassment and eviction of street traders by metro police officers. The organisation was founded by Mr Shoes Maloka (who held the position of president in the organisation) and Elliot Nkadimeng (the general secretary of the TBF) after they splintered from the Tshwane Mayoral Steering Committee on Street Trade, an inner-city-wide street trade governance structure created in September 2012. The Mayoral Steering Committee on Street Trade was made up of four organisations, namely, Tshwane Informal Traders Forum, Tshwane Informal Traders Council, Tshwane Micro Entrepreneur League, and Tshwane National African Federated Chamber of Commerce. These were the four most vocal and active street trader organisations in the inner city that were organising marches and pickets in an effort to fight for the rights of their constituents and demand engagement with authorities. As a result of these actions, the governance structure was developed as a platform of engagement between officials and street traders to resolve issues pertaining to street trading in the inner city as well as to curb marches against the city.

The Tshwane Barekisi Forum was thus created as a result of friction within the Tshwane Mayoral Steering Committee. The founders of the organisation were unhappy with the running of the steering committee and criticised its members as being self-interested. The TBF mainly adopted confrontational tactics when engaging with steering committee members and state officials. The organisation mobilised members in the inner city to challenge the Mayoral Steering Committee on Street Trade as exclusionary and not representative of all street traders in the inner city. The organisation became popular as it was seen to radically challenge the *status quo* and thus

gained support in the form of members from street traders. As a result, the TBF has a large constituency in the inner city as this is where street trading is highly contested and competition for space is rife (Khwashaba, 2019).

While more and more street traders in the inner city were supporting and joining the organisation, state officials were against the TBF, particularly its *modus operandi*. TBF leaders organised a series of marches and pickets to challenge state actors and how they address street trading issues and were as a result labelled a splinter organisation that is "violent and confrontational" (SAPA, 2014, unpaginated) by authorities. The organisation was accused of being a vessel for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and destabilising order in an African National Congress (ANC) run municipality.[7] The city argued that:

> Tshwane Barekisi Forum is an empty surrogate structure of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) whose establishment is to render the city ungovernable and score sordid political goals at the expense of the vulnerable poor uneducated traders.... This organisation has embarked on a series of illegal strikes to catapult the EFF brand within the trading space to attack the Mayor with high octane profanities, discredit the City of Tshwane and to undermine the process underway" (City of Tshwane, 2012, unpaginated).

The state officials associated the TBF with the EFF and accused it of fighting party political battles with the ANC in order to discredit the work that the administration was doing. This solidified the hostility between TBF leaders and state actors, who viewed the organisation in a negative light. From its formation in 2012, the organisation has organised a number of marches targeted at authorities and the Mayoral Steering Committee at various times and magnitudes. It mounted pressure on authorities that resulted in the committee being disbanded in 2015 in favour of a democratic street trade governance structure.

Manifestations of street trader leaders' agency in Tshwane

Encounters between street traders and the city officials have been characterised by turbulent relations between 2012 and 2018. This is an important and

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[7] EFF is a left-wing political party in South Africa founded in 2013 by Julius Malema (a former ANC Youth League president) and allies. The ANC is the ruling party in South Africa and has been in power since the first democratic elections in 1994.

interesting period depicting the relationship between street traders and state actors oscillating between confrontation, negotiation and alliance in various ways. This section presents the changing relations between state actors and street trader leaders in Tshwane and illustrates how these impact on ways in which agency is exercised at different periods. This changing nature of street trader leaders-state relations is described in three (overlapping) phases: 1) the period between 2012 and 2014 characterised by confrontational encounters between state actors and street trader leaders operating on the margins of the state; 2) the period of incorporation between 2015 and mid-2018 characterised by street trader leaders being installed into the governance structure as quasi-state bureaucrats; and 3) the period between 2016 and late-2018 characterised by heightening antagonism with the Democratic Alliance (DA) replacing the ANC administration and Tshwane Barekisi Forum's term of office coming to an end.[8]

Phase 1 (2012–2014). Confrontational encounters between officials and street trader leaders on the margins of the state

There is no recorded engagement between street traders and state actors in Tshwane before 2012. Confrontational encounters were recorded towards the end of 2012 when Operation Reclaim was initiated. The city dubbed this clean-up campaign as an infrastructure renewal project, but it resulted in the eviction of street traders from the inner city. During this time, the inner city was characterised by a series of marches and pickets organised by various street trader leaders challenging the evictions while simultaneously demanding engagement with authorities (Matimba, 2012). Various organisation leaders organised a series of marches and pickets against the eviction of street traders. On one instance, the demonstrations saw shop windows being broken and traffic coming to a standstill as protestors attempted to gain entry into the ANC mayor's office (EWN, 2014b). This was led by the TBF which was also calling for the mayor to step down as street traders were being victimised under his leadership.[9] The mobilisation of street traders and their blocking mode (with the TBF at the forefront) saw the eviction of street traders being halted by the city. TBF leaders also demanded the institutionalisation of an inner-city-wide street trader governance structure to engage

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[8] The Democratic Alliance is a centrist political party in South Africa and currently the official opposition of the ANC.

[9] The Mayor of Tshwane during this time was Kgosientsho Ramokgopa of the African National Congress.

with the city.[10] Another one of the TBF marches during 2014 targeted a member of the Mayoral Committee for Economic Development and a memorandum of demands was handed over. The main demands included a request to engage the city on the licensing of traders. Following that, another march targeted the Tshwane Metro Police Department to address the issue of officials harassing street traders and confiscating their goods.[11]

In a context of continuing confrontation between the city and street traders, TBF leaders faced attacks. Towards the end of 2014, the secretary general of the organisation, Elliot Nkadimeng was shot four times and wounded near his home. The secretary of the organisations recounts this incident in a newspaper interview stating that:

> When Elliot was shot in 2014, he was in the process of organising a march to demand the TMPD [Tshwane Metro Police Division] officers who shot and killed Foster Rivombo to be arrested with other organisations including the Tshwane regional structures of the SACP, ANC Youth League, Sanco and Cosatu, in solidarity with street traders (Mudzuli, 2014b, unpaginated).

The organisation leader alleges that these attacks were inflicted by some state actors in collaboration with rival street trader organisations who were against the ways in which TBF challenges the *status quo*. The TBF's modes of action during this time were extremely confrontational and allegedly led to retaliation from authorities to discourage the leaders' repertoires of action.

It is important to note that during this time, TBF leaders were attempting to gain recognition from street traders and state actors and to be incorporated into the city's street trade governance structure. Their actions geared towards challenging the city's clean-up campaign resulting in the eviction of street traders led to their incorporation into the governance structure as well as increased membership. The relationship between this organisation and the city was mainly characterised by hostility and confrontation. The repertoires of action adopted by the organisation led to their visibility as an organisation that fights for the rights of traders thereby gaining recognition from state officials. The organisation managed to wield blocking power and their efforts resulted in street traders being allowed to go back to their trading sites by authorities.

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[10] TBF leader, personal communication, 10 March 2018, Tshwane, Gauteng.
[11] Idem.

Phase 2 (2015–mid-2018). Period of incorporation: Quasi-state bureaucrats installed through formal electoral processes.

While the previous phase was characterised mainly by confrontation, the period of the TBF's inclusion into Tshwane's street trade governance structure was mainly cooperative. Following the period characterised by the series of confrontational encounters including marches, the city initiated a platform of engagement with street traders in the inner city. An informal traders' summit was held in the beginning of 2015 to interact with the mayor and the broader Tshwane leadership (Khwashaba, 2019). Street traders were encouraged to express challenges they experience while trading. During the engagement with officials, street traders, particularly the TBF's leadership, raised the issue of inability of traders to invest in their children's education.[12] The proposal for a bursary fund to sponsor traders' children to further their studies gained TBF support from traders. The engagement platform provided the foundation for a level of negotiation and cooperation between street traders and state actors.

Apart from the bursary proposal, the TBF also encouraged state actors to restore order on the streets by instituting an election process to install trader leadership. The summit culminated in street traders lobbying the city to initiate a formal election process to constitute an inner city wide trader governance structure. The formal election process, supported by the city, was a way to address "…mushrooming trader organisations that lack consistence and exploit their members…" (City of Tshwane, 2014, n.p.). The overall aim was to create "…organised structure or legitimate organisation that represent the interests of informal traders" (City of Tshwane, 2014, n.p.) in the inner city.

> Region 3 informal traders wanted elections, they voted in 2015 June or July. The trader leaders finally got a chance in 2015 to see the mayor and explain that they want to choose their own leadership and vote democratically.[13]

TBF was at the forefront of these engagements supporting the formal electoral processes. In June 2015, the city in agreement with street traders

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[12] Unified South African Traders leader, personal communication, 8 February 2018, Tshwane, Gauteng and TBF leader, personal communication, 10 March 2018, Tshwane, Gauteng.

[13] TBF leader, personal communication, 7 September 2017, Tshwane, Gauteng.

held elections where TBF leaders were elected into office for a period of three years (Khwashaba, 2019):

> Tshwane Barekisi Forum won all 10 chairs during the elections. The committee which all its members are from TBF is the only leadership recognised by the former Mayor as representing traders. A contract was signed that recognises the leadership for 3 years and then elections are to take place after the expired leadership steps down or voted out.[14]

The leaders elected into the city's governance structure are governed by a code of conduct which they signed at the beginning of their office tenure. The code of conduct gives guidelines pertaining to the workings of the committee and how members ought to conduct themselves. Members of the committee are expected to comply with the code of conduct as a way "…to enhance [their] professionalism and help to ensure confidence in the informal trading sector" (Business Support Unit, undated, p. 1). An extract of the code of conduct is captured below.

> Communication and official information – it is expected that Steering Committee members shall:
> - channel all communication between Committee members and informal traders on business matters through the Chairperson;
> - not disclose official information or documents acquired through membership of the Steering Committee, other than as required by law or where agreed by decision of the Informal traders Steering Committee;
> - not make any unauthorised public statements regarding the business of [the Committee];
> - support, adhere to and not contradict the formal decisions of the Steering Committee made in its meetings;
> - respect the confidentiality and privacy of all information as it pertains to individuals;
> - not use her or his membership position to obtain private gifts or benefits for herself or himself during the performance of her or his official duties nor does she or he accept any gifts or benefits when offered as these may be construed as bribes;
> - not use or disclose any official information for personal gain or the gain of others…

> Extract from Business Support Unit (n.d., p. 2).

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[14] Idem.

Coupled with the guidelines for leaders' conduct captured above, TBF leaders were also given an office in one of the municipal owned buildings to operate from and received a stipend of R2000 per month. The incorporation of the TBF into the city bureaucracy marked a period where confrontation between street traders and the city subsided. With the organisation's leaders elected as trader representatives and forming part of the Tshwane Informal Traders Representative Committee, leaders leaned more towards cooperation with the city.

In August 2015, a few months after election into positions, leaders organised an event in collaboration with the Mayor and various members of the Mayoral Committee to become "traders for a day" to raise funds for the bursary scheme (Nkosi, 2015; *SANews*, 2015). This event marked one of the first instances where the TBF and state actors worked together towards a common goal. The 20% of the revenue generated from the collaborative event was invested into the bursary scheme and the remaining 80% was shared between street traders that participated in the event (SANews, 2015). The mayor also continued to garner support for the street traders' bursary scheme even after the fundraiser. In a radio interview, Mayor Ramokgopa discussed his plans to develop the informal sector, particularly through the bursary fund (Jacaranda FM, 2015). By the end of the show, a total of R162 000 was pledged by listeners in support of the cause.[15] The above event led to the official launch of the bursary scheme in December 2015 where the City of Tshwane entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Pretoria (UP) detailing the minimum entry requirements of the university, criteria and eligibility of qualifying informal trader children.

After the bursary scheme was initiated, its administration was delegated to TBF leaders as the elected representatives of street traders as opposed to officials as is usually the case. At the beginning of the 2016 academic year, ten qualifying informal trader children were enrolled into UP with their fees paid by the bursary scheme. TBF leaders determined the requirements for candidates to qualify for funding from the scheme. TBF and state actors, particularly the mayor's office had a cooperative relationship until August 2016 when a new mayor was inaugurated.[16] This dismantled the established relationship between traders and the (ANC) mayor's office resulting in the TBF

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[15] Idem.

[16] The local elections in 2016 saw the installation of a DA mayor into the City administration (in coalition with the EFF), taking over from the ANC one which had a cooperative relationship with the street traders.

starting to adopt some of its confrontational politics that they used before be-ing incorporated into the governance structure.

Phase 3 (from late-2016). Disturbing established order: DA replaces the ANC reign and TBF's term of office comes to an end.

Under the DA-led administration, the TBF was still in office as part of the street trade governance structure. The DA-led administration unearthed a number of issues associated with the bursary fund that was managed by the TBF. The city realised that funds collected at the fund raiser during the ANC mayor's term were not enough to cover the fees of all approved beneficiar-ies. At the end of 2017, the ten beneficiaries' fees were outstanding, leading the city (DA administration) to contribute over R220 000 to settle the debt with UP. Street traders affiliated to the TBF accused the DA mayor of with-holding R740 000 which they raised with the ANC mayor (DA News, 2018). The TBF then organised a series of marches challenging the DA administra-tion, with the organisation resurrecting its antagonistic and confrontational tactics that were utilised during its struggle for inclusion into the inner-city-wide governance structure.

Another telling incident in the strained relationship between TBF leaders and the newly inaugurated DA mayor took place in 2017 when various meet-ings to address street traders were boycotted by the organisation and its members. One of the TBF leaders explained that:

> Msimanga [DA mayor] called a meeting at Marabastad to address traders without informing us and traders chased them away. We have not attend-ed meetings with the DA municipality because they have no vision and they are scared of strikes. They have no plan. We were assisted by ANC people.[17]

The leader above explains the reasons for boycotting the organised meet-ing as two-fold. The first reason is that the meeting was convened by the mayor directly without involving TBF as the inner-city-wide street trader representatives. The organisation of the meeting was different from the pro-cedure adopted by the previous ANC mayor who involved TBF in the organ-isation processes. The second reason is that the TBF was elected to power during the ANC reign and they formed a collaborative relationship with its leadership. When a new administration came into power, their allegiance

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[17] TBF leader, personal communication, 7 September 2017, Tshwane, Gauteng.

with the ANC remained, hence their hostility towards the DA mayor. In essence, TBF did not want to be seen betraying the established and cooperative relationship with the ANC administration which to some extent facilitated their inclusion into the street trade governance structure.

During the ANC administration, TBF leaders had direct and exclusive access to state actors as the elected street trader representatives, hence they were delegated the management of the bursary fund.[18] Under the DA administration, state actors encouraged a city-wide engagement of street traders which did not have to be facilitated by TBF leaders. This move further strained relations between the TBF and state actors and it opened up space for other traders to challenge the elected leadership. One of the competing street trader organisation leaders challenged the management of the bursary fund by the TBF alleging that its allocation processes are opaque and exclusionary. By virtue of managing the bursary scheme and determining requirements for the allocation of funds, TBF leaders have the powers to determine who benefits.

> The money that came out from Economic Development ended up with Barekisi Forum [TBF], if you ask them what happened to the money they do not know as well … The bursary which was out we're not even guaranteed because we don't even know where the people who got it are selling. We can even ask the municipality [under ANC administration] the list of the people but their response will always be the same, it's coming. But we know for sure that bursary ended up with the [TBF] leadership it did not go down to the traders.[19]

The above leader is accusing the TBF of distributing funds to their children and traders they have a close relationship with, and this was happening under the watch of officials under the ANC administration. Issues of TBF leaders' capture by state officials were also raised under the DA administration. While the TBF was generally cooperative during the previous administration, some street traders alleged that the ANC was able to influence and penetrate decision-making processes of the TBF leaders to their advantage.

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[18] Officials discouraged direct engagement with street traders and encouraged they relay grievances through TBF as their elected representatives. This meant that the TBF were the recognised street trader leaders in the inner city and they were exclusively engaged by officials.

[19] Unified South African Traders leader, personal communication, 8 February 2018, Tshwane, Gauteng.

The hostility between TBF leaders and state officials continued to manifest itself in various ways. In July 2017, employees of the Local Economic Development forum were held hostage by TBF leaders over bursary related issues. The leaders were complaining that beneficiaries' fees were not paid into students' accounts as agreed (Moatshe, 2017a; 2017b). This was one of the signs of heightening radicalism during this period, where officials were held captive, a mode of action never adopted during the ANC administration.

TBF leaders also took their struggle to national television in 2018 when they appeared on *Daily Thetha*[20] to talk about the ill-treatment of street traders in Tshwane under the DA administration. One of the issues raised was the discontinuation of the bursary fund established under the previous administration with the purpose of improving traders' children's lives. This came after the DA administration's decision to relinquish the management of the bursary scheme from TBF leaders to state officials and integrate it into broader City of Tshwane Bursary Schemes (DA News, 2018; Moatshe, 2018). The criteria to assess and award bursaries to beneficiaries was also reconfigured to ensure that all street traders' children have a fair chance based on merit, academic performance and financial need. This was to ensure the process of allocation was not influenced and/or abused by certain groups of street traders.

TBF leaders were against the integration of the bursary scheme into the broader city bursary schemes as it takes away their power to manage the funds. Following the TV appearance, the TBF also led a march with beneficiaries of the bursary fund outside the Tshwane Local Economic Development offices. During the march, the organisation demanded that bursary funds be released to TBF leaders to distribute on behalf of the street traders as they have been doing under the ANC administration. The hostility between the Tshwane Barekisi Forum leaders and the state has continued since 2018.

The hostility further heightened during 2018, especially when the TBF's term of office came to an end. In one instance, the TBF obtained an interim court order against the city's metro police officers to stop harassing and intimidating street traders (Venter, 2018). A petition to the Gauteng High Court was lodged by TBF on behalf of street traders against arbitrary impoundment of goods and restrictive licensing rules. During legal proceed-

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[20] This is a talk show on one of the biggest national television platforms, SABC1, engaging in robust debate and dialogue regarding current issues affecting people's lives in South Africa, especially the youth.

ings, the city's metro police officers were ordered by the Court to immediately release the confiscated goods to their owners. There was agreement that metro police would stop confiscating goods pending outcome of negotiations between the parties regarding the issuing of licensing. All of this occurred in the period where TBF's term of office as the elected representative of inner city street traders had ended.

Conclusion

For a long time, the agency of informal people has been conceptualised through atomised forms of resistance. Collective claim-making was seldom studied as a way to influence governance practices. In recent years however, collective efforts of informal people have come under focus to analyse their agency and ways in which they engage with the state and make claims. This chapter has presented how street traders exercise agency at various periods and how this is enabled and/or constrained by leaders' position in relation to state power.

From the empirical evidence presented above, it appears that the position of street trader leaders in relation to state power coupled with their socioeconomic conditions have an effect on the ways in which leaders exercise their agency. Leaders' relationship with state officials enables and/or constrains various forms of street trader leaders' agency, resulting in the status quo (or power relations) either being transformed or reinforced. Leaders operating on the margins of the state are able to openly exercise their agency and challenge the state in ways that quasi-state bureaucrats are unable to. This is because leaders on the margins of the state have a different relationship with state actors as opposed to leaders that are part of the state apparatus. Leaders operating on the margins of the state mainly rely on confrontation as a way to make claims while quasi-state bureaucrats are generally cooperative when engaging with the state as their position allows them to access certain resources and favours. Street trader leaders adopt certain courses of action based on what they want to achieve and this is impacted by what is structurally possible.

The three phases presented above illustrate the shifting nature of relations between street trader leaders, particularly TBF, and state actors and how this facilitates leaders' agency in Tshwane. The first phase depicts a period marked by non-engagement resulting in hostile encounters between street traders and state officials. In this phase, TBF leaders were fighting for recognition by both grassroots traders and the state and inclusion into the inner city governance structure. During this time, the leaders were operating

on the margins of the state and the relationship with authorities was mainly characterised by hostility and confrontation. During this time, leaders were exercising their agency through various means with the dominant one being resistance and taking matters into their own hands. Leaders organised marches, protests and pickets to gain sympathy and publicly shame the city for ill-treating traders. These repertoires of action were enabled by the fact that the leaders were operating on the margins of the state and thus were able to overtly challenge the city.

It is interesting to note that the confrontational encounters during phase 1 opened space for engagement and negotiation between street traders and officials. This eventually culminated into the election of TBF leaders into the inner city wide governance structure which was characterised mainly by co-operation between leaders and state actors, particularly under the ANC administration. In this phase, street trader leaders are part of the state apparatus and act as quasi-state bureaucrats as they are elected into positions, with an office to operate from, paid a monthly stipend and governed by a code of conduct which regulates their behaviour. The agency of leaders in this instance is characterised by cooperation with state officials and manifests mainly through the administration of the bursary scheme. The leaders together with authorities worked hand in glove to the fruition of the informal traders' bursary scheme with funds raised to sponsor the first ten beneficiaries. The leaders also had the discretion to decide on the minimum requirements of the scheme and which beneficiaries to allocate funds to.

This short period of cooperation was disrupted by local election in late 2016 where the ANC administration was replaced by the DA. The collaborative relationship established between TBF leaders and the ANC mayor was dismantled after the elections and this soured relations with the newly elected DA mayor. Coupled with the change in administration, TBF's office also came to an end in 2018 leading to further straining of the relationship with. This third phase was thus characterised by heightening hostility with street trader leaders adopting a number of tactics to challenge state actors. The radical actions against the state were facilitated by the fact that leaders were now operating on the margins of the state as their office term had ended. Coupled with tactics adopted in the first phase such as marches and protests, leaders were also using the legal system as a strategy to gain relief. Courts were approached by TBF leaders to fight their battles with state officials and resolve prevailing issues.

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Chapter 7
Searching for Autonomy? Elite Agency
in Contemporary Johannesburg and Yaoundé

Federica Duca

Introduction

Navigating elite spaces in Cameroon and South Africa are two different spatial experiences. If in Johannesburg, South Africa, the wealthy suburban landscape is dominated by high security walls, electric fences and two-minute armed response, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, one can wander in the city without such visible spatial interference.[1] While in many African cities, and specifically in South Africa, the urban elite landscape is characterised by enclosed and boomed spaces, countries such as Cameroon, where collective high walls and boomed neighbourhoods are not the norm, stand out for the lack of such extensive enclosed areas. Indeed, elite spaces in Johannesburg are immediately recognised for their inaccessibility and physical borders, while in Yaoundé such barriers are not visible and elite suburbs stand out for their more developed infrastructure and highly structured buildings.

Experiencing both Johannesburg and Yaoundé, I often wondered not only why this would be the case, but also what this would mean for the urban fabric of the city, for how its residents live in it and for its conviviality. Typically, studies of the elite have regarded this group as possessing agency, independence and power, and have considered it as a homogeneous group that by virtue of their opportunities and means are able to retreat from the public sphere. More recent work on elites and the upper middle class problematises these assumptions. In dialogue with these studies, my work interrogates the

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[1] It is important to point out that this does not mean that in Yaoundé there is more freedom overall, or that there is no discrimination. Indeed, instances of harassment are very frequent. What it does mean, though, is that there are no physical barriers.

kind of agency that elites exercise in the urban space in two African urban settings and how this is linked to claims to occupy and live in the city and the nation.

The chapter is motivated by two concurrent dynamics taking place globally and on the African continent. On the one hand, there is the increasing wealth inequality and the consequent interest in the gap between the rich and the poor, and on the other hand the relationship between them and the effect that this has on urban spaces. Indeed, in the last twenty years, societies across the globe have witnessed a significant accumulation of wealth, as well as the increasing importance of urban spaces as sites from which the wealthy operate in a networked fashion. On the African continent, this is particularly relevant as cities have experienced steady growth, leading to a great diversification of their landscape and infrastructure, and the emergence of new spaces appealing to both an emergent middle class and to established elites.

Cities in the Global South have often been referred to as laboratories, with unregulated megaprojects and tax-exempt zones built from scratch that adjoin informal settlements (van Noorloos, Kloosterboer, 2018). These are seen as enclaves, symptomatic of a disordered and chaotic growth of the city, poorly planned and led by private interests. Most importantly, some of these urban changes are read as the reflection of an increased push for autonomy and self-governance by some groups of the population, notably the wealthy.

In light of the soaring neoliberal trend of the state, cities have been described as increasingly autonomous spaces, populated by bubbles that themselves claim autonomy; these are spaces motivated by and facilitating the detachment of some groups from the city: namely enclaves for the wealthy, and informal settlements or slums for the poor. Building on observations in two countries, one with a high level of visible enclosed spaces for the elite, and one without, I examine the relationship between elites and spaces, and more specifically I show how elites conceive of their position in urban spaces, and the implications for claims of autonomy and self-government in the city to finally unearth the formulation of a nationalistic discourse.

More specifically, I am interested in understanding how the exercise of agency is linked to pushes for autonomy and how this is informed by the relationship between the city and the nation, asking the question: how do elites collectively and individually exercise autonomy and what is its spatial configuration in different African urban contexts? How is autonomy framed and practiced and from what is it claimed?

In the next section I detail my understanding of elite agency and autonomy in the urban space, I will then discuss the research methods, to finally

look in more detail at agency and autonomy in the two African cities. By way of conclusion, I will tease out some remarks on possible ways of understanding the relationship between agency and autonomy in the urban space, looking at local and national institutions.

Agency, space and elites

Urban elites occupy distinct spaces in the city: they live in upmarket areas and they have access to better services than the rest of the urban population. Their position often translates into privilege in the governing institutions of their community (Nugent, Shore, 2002). Marcus (1998, p. 136) describes elites as "those with political power and who control the distribution of resources in their locales". Khan (2012) adds that elites are defined by their access to resources that they can transform into material, economic or political capital. On the African continent, interest in elites was initially linked to the role of liberation movements and the nature of the political elites designated to lead the new democratic countries (Lloyd, 1966). Elites were thus the innovators and the educated class. Lentz (2015) notes that the study of elites, especially in the post-colonial period, has mostly revolved around the nature of the new political leaders and public servants and their relationship with the growing middle class. However, studies of the elite also cover the role of elite associations and homeowners' associations in urban and rural contexts (Nyamnjoh, Rowlands, 1998) or the relationship between the work of elite associations and the idea of development (Orock, 2015), as well as elite accountability more generally in post-colonial countries (Adebanwi, Orock, 2021).

While elites are generally considered to belong to a homogeneous group that shares common interests, recent work cautions against an easy assumption that sees elites as always free from their interests by virtue of their potential for control of cultural, economic, and political aspects of society, and suggests that elite agency should not be taken for granted (Khan, Mears, Cousin, 2018). Furthermore, elites are characterised by different positions and structures of power and their mobility does not necessarily correspond to national rootedness and deterritorialisation (Andreotti, Le Galès, Fuentes, 2019).

As a response to the steady growth of inequality and its manifestation in urban spaces, recent scholarship (Atkinson, 2008; Forrest et al., 2017) emphasises that enclaves of wealth create and are the manifestation of deeper urban segregation, separation, and division. Yet, gated communities (defined

as walled and enclosed residential areas) across the globe and the continent
are not only a manifestation of enclaving, where "walls have come to sym-
bolise the vexed conviviality of urban elites and less affluent groups" (Heer,
2019, p. 10), but also of an "'aesthetics of imagination' that migrates through
the cities and thereby weaves together otherwise dissimilar and distinct so-
cial practices and spaces, political desires and economic aspirations" (Niel-
sen, Sumich, Bertelsen, 2021, p. 881). Indeed, if we study wealthy urban en-
claves not only as spaces in which the successful find refuge and live com-
fortably detached from society and in search of a form of "autonomy" from
the rest of the city, we are able to read elites not only as secluded and in re-
treat, but also as actively operating within a broader network that extends
from the city to the national domain.

Inhabiting the city: Agency and autonomy

Agency conventionally refers to the individual capacity of action and to the
capacity of making decisions within a given regime and a given context. Ac-
tors act as agents, albeit in different forms, as people that mediate and push
for a certain change or maintenance of a status quo. From an urban perspec-
tive, agency can be studied as the capacity of making claims on space and
the modalities that elites adopt to occupy the city.
    Foucault (1982) maintained that individuals actually exercise agency only
when they resist the pressures of normalisation and that their free action is
directed at challenging a particular moral regime. This vision raises two con-
cerns, the focus on the individual and the critical character of agency. The
focus on the individual and personal freedom is questioned by scholarship
that emphasises agency as interdependence, thus outlining its relational as-
pect. From this perspective agency is not a given but is rather constituted
through interactions and forged in encounters (Durham, 1995). Similarly,
Nyamnjoh (2002) notes that agency in Africa is best understood as interde-
pendence and interconnectedness, focusing on the relationship between the
individual and society, rather than individual freedom. The debate on wheth-
er agency ought to be considered an individual or collective resource is also
tackled by Davies (2017, p. 26), who claims that elite agency should be un-
derstood as "the relationship of the super-rich to domains of power, culture,
and production as a series of principle-agent problems, in which they seek a
form of representation which absolves them of the need to become involved
in matters of public concern or controversy". This is of particular interest as
it challenges the mainstream idea that elites act in full freedom. Davies sug-

gests that money does not necessarily convert into power and that perhaps elites' main desire is a negative liberty, thus the capacity of maintaining power without interference. Davies proposes to look at the question of agency as the "principal-agent", where elites rely on agents (or mediators) to maintain their position of power and their privilege, challenging the idea that agency is deployed to critically challenge the system.

Autonomy, which refers to self-governance and self-determination, is central to the relationship between agency and the elite. According to Foucault (1982), individual autonomy does not exist if the subject is not able to act free from the influence of the regime within which it operates. Autonomy is also defined as a creative push, and it is indeed a collective self-institution that is at the basis of radical democratic politics, linked to the capacity of modifying the laws of society (Castoriadis, 1987).

Elite autonomy is usually studied as a push for and capacity of self-government, and it is often linked to the nature of the political regime. Within this context, Bealey (1996), for instance, suggests that in democratic countries elites should be allowed autonomy only to the degree that they respect democratic values. Indeed, elites should enjoy relative autonomy only if they do not endanger the democratic setup of a particular context. Autonomy then refers to self-governance and freedom, as well as to its creative force. But it is also linked to "autochthony", which: "triggers a politics of belonging" (Geschiere, Gugler, 1998, p. 309), a process "subject to constant redefinition against new 'others' and at ever-closer range" (Ceuppens, Geschiere, 2005, p. 385).

Autonomy as autochthony encompasses both the idea of autonomy as self-representation and self-government, paving the way to a more spatial understanding of it. Following the Marxist school, autonomy is the core dimension of class struggle and of the "autonomous" management of the space, thus in this line the "autonomous" city (Vasudevan, 2015) is one that sees occupations as forms of appropriation of the space. Another recent intervention addresses the question of urban autonomy as a political project and the ways in which this could be conducive to a more just city (Bulkeley et al., 2018). Looking at the city of Kinshasa, Freund (2011) shows that the urban does not live independently from the national, where the upper middle-classes resort, and believes in national solutions and interventions rather than in urban ones, making of the city not an autonomous space but rather a locale that is validated by the endorsement of national values.

I refer to the urban elite as the group that lives in upmarket and more resourced suburbs of the city, and whose position influences local and national

politics. I interrogate the ways in which they make sense of their position in the urban space and how they exercise their agency to maintain it. Agency, intended as the capacity to maintain one's position of privilege, is analysed in connection with autonomy, or the ways in which at individual, collective and spatial levels elites make sense of their position and govern it. This way, I look at how urban elites constitute themselves as self-governing and self-determined through the lenses of belonging to both the urban and national spheres. If the widespread idea is that elites long for spaces of retreat in which they can exercise their autonomy and in which they live idly, notably in enclosed and walled enclaves, then it is important to look into these spaces and understand how they are constructed politically, socially and institutionally.

Researching the agency and autonomy of urban elites

In the last ten years I have worked extensively on spaces of privilege and here I rely on my ongoing and long-standing work on elite and urban space in Johannesburg, South Africa and on a set of reflections and observations developed during research field trips in Cameroon between 2015 and 2017. The trips to Cameroon were conducted for a research project on taxation and state formation, with particular attention to the element of state-society relations regarding the social and fiscal contract. The research brought me to spend the bulk of the time in Yaoundé, the capital city, with regular trips to other cities such as Douala, Buea, Limbe, Kribi and Maroua. In Yaoundé, I interacted extensively with members of the elite, both economic and political, and observed the spaces in which the elite live and spend their time.

As such, this is not a comparative endeavour. Rather, the question and the interest stem from the empirical observation of two different urban and political contexts. The absence of gated spaces in Yaoundé and the abundance of them in Johannesburg led me to interrogate what the implications of this are for life in the city and how space is claimed and protected by elites. Agency and autonomy are two fitting concepts for understanding such dynamics in contemporary urban contexts.

In doing this work, I adopt what Jennifer Robinson refers to as "thinking cities through elsewhere" (Robinson, 2011), where I look for the variation between the cases, and I am interested in the meaning and implication of the diversity of urban outcomes. I base this work on "building comparisons through putting case studies into wider conversations – where case studies do not need to be defined territorially but might be any kind of urban process

or outcome, for example, projects or events or even the flows and connections amongst cities" (Robinson, 2011, p. 15).

In both countries I conducted interviews and participant observation, often walking with my respondents, thus using the technique of the "go-along" (Kusenbach, 2003).

The urban elite is defined as that group of the population that resides in upmarket residential areas and that exercises a form of influence (political, economic, or cultural).

The elite I interacted with were high-ranking public servants and administrators, real estate constructors in the city, professionals, or those who have inherited wealth. In order to unpack how they construct themselves as autonomous individuals and collectivities, I focus on the relationship between the elite and the national narrative on the state of the country, and the modalities of self-governance and self-determination in the city with specific attention to the main institutions and mediators.

Two stories of claiming and understanding urban space

The Yaoundé Golf Course is located in the wealthy suburb of "Golf" and is adjacent to a luxury hotel. The way to the entrance is a dirty road between big free-standing houses, with big bright brick walls and tall, thick iron gates. At the entrance there is a boom gate, but typically there are no security guards. On the days of my visits the boom gate was always open, making the entrance accessible to anyone.[2] This way, I could make my way up to the clubhouse without being asked who I was and the purpose of my visit. At the clubhouse I could easily ask to talk to the manager and have a long conversation with him. While sitting talking at a table of the club, the manager introduced me to some of the golfers and proudly showed me that the course is exclusive but at the same time open to everyone – in fact children from the surrounding neighbourhood could enjoy the green space.

Johannesburg presents a different picture. Most of the golf clubs, be they private or public, feature systems of control at the entrance. In most cases the visitor is asked to provide personal details and while sometimes talking to the managers or golfers is as easy as in the Cameroonian case, the common thread of the conversation would be around the exclusivity of the course, security, and the wish to keep the golf club as pristine as possible. Further-

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[2] Visits took place in March and April 2017.

more, golf courses are much more differentiated: some of them exist within residential estates and are thus entrenched in a double system of enclaving.

These different experiences also coincide with two different views of the city. For elite members of Yaoundé, expressions of love for the city are recurrent. A businessman who lives in an up-market suburb told me, "I love Yaoundé and I love Bastos [a wealthy suburb of the city]. I actually don't move much from here, but I could go anywhere. Yaoundé is a very quiet and safe city".[3] Similarly, complaints about the state of the country and specifically its political situation are also common, though almost all conversations I had with people ended with a sense of pride in the country, albeit linked to a sense of frustration about the lack of political change.

Their South African counterparts would not echo the same sentiments. Expressions such as, "Johannesburg city centre is off-limits, derelict", or "There is a lot of crime and we need a lot of security in Johannesburg", are very common.[4] The concerns about the state of the city are countered by expressions of love for the country; for instance, a typical conversation with a suburban resident of Johannesburg who lives in a gated space would point at the importance and necessity of living in highly securitised spaces due to crime and for the better delivery of services, but at the same time there would be expressions of love for the South African nation, exemplified by, "South Africans are good people".

While crime and anxiety dominate the elite landscape of Johannesburg and are visible in the presence of high walls and secured communities, in Yaoundé the "talk of crime" (Caldeira, 2001) is not prominent amongst the elite of the city, although there are constant concerns about the ongoing conflict between the Anglophone and Francophone regions and the Boko Haram insurgency. Not surprisingly, in South Africa, elites and the upper middle class opt to live in such spaces for security reasons, be they gated communities or highly securitised wealthy suburbs. Many confirm that in gated communities they seek convenience and safety, as well as cleanliness, and importantly, a distance from the city centre.[5] Gated communities mushroomed at the time of the transition in 1994, in the aftermath of apartheid, following a sprawling process that created new nodes of the city other than the tradi-

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[3] Interview with businessmen, Yaoundé, April 2017.

[4] These were common expressions that I heard during my fieldwork in Johannesburg from 2013 to 2015.

[5] Many of the newly built gated communities are located on the outskirts of the city, far from the city centre.

tional city centre. The move out of the city matched the expectations of a class that aspired to live in a "world-class city", and which they feared could not be met by the new government.

On the contrary, Cameroon does not feature gated communities as such. In 2017 a website of a company based in the Southwest Province indicated that a complex called Buea Heights was under construction, announcing that this would be the first world-class gated community in Cameroon. However, during my last visit in Buea I could not find any additional information on this project and the address indicated on the website did not correspond to a real estate company and no one there knew about this project.[6] Page and Sunjo (2018, p. 76) point out that families that live a transnational life decide prefer to invest in urban spaces and that "in West and Central Africa it is individuals or households not large building companies or governments who are building the town plot by plot". New habitations in Cameroon consist of free-standing houses and only occasionally apartment blocks (although these are increasingly present) and there is a strong relationship between rural homes and urban-based elites, where the political legitimacy of urban elites is based on the nature and significance of rural homes. This does not mean that Cameroonian cities do not experience phenomena of segregation and distinction. As noted by Saagouana (2018), in Yaoundé the wealthy relocate to the part of the city in which they can access quality resources, and segregation and distinction is better explained by the type of habitation, and the proximity to good schools. This points to different systems of planning and positioning of groups within the city, as well as different modalities of claiming space in the city and occupying it.

The way in which elites claim and occupy the urban space is also reflected in how they understand the city overall. In the following sections I will elaborate on how the urban elite positions itself within the broader nation. I will then briefly elaborate on the role of residents' associations as mediators in building and maintaining urban boundaries.

Urban elites and the national narrative: New country vs cosmetic democracy

Both Johannesburg and Yaoundé share the aspiration to become world-class cities and they have both adopted policies towards this end. For instance, in

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[6] A more recent google search indicates another complex described as Gated Community, characterised by secure and state of art living (http://www.njnhomes.com/riverview.html) in the Northwest Province.

2005 Yaoundé attempted to undergo various programmes to modernise and beautify the city. Amongst others is the project of rendering public parkings for payment in a bid to make Yaoundé like the Parisian Haussmann. On their side, the upper-class residents of Yaoundé have never referred to their city as "world-class"; even when frequenting locales that are considered upmarket, there would be constant references to Paris and to regular trips to France and to the lack of political and social change in the country, but never to Yaoundé as a "world class city".

Johannesburg has aspired to be classified as a world-class city since its inception and in the last ten years has adopted policies such as the introduction of a new bus system (the Rea Vaya) as well as new campaigns to beautify the city.[7] Its upmarket residents take pride in the offerings of the city and its residential infrastructure: "We have visitors coming from Australia, and we are very proud of what we can offer. Off the airport they will jump on the Gautrain[8] and they will then join us here in our Estate. If they don't go to the city centre, we can show that we are a world-class city".[9] In this instance, the city centre is seen as a part of the country that should be hidden and in which residents do not take pride.

These vignettes offer two different ways in which the city is conceived, but they also inform of the relationship between the city and nation: the ways in which residents conceived of their position in the city is linked to the national narrative.

Conventionally, the South African elite is discussed along the lines of racial dichotomy. On the one hand, this refers to the white minority and to the inherited privilege gained through the period of the racial oligarchy (Du Toit, Kotzé, 2011), on the other we refer to the new Black elite. The South African elite is often analysed in relation to the period of transition to democracy, defined by Bond (2000) as an elite transition, and the debate is highly racialised, contrasting the white with the black elite, often referring to the white established one as "real" and the new black one as "fake" (Duca, 2015). One common feature of the South African elite, despite the diversity, is the sharing of residential spaces, often gated estates, and the formal belief

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[7] While it is not the aim of this chapter to review these policies, it is important to note that both in Yaoundé and Johannesburg they have been critiqued for progressive denial of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1996 [1967]) to the residents.

[8] The Gautrain is a commuter rail system in Gauteng inaugurated in 2010 on the occasion of the Soccer World Cup.

[9] Interview with a family, residents of a golf estate in Johannesburg, November 2011.

in the possibility of a "new country" based on nation building and social co-hesion after the demise of apartheid, even if with increasing disillusionment.

On the other hand, in the Cameroonian context, despite the colonial herit-age, race does not play a big role in the reading of the city, while ethnicity does. Scholars over time have demonstrated that the functioning, structure and influence of urban and rural elites in Cameroon is also connected to the national question, though differently from South Africa. The first President, Ahidjo, between the 1960s and the 1980s launched a programme of national unity, where elites played a particular role as they were not expected to have a say on the national planning, while they were expected to be influential at the local level (Orock, 2015). However, due to the lack of political change over time, Cameroonian democracy has been described as cosmetic (Nyamnjoh, 2002) and its state as stationary (Eboko, Awondo, 2018). The old age of the current President Biya, in office for almost forty years, is often associated with the status of the country: "How can an old man, such as the President, understand the needs of contemporary society? What kind of change do you think he is going to bring forward?".[10] Others perhaps more cynically would say, "Why do people even protest, there is no change in sight",[11] hinting overall at the political inertia in the country. This leads to the lack of a narrative of the country dominated by change, and of the emer-gence of a new society, and by the disillusion about being able to bring change in a context that is considered undemocratic.

Colonial and postcolonial planning laws in Yaoundé determine a signifi-cant exclusion of the indigenous population from the city (Njoh, 2015). Overall, urban politics in Yaoundé can best be described by its inertia which results in a form of symbolic violence (Mbienkeu, 2018). In this context, elites who have political and economic capital are able to appropriate the ur-ban space which is left out by the formal planning of the city through provid-ing interventions that allow constructors to build even when they don't have official permits (Mbienkeu, 2018). A real estate developer said: "You know here, if you want to get something done, you should go to the office, wait and have long conversations".[12] Building then becomes an endeavour that goes beyond the technicality of construction, something that the elite are able to navigate thanks to their status. The action of building a house or adopting a particular lifestyle is not associated with participating or contrib-

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[10] Conversation with a real estate developer in Yaoundé, March 2017.
[11] Conversation with the CEO of a wood company of Yaoundé, February 2016.
[12] Conversation with a real estate developer in Yaoundé, April 2017.

uting to the country, but mostly to personal fulfilment delinked to a deliberate national project.

Differently, in South Africa the urban elite sees buying property in a newly developed gated estate as being part of the "new country", while the construction of new developments raises concerns about the openness of the city. Planning of upmarket suburbs and gated communities in Johannesburg follows a more formal procedure, and this is linked to the sectorialised fashion of the city which leads to a greater visibility of enclaves. Homeowners' associations facilitate the interaction with local government, and the construction of gated communities is predicated upon the need to build a "new country". Individuals then do not engage with authorities, while associations engage on their behalf.

The way in which residents and the elite associate themselves with the city is very much linked to how they envision their position within it. For the urban elite of Yaoundé, claiming occupancy of a space emerges as a form of personal engagement with the authorities, even though often facilitated by the connections between the individual and political networks. As discussed by Lissouck (2018), the role of associations, be they religious, ethnic or political, play a great role in shaping access to resources in the city, at times subverting formal administrative processes. Claiming the right to inhabit and occupy the city in Johannesburg, is often structured more by formal residents' and taxpayers' associations whose concern is deliberately that of retaining resources. In both cases pockets of the city declare themselves as autonomous, while they interact with the local administration to acquire legitimacy.

Spatially, they create different cities: in both cases they display forms of social and economic distinction. In the case of Johannesburg, it is also physically visible in the form of walling. The different landscapes are the manifestation of different structures of planning, also representing different visions of the country and self-understandings.

If the ways in which the elites navigate the urban space and make sense of it are determined by the very structure of the urban elite, by the workings and the reach of their associations, it is important to also look at how elites identify with such space and institutions.

Elites claim their position in the city by arguing for forms of self-governance (both explicitly in the South African case and more implicitly in the Cameroonian case) and they do this by claiming a belonging to the nation, while keeping their self-understanding and presentation close to ethnicity or race. The space of the gated community in South Africa becomes

identified as a space from which this belonging is expressed as they mediate residential belonging. This is not the case in Cameroon, where building a house is more of a personal endeavour and where residential spaces are not as sharply associated with the "new country" like in South Africa.

Modalities of self-governance in the city

Both the South African and the Cameroonian contexts offer insightful perspectives on how elites and the upper middle-class co-ordinate their efforts to maintain their position in the city, namely through the action of residents' associations. In this section, I elaborate in more detail on the function of residents and elite associations as institutions that help mediate the relationship between elites and their urban space, providing the foundations for a process of claim to some parts of the city, and most notably those in which they reside. By joining these associations, residents exercise their agency both as individuals and as a group. At times elites mobilise their agency to prevent radical change. In so doing, elites do push for autonomy as self-government. Looking at such institutions also sheds light on the ways in which urban elites interact with other institutions in the city. The literature on residents' associations in South Africa is very wide. The two main types of elite associations are homeowners' associations that regulate any estate and gated community and the residents' associations of wealthy suburbs (non-gated). Rubin describes residents' associations in Johannesburg as the custodian of middle-class visions for the maintenance of suburban borders. Their actions are directed at moderating any progressive state impulses (Rubin, 2021) and they often cooperate with state institutions such as the police (Manoim, 2020). Bradlow (2021) describes this dynamic as "ring fencing" from an elite that has lost political power but maintained economic power. Residents' associations in South Africa, and particularly homeowners' associations, work as mediators between the residents and local institutions and with the national sphere (Duca, 2015). Their work is directed at providing the structure for a safe, state of the art and unchallenged spatial landscape and setup. Such institutions first create a desirable environment for the residents, and then by managing day-to-day maintenance and management of the space, they make sure that all services are ensured.[13] Through this mechanism and

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[13] This dynamic is certainly a racialised one as well, as gated communities and suburbs do create dynamics of internal discrimination, while at the same time providing a structured space that protects the interests of these groups.

by creating private spaces of comfort in the city, they also create spaces to which the residents feel attached and relate to the country, epitomised by the common expression of residents who live in such estates: "We would have moved out of the country if we did not have the chance to live here".[14]

The working of the residents' associations also creates a safe geography for the residents, indirectly inducing them to navigate the city along the lines of the formal and informal boundaries that they create. They indeed contribute to fostering a spatial divide between the suburban spaces and the city centres, while mediating the connection between the residents and the South African nation.

In the Cameroonian context, residents' associations have existed for a long time, acquiring different functions. Extant scholarly work analyses them either as spaces from which the groups take control (there are community, cultural and development associations), thus as groups close to the ruling party bureaucracy (Mbuagbo, Akoko, 2004), or as groups that assert political rights (Hickey, 2002) and that are able to deliver goods and services (Yenshu, 2008). There is consensus that elite associations do have a bearing on political decisions. In Cameroon, since the 1990s, elite networks give expression to fear of exclusion and conflict stemming from the impact of political liberalisation (Nyamnjoh, Rowlands, 1998). Research in Yaoundé (Lissouck, 2018) also reveals that elite associations hinder transparent administrative processes in the city via a form of political interference and through the working of personal relationships. While we cannot rule out such processes in Johannesburg, Bradlow (2021) shows that the role of residents' associations is determined by their economic power.

While in both cases elite associations play a very important role, and while it is clear that they exert political influence, in Johannesburg the role of residents' associations is able to create a space of comfort which is directly associated to belonging to the nation and is made available by the economic power of the white elite. This is not the case in Cameroon, where identity is more linked to ethnicity and regionalism, and the work of residents' associations in the city is seen as mere interference with administrative processes in the city. While in both contexts the working of associations causes exclusion, in Yaoundé there is more connection to an elite that is more political-administrative and that is able to influence the construction of the space thanks to this kind of political influence, while in Johannesburg this is more linked to economic power.

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[14] This is a common expression that one would hear when talking about life in South Africa and Johannesburg from residents of gated estates.

Conclusion

Johannesburg and Yaoundé are two different cities characterised by different narratives of the city and of the nation in which they are located. This chapter set out to show how elites in different urban spaces claim their position in the city. The focus on Cameroon and South Africa is motivated by empirical observation on the different nature of the urban space, exemplified by the presence of gated communities in Johannesburg and their absence in Yaoundé.

Taking into consideration the varied nature of elites and subscribing to the idea that elites are heterogeneous and do not always act from the same motives, I argue that members of the elites use their power and means both in a personal and a group capacity. The action of elites is often directed to the accomplishment of autonomy as self-government. In the urban space, amongst others, this means occupying residential spaces through the mediation of residents' associations and motivated by a mistrust vis à vis the state, even when they are entrenched in it.

While elites in both contexts claim autonomy in the urban space, this is done through different mechanisms. In South Africa it is through the action of ratepayers and residents' associations who have economic influence that do boundary work in a formal way, and in Yaoundé, Cameroon, this is also done through networks of political influence. The work of these associations is predicated on the idea of belonging and protection of a form of autochthony and belonging (self-understanding), based on the national narrative on nation-building, or lack thereof. This means that those pockets of the city in which the claims are made by the elites do become themselves autonomous in terms of self-governance (due to the lack of planning or poor service delivery). However, this remains a relative autonomy vis à vis the local and national government, as the very existence and acceptance of these spaces is determined by the relationship between the elites (as individuals and groups) and institutions.

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Chapter 8
Groups of Interest and Transformative Agency on Public Policies
An Analysis of Their Participation in the Food and Nutrition Security
Agenda in Mozambique

Edgar Cossa and Orlando Nipassa

Introduction

Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) is a dynamic concept, based on changing knowledge and contexts. From the point of view of Governments, food security represents a political and public policy problem, for which there is no diagnosis or neutral solution: a problem called "perverse" that transgresses the boundaries of usual policies and requires policy-making processes that reflect, guide and include diverse experiences, knowledge and values (Rittel, Webber, 1974, cited in Zanella et al., 2018) from different groups. In the current scenario, efforts to ensure stable access to adequate food for all have not been successful. Some have even labelled the longest-term status of malnutrition and hunger in the world, and the related effects of several attempts to overcome these, the "graveyard of aspiration" (Shaw, 2007, cited in Duncan, Claeys, 2018). It can be noted that international commitments to reduce hunger and malnutrition, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030), are far from being achieved. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report (FAO, 2018) showed that: (1) globally, the prevalence of stunting among children under the age of five is decreasing. The number of children with chronic malnutrition has also decreased by 10% in the last six years, but with 149 million children still chronically malnourished, it is necessary to accelerate progress towards reaching the 2030 target of halving the number of children with malnutrition; (2) in 2018, Africa and Asia had the largest share of all forms of malnutrition, representing more than nine out of ten children with chronic malnutrition, and almost three quarters of all underweight children in the world.

Examples from African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Madagascar, Kenya, South Africa, South Sudan, Rwanda and Mozambique, conclude that a total of 14.8 million children under the age of five are chronically malnourished (Graça Machel Trust, 2017). For example, Madagascar has the highest rate of chronic malnutrition at 47.3%, Kenya 26% at the lowest rate of malnutrition, with a median for these nine countries of 37.6%.

Almost all over the world, in response to this political and public policy problem, innovative forms of governance since the creation of public institutions and policies have been introduced to deal with this complexity of food nutrition insecurity problems, including multi-stakeholder participation processes and other different groups of interest (Breeman et al., 2015, cited in Duncan, Claeys, 2018). Since the food price crisis in 2007/08, there has been a proliferation of groups of interest or non-state social actors dedicated to bringing together diverse perspectives to inform and improve public policies on food and nutrition security (Aubert et al., 2016).

However, the analysis of the role of the state has occupied much of the attention of analysts dedicated to the study of the process of formulating public policies. As a consequence, there is an almost insistent carelessness in relation to the analysis of participation in this process by non-state actors (Santos, 2002).

The insufficient study of agents other than the state leads to a distorted image of reality, namely, that state agencies act alone in the formulation and implementation of what is defined as "public policy" (Santos, 2002). Some studies even recognise the relevance of other actors, without, however, offering a detailed investigation about their role in participating in this process.

With Mozambique's commitment to halve hunger and malnutrition at the World Food Committee (CFS) Summit in 1996, there was a greater involvement of non-state actors to participate in the process of formalising public food and nutrition security policies. Since then, these actors have been playing a role as transformative agents on public policies in the country. We refer explicitly to the case of the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy and Action Plan I (ESAN I, 1998–2007) and the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy and Action Plan II (ESAN II, 2008–2015) financed by the FAO and German Cooperation, and the Multisectoral Action Plan for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition (PAMRDC) financed by DANIDA and Helen Keller International. In fact, there was a proliferation of civil society organisations, international cooperation partners and United Nations agencies actively participating in the agenda to combat malnutrition in Mozambique, culminating in the creation and officialisation of the

Partners for Nutrition Forum (NPF) in 2011. Despite these efforts and greater participation by non-state actors, the country's levels of malnutrition and food insecurity remain high.

Technical Secretariat Food and Nutritional Security (SETSAN) data show that the trends in indicators of chronic malnutrition and food insecurity between 1996 and 2013/14 have not registered a significant reduction in general. Regarding food insecurity, the rates vary from 60% to 24% in 2014 (SETSAN, 2014). Regarding chronic malnutrition in children under five years old, instead, there is still no significant change from 48% in 1999/2000 to 43% in 2014 (SETSAN, 2014). The results in Mozambique show that around 62 billion meticais (or USD 1.7 billion) were lost in 2015 as a result of child malnutrition. These losses are equivalent to 10.94% of GDP in 2015. The largest share of this cost is the loss of potential productivity as a result of mortality related to malnutrition.

It is in this context that we seek to understand the transformative agency role of the groups of interest dealing with other non-governmental actors in the process of formulating public policies to combat chronic malnutrition in Mozambique.

We adopted a mixed methodology, with crossing of quantitative and qualitative information through the administration of structured and semi-structured interviews addressed to members of the National Food Security Council (CONSAN) and members of the Nutrition Partners Forum (NPF). The bibliographic review, and the participant observation in the first and second session of CONSAN and in a session of the Provincial Council of FNS (COPNSAN) that served as a mechanism for collecting information and interviews with key informants, were also a source of information, since they are people who have already been involved in the process by the government or other stakeholders. For the analysis of the participation of the Interest Groups in this specific process of elaboration of the PAMRDC, the deliberative systems structures proposed by Dryzek (see Zanella et al., 2018) were adopted in an adapted version.

However, the methodological issue for the analysis of public policies must be emphasised mainly in the context of the identification and description of the social actors or groups of interest that participated in the process of formulating and implementing public policies, hence we resorted to the political cycle model because it can favour the availability of information. In order to have a picture of each of the public policy development phases, which allows as specific objectives:

- To characterise groups of interest and participation mechanisms in the formulation and implementation of PAMRDC;
- To verify which resources are available to these groups and the support base for their interests.

In this work, the object of study is the relationship that is developed between the different actors or different groups of interest, understood in this work as agents of transformation involved in the formulation and implementation of public policies, in particular in PAMRDC. To understand these relations that are established in the formulation of public policies in Mozambique, Bourdieu's social field approach in our understanding is the most adequate to explain the phenomenon.

This article is structured in a way that facilitates the perception of the problems, and we first present key concepts with groups of interest, food and nutritional security and we try to understand a little about PAMRDC since our analysis is specific to this public policy. Second, we present information on the context of stakeholder participation in Mozambique on the FNS agenda, as well as an analytical and sociological interpretation approach to groups of interest based on Bourdieu's social field approach. Third, we seek to present the discussion and results of this work; and, lastly, we give a conclusion.

Are groups of interest transformative agents?

Almost all over the world, in response to combating food and nutritional insecurity, innovative forms of governance have been introduced to deal with the complexity of food nutrition insecurity problems, including processes with various groups of interest as advocated (Breeman et al., 2015, cited in Duncan, Claeys, 2018). As we know, since the food price crisis in 2007/08 there has been a proliferation of groups of interest or non-state social actors dedicated to bringing together diverse perspectives to inform and improve public policies on food and nutrition security. In this work, groups of interest are understood as organisations separated from the government – although often in close contact or in partnership with government agencies – whose objective is to exert influence on public policies and have the ability to purposefully transform the structures in which they are embedded, which we refer to as transformative agency (Tuominen, 2018). Much of the literature on the participation of groups of interest or stakeholders in decision-making processes highlights the positive contributions to be obtained by opening

processes usually led by the state (Fischer, 2000). However, there is also a criticism that, in many cases, groups of interest have depoliticising effects (Kuchler, 2017, cited in Duncan, Claeys, 2018), suggesting that public participation has become no more than a strategy of depoliticisation. Groups of interest, despite their proliferation and the fact that today they are part of governmental and non-governmental processes to combat food and nutritional insecurity, also present their potentials and limitations as we can see in the HLPE report (2018):

- The main benefit of a group of interest is the mobilisation and coordinated use of complementary resource services (including human, material and financial resources) from different stakeholders to solve a common problem that no stakeholder would be able to solve alone.
- Complementary resources in a group of interest can promote synergies and help partners to better share risks and responsibilities, to attract new resources or to use existing resources more effectively to achieve the group of interest's FNS objectives and goals.
- By providing a space for policy dialogue for different stakeholders, or groups of interest with different points of view and diverging interests, they can improve mutual understanding between partners, facilitate political convergence and build consensus.
- If the rights, interests and needs of the different stakeholders are properly considered, the strategies, decisions and action plans developed by a group of interest can be more widely accepted and more easily implemented by all, and can lead to better results in terms of FNS and sustainable development.
- But on the other hand, the groups of interest also face major challenges and limitations in realising their potential. Tensions may arise between partners in a group of interest due to distrust or differing views on: values; the diagnosis of the situation; common short-and long-term goals; priorities for action; and the resources needed to implement the action plan. These divergences are based on the different interests and motivations, roles and responsibilities of the partners in a group of interest. Tensions can also be generated by conflicts of interest between them.
- There is a risk that the groups of interest will reproduce existing energy asymmetries and strengthen the position of more powerful players. One of the challenges for groups of interest in the FNS area is to recognise and resolve these power asymmetries. Inclusion, transparency and ac-

countability are the keys to meeting this challenge. Full and effective participation of the majority of marginalised and vulnerable groups, directly affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, will be ensured if the weaker partners have the right and the ability to speak, to be heard and to influence decisions. This requires time and resources to participate in the discussion, including face-to-face meetings, as well as information and communication skills.

Studies of practice change, institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship use the concept of agency to explain purposive action (Tuominen, 2018). The term "actor" suggests that depending on the underlying theory, researchers link agency either to the actors' orientation towards maintaining or changing the situations they face, or to their ability to make a difference. Both conceptualisations connect agency intimately to the actor's structural and cultural contexts, which influence whether the actor pursues transformation or continuity.

The interventionist line of research applied considers the emergence of transformative agency to be an important outcome in formative interventions (Engeström, 2011 cited in Kajamaa, Kumpulainen, 2019). From this perspective "actions and expressions of transformative agency emerge when people are placed in demanding situations and are given an opportunity to analyse, envision and redesign their activity collaboratively, with the help of mediating conceptual instruments" (Haapasaari et al., 2014, p. 259). These studies emphasise resistance, conflicts and tensions as important mediators, mediating the interaction and innovative learning and knowledge advancement. It is in this context of conflicts and resistance that we intend to analyse the participation of interest groups in the formulation of public policies, as they are transformative agencies capable of influencing the structures in which they are involved.

About food and nutrition security

The World Food Summit in 1996 considered that "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life". The World Food Security Summit in 2009 stated that "the nutritional dimension is an integral part of the concept of food security", and identified four main pillars of the FNS, already described in the HLPE report (2018):

- Food availability: availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports.
- Access to food: access by individuals to adequate resources (rights) to purchase adequate food for a nutritious diet. This dimension includes physical access to food (proximity) and economic access (accessibility).
- Utilisation: use of food through adequate food, drinking water, sanitation and health care to achieve a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met.
- Stability: in order to have food security, a population, family or individual must have access to adequate food at all times.

This definition shows that FNS is a multisectoral and intersectoral concept, with transversal pillars that cross each other, but that none of them can be analysed separately. In this context, the different categories of stakeholders, as described above, can also be categorised with a food system perspective based on the main elements of the food systems identified in the last HLPE report (2018), distinguishing: consumers; interested parties acting in food environments; stakeholders directly involved in the different stages of the food supply chain (production, storage and distribution, processing and packaging, retail and markets); and the stakeholders that indirectly shape food systems, their drivers and their results.

Even though private actors play an important role in food systems, it is important to remember here that access to adequate food is a human right that states have an obligation to respect, protect and enforce through appropriate policies and regulations.

About PAMRDC

PAMRDC was the answer in 2009/2010 to high rates of chronic, persistent and unalterable malnutrition, coming mainly from the health sector. PAMRDC was prepared in a context in which Mozambique had been implementing the National Strategy for Food and Nutritional Security (ESAN II, 2008–2015), at a time when the evaluation of the Absolute Poverty Reduction Plan (PARPA, 2006–2009) showed that the rates of chronic malnutrition in Mozambique were high, and one of the major weaknesses of ESAN II was the fact that the strategy did not give a clear and incisive orientation in the fight against malnutrition. Among these challenges were others at a local and global level that also forced the government to adopt a public policy. Aware of the seriousness of the problem of chronic malnutri-

tion, the Government of Mozambique approved, in 2010, the Multisectoral Action Plan for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition (PAMRDC) with the objective of accelerating the reduction of chronic malnutrition in children under five years of age, from 44% registered in 2008, to 30% in 2015 and 20% in 2020. PAMRDC is made up of seven strategic objectives, namely:

> (1) To strengthen activities with an impact on the nutritional status of adolescents (10–19 years old); (2) to strengthen interventions with an impact on the health and nutrition of women of childbearing age before and during pregnancy and lactation; (3) To strengthen nutritional activities aimed at children in the first two years of life; (4) to strengthen activities aimed at households to improve access to and use of foods of high nutritional value; (5) to strengthen the capacity of human resources in the area of nutrition; (6) to strengthen the national capacity for advocacy, coordination, management and progressive implementation of the Multisectoral Action Plan for the Reduction of Chronic Malnutrition; and (7) to strengthen the food and nutrition surveillance system.

The implementation of the present plan would also contribute to the achievement of the goals established in objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) and to the progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural human rights, especially the right to food and health.

The target groups are girls in their teens (10–19 years), women of childbearing age before and during pregnancy and lactation and children in the first two years of life. These groups should be prioritised because they represent the "window of opportunity", where chronic malnutrition develops and can be reversed by prioritising the 1 000-day intervention approach. Interventions within children's first 1 000 days of growth – 270 days of gestation, 365 days for the child's first year and 365 days for the child's second year, totalling 1 000 days.

The selection of these age groups is also because the plan aims to give priority to interventions aimed at the immediate level of chronic malnutrition causation, because only then would it be possible to expect a faster response, compared to that obtained by actions directed at the level of underlying causes. In addition, the plan assumed that other strategies and plans aimed at resolving the underlying and basic causes of chronic malnutrition at the family, community and social levels as a whole were being addressed by other policy documents.

Stakeholder participation in FNS's agenda

In Mozambique, the participation of non-state actors took its first steps with democratisation and the liberalisation that followed the introduction of the 1990 Constitution. This was accompanied by a proliferation of various civil society organisations (CSOs) looking for a space for participation in public life, in the form of associations, professional societies, community development groups, NGOs and other organisations, in relation to previous periods (colonial and post-independence).

The participation of non-governmental actors in policy-making processes in Mozambique is a reality that is not new. They participate in various processes and at different levels, such as reports (MPD, 2013) on cross-cutting issues, such as HIV and AIDS, gender, climate change and food and nutrition security (FNS) that show that these themes were introduced on the national agenda by development partners or donors. In the case of FNS, the first two strategies were financed by the FAO and German Cooperation, then by DANIDA and more recently by the British Government. There was a proliferation of methodologies for integrating cross-cutting issues into the planning process, such as: local economic development (financed by AECID/GTZ); HIV and AIDS (financed by UNDP); gender (UNDP/Un Women); food and nutrition security (FAO) and climate change (funded by UNDP).

The stakeholders for nutrition are all partners in nutrition, consisting of donors that can be multilateral and or bilateral, the United Nations Organisations, civil society, the private sector and academia, these being considered groups of interest. The role of these actors in nutrition in Mozambique is undoubtedly of tremendous importance for the coordination and implementation of PAMRDC. The Nutrition Partners Forum (FPN) was formed in 2011, with the objective of promoting and ensuring the coordination and harmonisation of non-governmental actors working in nutrition in Mozambique, in order to strengthen the alignment between the national plans, strategies and policies of the Government of Mozambique (GoM) with international mechanisms.

The members are all partners for development, involved in the implementation of PAMRDC in all sectors. The FPN is part of the SUN movement, where the donor group is a sub-group of the FPN, which is found in an "ad hoc" manner (SETSAN, 2018). Currently, the work plan is developed, with strategic priorities. These are: improve governance for nutrition; improve data collection; operationalise the national strategy for communication for be-

havioural change; increase the availability of fortified foods, nutrition sensitive food systems and social protection schemes. The FPN prioritises the involvement and participation of four key ministries (agriculture, health, education, and water and sanitation).
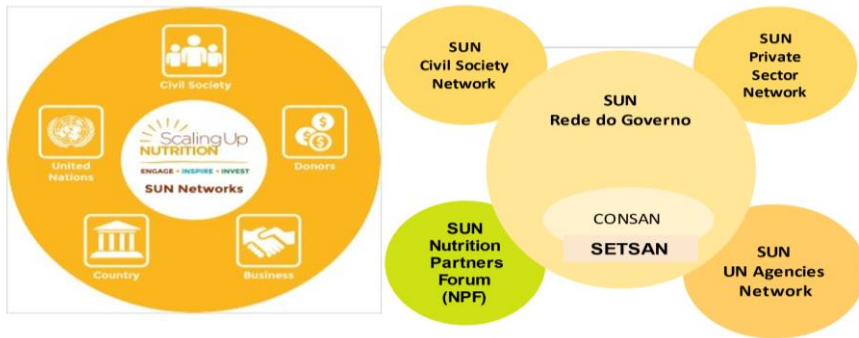
Figure 1: Stakeholder organisation structure

The legal mechanisms for its participation are at the political level through the National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSAN). This was created in 2017 as a political consultation and coordination body for the FNS, chaired by the Prime Minister and it is composed of different ministries that have different sectoral responsibilities to ensure the various dimensions of the FNS. In addition to the government sectors, civil society, private sector and academia representatives also participate in CONSAN. The government is currently moving forward with the creation of similar structures at the provincial (COPSAN) and district (CODSAN) levels in order to promote greater coordination and political dialogue for the FNS at a decentralised level.

At the technical level, the Technical Secretariat for Food and Nutritional Security (SETSAN) was created in 1998 to coordinate the implementation of ESAN I and monitor the situation of food insecurity and vulnerability in the country. However, it was only institutionalised in 2010. In 2012 and 2013, SETSAN was reformulated as a technical coordination body under the supervision of the minister who oversees the agriculture area, having acquired legal personality and administrative autonomy, with the participation of government sectors, representatives of civil society, the private sector and academia.

Bourdieu and relations between groups of interest

The social relationship that develops between different groups of interest involved in the conception of PAMRDC can be captured by Bourdieu's social field approach. For Bourdieu, the field is a social microcosm endowed with a certain autonomy, with specific laws and rules, and at the same time it is influenced by and related to a wider social space. It is a place of struggle between the agents who are part of it and who seek to maintain or reach certain positions. These positions are obtained through the dispute for specific capital, valued according to the characteristics of each field (Pereira, 2015). When we analyse groups of interest from the transformative agency perspective, we realise that they orient themselves towards reproductive or transformative projects depending on both their structural positions and reflexive deliberations (Tuominen, 2018). However, the realisation of their projects depends on their capability to organise for collective action, and on the interests and resources or capital of other agents.

The capital funds are owned to a greater or lesser degree by the agents that make up the fields; these differences are responsible for the hierarchical positions that these agents occupy. To think from the concept of field is to think in a relational way. It is to conceive the object or phenomenon in constant relation and movement. The field also presupposes confrontation, positioning, struggle, tension, power, since, according to Bourdieu, every field "is a field of forces and a field of struggles to conserve or transform this field of forces" (Bourdieu, 2004, pp. 22–23). The fields are formed by agents, who can be individuals or institutions, who create the spaces and make them exist through the relationships they establish there. One of the principles of the field, as it determines what the agents can or cannot do, it is the "structure of objective relationships between different agents" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 23).

In short, we adopt this approach by Bourdieu because it presents two important elements for the analysis of relationships:

1) As relatively autonomous social spaces, fields can compose their own rules and laws, take positions and make decisions. It is important to understand how governments or governmental entities act to resist proposals from groups of interest or how they act to impose external factors on public policies. According to Bourdieu, if "it never escapes the impositions of the macrocosm", each field has, "with respect to this, a more or less accentuated partial autonomy" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 21). The degree of autonomy of a field increases as it is better structured, and to analyse

this it is necessary "to know what is the nature of external pressures, the way in which they are exercised, credits, orders, instructions, contracts, and in what forms are the resistances that characterise autonomy, that is, what are the mechanisms that the microcosm activates to free itself from these external impositions and be able to recognise only its own internal determinations" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 21). The possibility of a field's resistance to external factors and pressures depends on its degree of autonomy. An indicator of this autonomy is what Bourdieu calls "refraction" capacity or power, which means the possibility of transfiguring external impositions to the point of "becoming perfectly unrecognisable" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 23).

2) Another fact that makes us choose this approach is the presence of conflicts, the existence of objects of dispute between the different agents who, depending on the position they occupy in the field, are called "suitors" or "dominants". This fact fits in with Fischer's (2000) approach, according to which, when prioritising an issue on a country's political or government agenda, it depends a lot on the capacity of the interested parties to influence that same agenda in a specific, opportune context of group struggles and conflicts between different actors. The conflicts assume different characteristics in each field, but their existence is common to all of them (Pereira, 2015). For Bourdieu (1983, p. 89) "in each field there will be a conflict, from which one must, each time, look for specific forms, between the new that is entering and that tries to force the right of entry and the dominant that tries defend the monopoly and exclude competition". Composing the structure of the field, the power relations between agents and institutions are responsible for taking positions, determining postures and actions. In this dynamic, those who have a certain monopoly on capital legitimised in the country have a greater chance of being served in their opinions and choices.

Discussion and results

The participation of non-governmental actors in policy-making processes in Mozambique is a reality that is not new. They participate in various processes and at different levels, such as reports (MPD, 2013) on cross-cutting issues, such as HIV and AIDS, gender, climate change and FNS, themes that were introduced on the national agenda by development partners or donors.

Characterising groups of interest and participation mechanisms in the formulation and implementation of PAMRDC is not an easy task, since there

is a historical process that has been taking place for some time. To participate in the food and nutrition security agenda in Mozambique, groups of interest come in several forms. The stakeholder analysis, presented in Table 1 below, focuses on important aspects of governance related to the study's results, namely: the mandate of stakeholders, responsibility, predictability of funding and resources, harmonisation, and alignment.

Table 1: Stakeholders' analysis (adapted from SETSAN, 2018)

Type of stakeholder	Mandate	Responsibility	Predictability of funds and resources	Harmonisation	Alignment with national strategies
SETSAN (SUN focal point)	Coordination	GoM, People of Mozambique	Fluctuating, very often low	Very high	Very high
Bilateral donors	Financing, vision and supervision	Taxes in the countries of origin	Fluctuating according to priorities and policies of the countries of origin	Fluctuating	Fluctuating
Multilateral (UN e WB)	Technical assistance (UN) and Financing (some from the UN) (WB)	UN General Assembly and WB Board	High	Medium (they act as one at the UN but it is not always the case)	Medium
Civil society	Services provision and governance	Financiers	Fluctuating according to the financiers	Low to medium	Low to medium
Private sector	Profit and sometimes CSR	Investors	High, according to the investment return	Low	Low
Academia	Provide Relevant education	For the GoM/financier and students	Fluctuating depending on the financiers	Medium to high	High

The private sector and civil society have struggled to define their specific roles in the implementation of PAMRDC, despite being part of the SUN network. While the private sector operates mainly by supporting urban centres in conjunction with the market programme financed by the Netherlands, civil society tries to develop a "voice" and accountability among and within

communities and to create networks for advocacy and communication for food and nutritional security, also in the provinces and at lower levels.

In Figure 2, we see that stakeholders have changed over time, especially an increase in the number of NGOs involved in the implementation, while bilateral and multilateral donors have remained the same. One explanation for this may be that while donors previously worked and supported the government directly, they gradually increased support for the government through civil society organisations and the private sector.
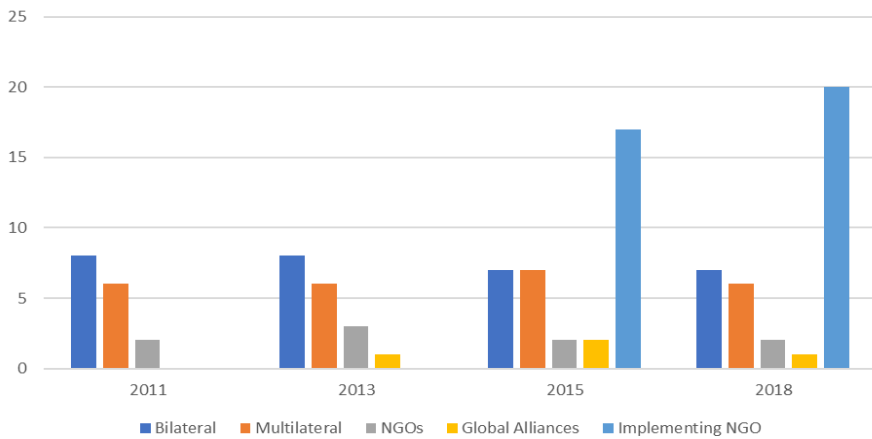
Figure 2: Stakeholders in nutrition, 2011–2017 (SETSAN, 2018)

The characterisation of the groups of interest actors show that they are not homogeneous groups, as there is a great differentiation among them. If we look at Bourdieu's proposition, according to which groups have different types of capital that determine their relationship of power as to the fields in which the relationship occurs, we observe that their economic capital, social capital, or symbolic capital means that the participation of the groups of interest differs in each of the components or in the field in dispute or participation.

In relation to economic capital, most national civil society organisations, such as groups of interest, have a factor that jeopardises their relations to the extent that their heavy financial dependence on international donors, conditions their language and positioning. Most of them do not operate on a stable financial structure but depend on funds released by foreign financiers based on specific projects. Since they depend on financing from international organisations, they automatically reproduce the financiers' language regarding the FNS agenda, as an interviewee mentioned:

> Most of the time, we compete for public tenders in programmes of the United Nations, the World Bank and other international organisations. We have no alternative if we do not do what they want, because the tenders come with conditions, such as: gender relations, climate change and some human rights cases and we are forced to repeat their discourse because we want to win in order to be implementers and keep our organisations running. We are service providers, and we do what our boss wants even if we have a different opinion (Key informant, Civil Society Executive Director).

Regarding the origin of the resources that are available to these groups and the support base of their interests, most groups of interest have knowledge of and access to information on global financing mechanisms. There is particular emphasis on women, children and adolescents through a multi-stakeholder partnership that is helping countries to deal with the biggest problems of health and nutrition that affect women, children and adolescents. The Global Financing Facility (GFF) is supported by the governments of Burkina Faso, Canada, the Ivory Coast, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom; as well as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the Susan T. Buffett Foundation; the European Commission; Laerdal Global Health; and Merck for mothers.

The GFF supports governments to gather partners around a country-led plan, prioritising high-impact health areas, but in which little investment has been made. The GFF Trust Fund acts as a funding catalyst, with countries using modest grants from the GFF Trust Fund to significantly increase their domestic resources alongside IBRD AID and World Bank financing, and with external financing in line with private sector resources. The added value of these organisations is that they have access to information and installed technical capacity for the submission of financing proposals and in several cases using government letters of approval.

Regarding social capital, national civil society organisations play a fundamental role, insofar as they are seen as organisations that represent vulnerable groups and, in some cases, have representation in all provinces of the country. However, their weakness in terms of human resources with capacity to provide adequate technical assistance to the government, and their lack of financial and material resources, does not allow them to have autonomy in their language and positions on FNS issues.

According to Homerin (2005), the main characteristic of Mozambican CSOs is their institutional fragility, which is deficient in several aspects: poor material conditions, low levels of staff qualification, weak voluntary participa-

tion, and difficulty in standing in a credible way vis-à-vis public authority. Therefore, they do not appear as fully credible actors before the political authorities or even before the populations they are supposed to represent. These organisations are often seen as having strong political connections and as only reproducing the government's discourse, since it is not uncommon for people to swing between a public function and the associative environment, appropriating both positions, with the conflicts of interest that this can create, and weakening their capacity to negotiate and mobilise resources at the local and international levels.
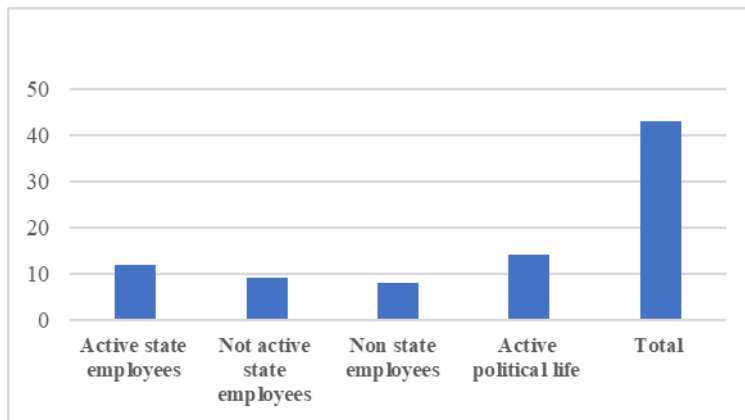
Figure 3: NGOs' political links

As we see in Figure 3 above, interviews were conducted with 43 NGOs, to understand the level of connection that their leaders (Executive Directors or Coordinators) have with the state. About 33 of these civil society organisations had links with the state, for some were active state employees (12), others had been state employees (9) and others had an active political life (14). These factors are explained by Kuchler (2017, cited in Duncan, Claeys, 2018) as there is also convincing criticism emerging to show that, in many cases, the groups of interest have depoliticising effects, suggesting that public participation has become no more than a depoliticisation strategy. This situation also calls into question the fact that the representatives of some Mozambican CSOs have conflicting interests. Away from base communities and close to political power, they may in some cases benefit from a good organisational structure, but their social legitimacy is diminished.

With regard to symbolic capital, there is a greater capacity for human and financial resources, as they are concentrated in international organisations,

without forgetting that there are those traditional organisations in support of the FNS agenda, such as the United Nations agencies (FAO. WFP, UNICEF, WHO). These operate not only in these traditional areas, and since they have resources mobilised at the highest level and with experience in processes at the global level, they are practically recognised by governments and are in a different position from other agencies, which in at some point, makes the language of these organisations different from that of others.

These United Nations organisations or agencies establish relationships with those organisations that have the greatest capacity to influence government decisions because they are international institutions with a tradition of providing technical assistance to the government in matters of food and nutrition security, and have always performed a key role in supporting countries in the development of social programmes and projects.
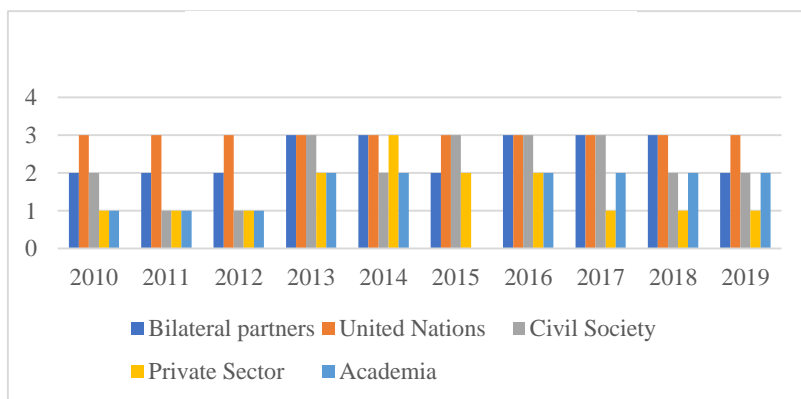
Figure 4: Stakeholder participation tendency in PAMRDC

Looking at the charts from 2010 to 2019 (Figure 4), we can see the consistency of participation of these organisations in the FNS agenda in the country. In a classification of 1 to 3 (1 is low participation, 2 is average participation and 3 is high participation), there is the consistency of active participation by the United Nations agencies. These organisations, because of their history of supporting social and human development at a global level, already have resources available annually for a normal support base, through technical assistance or project implementation from local grassroots organisations. On the other hand, there is a wide variation in the participation of civil society organisations, the private sector and academia due to various

factors of a structural or financial nature, which means that their capacity to influence decisions is reduced.

This differentiation between the capital of the groups of interest is supported by the approach of Bourdieu (2004), according to which, there are several actors and that each actor holds capital that can be cultural, social or economic that determines its position or weight in relationships and that dictates its autonomy or power to influence the course of public policy. Hence, from the assets of the social actors or groups of interest that participate in the elaboration of the PAMRDC, and the influence or role of each of the actors, it was realised that as transformative agents, it was the cooperation partners and the United Nations agencies in particular that played a key role in the formulation and implementation of PAMRDC. However, it was also clear that there are conflicts due to their capital among the cooperation partners in their relations, not all by consensus, which determine their position in the process of implementing PAMRDC processes. For this reason, it is extremely important to categorise the groups of interest whenever analysing their participation in similar processes, as it becomes difficult to measure their influence, as well as their participatory role in the design and implementation of public policies.

This process of differentiation and the asymmetries between these groups may be one of the reasons that the country continues to have high rates of chronic malnutrition, since the full and effective participation of marginalised and vulnerable groups directly affected by food insecurity and malnutrition would only be ensured if they had the right and the ability to speak, to be heard and to influence government decisions (HLPE, 2018).

Conclusion

In Mozambique in the last 20 years, there has been a proliferation of non-governmental actors or groups of interest acting as transformative agents that have actively participated in the agenda to combat malnutrition, through the process of formulating policies and mobilising policy resources for their implementation. However, malnutrition rates remain high, with 43% of children under five years consuming about 11% of the country's GDP. In this work, we seek to understand the role and contribution of the groups of interest in the process of formulating and implementing the multisectoral action plan for the reduction of chronic malnutrition in Mozambique. The characterisation of the groups of interest actors showed that they are not homogeneous groups, as there is a major differentiation among them. This differentiation is manifested in terms of their economic, social and symbolic capital which determines

power relations between the groups that are established in terms of conflicts in the implementation of the agenda to combat malnutrition.

The situation of conflict and capital differentiation jeopardises the functioning of some groups and their own credibility among the vulnerable groups they represent. Being represented by fragile, dependent and politicised organisations has not ensured the representativeness and effective participation of these groups in the process of shaping and implementing PAMRDC, jeopardising the effectiveness or achievement of the expected results.

In this analysis, it also becomes clear that it is not enough for the groups of interest to organise themselves to support an agenda, because as transformative agents group members have a reflexive orientation towards how collective outcomes are important for a group to reach its goals and generate relational good with government and other actors. How their counterparts need to organise themselves so that they can build capacities in their institutions to respond to the challenges for which they were created is a field that can be explored in other discussions. Nevertheless, social interactions between groups typically lead to compromises and unanticipated consequences, advancing either structural elaboration or mere continuity. Structural elaboration changes resource distributions and leads to the re-grouping of agents. This process, in which agency itself is transformed, is labelled double morphogenesis (Archer, 1995, cited in Tuominen, 2018). We believe that the relationships and integration of the groups of interest must be an integral part of the strategies, plans and programmes in all sectors in order to achieve the objectives and goals of FNS (HLPE, 2018). These groups offer innovative mechanisms that can contribute to finance and improve the state of FNS, but they do not replace the need for public investment to combat malnutrition. It means allowing the creation and establishment of independent, stable and effective institutions, organisations and groups of interest that can strive to achieve their goals through their engagement in the transformative agency process on food and nutrition agenda in Mozambique.

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Chapter 9
Policy, History, and Individual Action
Using Moroccan Agriculture to Reflect on Agency

Beatrice Ferlaino

This chapter aims to demonstrate how the concept of agency can stimulate a vision of society able to blend subject and structure as well as past and present times. This perspective on agency will be explored through the case study of Moroccan reconversion projects. As part of the present national agricultural policy, the objective of these projects is to substitute cereal crops with "highest added value" tree cultivation. Farmers responded to this proposition by planting ancient cereal crops besides the implemented "added value" cultures. Changing the policy according to farmers' action is considered inevitable by politicians because the practice of combining trees and cereals is currently still extremely widespread among the beneficiaries of the project: the coexistence between cereal and "high-value crops" will therefore be included in future reconversion projects. To understand this unorganised form of agency expressed by farmers, we have to retrace the historical importance that cereal crops – and, especially, soft wheat – have had in rural Morocco. The focus on reconversion projects allows us to identify individual action as both a "trace of the past" and a lens to read the dialectical construction between individual agency and social structures.

This chapter is inspired by fieldwork carried out in Morocco between October 2019 and March 2020 on Moroccan agricultural policy and its cereal production chain, in the frame of my PhD thesis. In the first part of this work, I will explain how "agency" is intended by positioning it in the "practice theory" branch (for its understanding of individual/structure mutual influence) and by presenting the concept in its historical aspect (mobilising "historical agency" works). I will then introduce the case study and, with the reconstruction of Moroccan agriculture policies' history, show that farmers'

reaction is understandable if observed in the long duration: reflecting on historical trajectories helps us to shed light on the individual motivations, historical roots and social meanings of actions and choices.

Agency as a trace of the past

This chapter aims to propose a specific interpretation of agency: individual agency can be, simultaneously, a "trace of the past", giving us signs of how social and cultural circumstances that surround subjects are formed and interpreted, and a symbol of the mutual influence of individuals and structure.

In this work, agency is intended according to the so-called "practice theory studies" (Ortner, 1984; 2001; Hanks, 1990; Schatzki, 2002) which recognise it as:

> A general characteristic of all human beings … Agency is thus by definition everywhere … There is agency at work in the continuity and homogeneity of social and cultural forms, just as there is agency at work in discontinuity, deviance, and variation. Thus, it is not a question of looking for "instances of" agency in social and cultural life, but rather of formulating theoretical frameworks which presuppose agency (or rather multiple agencies) at work within … particular practices and projects (Ortner, 2001, p. 272).

Conceiving agency in this way doesn't mean not defining it at all; but rather to recognise it as "simply" a perspective, a particular angle chosen by the researcher to understand the making of society through a specific social phenomenon. Neither agency nor structure exist per se: they take shape if and when they are observed, and they can become prisms through which to explore people's actions and society's formation. This branch moves from the works of Anthony Giddens (1976; 1979; 1984) on reality's structuration (the mutual and often unintentional relationships which connect individual actions and social structures in shaping society); of Marshall Sahlins' (1976; 1981; 1985) structure of conjunctures that constructs different rationalities (giving meanings to symbols and actions); and of Pierre Bourdieu's (1972; 1979; 1980) movement of externalisation of the interior and internalisation of the external (which simultaneously constructs individual habitus and social fields). In the present work, agency is therefore not conceived necessarily as something intentional or subversive, in contrast with structure; instead, it is considered as something which can also be identified in unorganised actions which reproduce social order and maintain stability.

Assuming this interpretation lets us notice the mutual influence between individual agency and social structure (which, as perspectives, have to be thought together to be complete), as well as allows us to access the exploration of how people's actions take shapes and why. To consider this second aspect, quoting the work of E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966), we can observe how individual and social practices are constructed in an overlap of past and present where beliefs and interests and – more or less conscious and explicit – political positions melt in the making of social balances and unbalance. "We must always bear in mind this overlap" (Thompson, 1966, p. 247) as well as the importance of conceiving social phenomena as historical ones, entailed in historical relationships.

Examining the historical character of agency practices means also understanding how the historical context influences present human action; how it is, in turn, shaped; and how beliefs, motivations, and meanings of actions melt, take shape and change through history. This kind of investigation is, in part, explored by historical agency studies. If some of these work to rehabilitate the concept of agency in the study of the past (Smith, 2001; Callinicos, 2004), in the idea that "history is not simply something that happens to people, but something they make – within, of course, the very powerful constraints of the system in which they are operating" (Ortner, 1984, p. 159); another part of historical agency studies is centred on revealing the connections between past and present times, focusing on individual (Carlyle, 1966; Taylor, 1991) or collective (Genovese, 1974; Davis, 2000) action.

This chapter seeks to contribute to these conceptions of agency. The observation of an unorganised form of individual agency in Moroccan cereal agriculture offers us a way to read the relationships between subject and structure in a unified perspective and, simultaneously, to insert the concept of agency in long-term analysis. Since agency practices can be a "trace of the past", their investigation allows us to explore the role of history in the construction of individual action and social structure and their mutual influence. Reconversion projects are a clear example of both the connection between individuals and structure, as well as the historical influences on contemporary practice.

Reconversion projects: An example of farmer's agency?

In 2008, Morocco experienced the promotion of a new agricultural policy: the Green Morocco Plan (GMP). With a ten-year term, its principal aim was to produce a profound social change in the national rural context by increas-

ing small farmers' income (Ministry of Agriculture, 2008). Upon expiration of this first project, a second one was proposed in 2020, named Generation Green (GG). Oriented to 2030, this second policy is presented as more socially concerned than the first:[1] to avoid the negative effects of urbanisation and stabilise rural population in rural areas, GG is concentred on the creation of an agricultural middle class – and promoted by the King himself.[2]

The GG is considered as the second version of the GMP (enough to be even named GMP2) (Azara, 2020; Ben Abbou, 2019) and the strategy has not yet been fully elaborated. From the presentations available until now, the general aim of GMP1 is continued in its second version: increasing agricultural exports and making this the cornerstone of rural development.

Reconversion projects are at the very core of this strategy: they propose to substitute cereal production with "highest added value" crops such as olive, almond and fruit trees. These projects are part of the second pillar of GMP1, specifically dedicated to the modernisation of agricultural practices in "non-favourable" regions.[3]

At the very beginning of the project's presentation, the aim was to develop between 50 and 70 reconversion projects, involving between 30 000 and 40 000 farmers, with the final aim of reducing cereal production by 20% (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014); in the second version of GMP the goal is even "to reconvert one million hectares planted with cereals to fruit trees" (ADA, 2021a). The importance of the reconversion projects in the Ministry's strategy is clear: they are mentioned by the General Secretary of the Agricultural Ministry in public interviews (MediTVAfrique, 2020), and were elected by the Minister of Agriculture himself as the symbol of the policy's sustainability. In fact, in a public interview where he was asked to identify the political strategies for making agriculture more resilient, he said:

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[1] I very often found this explanation during the fieldwork, but it was strongly emphasised in my interviews with a member of the Agricultural Development Agency, Rabat, 28 February 2020, and with an important figure in the Agricultural Credit, Rabat, 24 February 2020.

[2] "We aim to promote the emergence of an agricultural middle class and to consolidate its structure so that, ultimately, it can exercise its dual vocation as a factor of balance and leverage of social-economic development, at the image of the urban middle class" translated by the author, Royal speech, 12 October 2018.

[3] This is to be achieved by introducing farm machinery, chemical fertilisers, irrigation infrastructure and certified seeds, and by replacing cereal. The First pillar is instead addressed to the "favourable" areas and focuses on the increase of export crop production and distribution, by constructing storage and transformation infrastructures.

> Firstly, the reconversion of land used for cereal cultivation, a crop that has the tendency, when there is low rainfall, to compromise the whole season … Today, fruit trees are more resistant to climate change, which makes it possible to improve farmers' incomes and at the same time ensure the sustainability of production and a better use of agricultural land (Azara, 2018).[4]

The Minister confirmed the importance of these projects during a famous speech to Parliament on 1 June 2020, when he openly said that the agricultural strategy wants to break with the "taboo" against allowing anything but cereal production as the main national crop: "Choosing to base our agriculture on cereals would mean to accept creating a loss for Moroccan farmers of 20 billion of dirhams every year … Morocco can buy cereals on the global market and this doesn't create problems".[5] The wish to substitute cereals was also expressed clearly by one of the GMP creators. A graduate in management at the *École des Hautes Études Commerciales* (HEC) in Paris and – at the time – an employee of McKinsey, the consulting group that developed the GMP's strategy, this Moroccan man explained the main reason that brought him and its colleagues to take this choice:

> We had to make agriculture an economic sector like any other and break taboos. An important decision we made was to deny the dogma of food self-sufficiency, particularly in cereals. We said: what is the best way to invest national resources? … To be profitable, cereals require big investments (irrigation, selected seeds, etc.) ... It is better to use water resources for export and buy good quality cereals from outside.[6]

This same idea is confirmed in official documents:

> The importance of cereal surface (59% of the Utilised Agricultural Area - UAA) … witness the great possibilities on intensification and reconversion … These potentials are further suggested by the differentials in the profitability of the land used: while grain accounts for 59% of the UAA, it participates in the overall value of agricultural production only to the extent of 18%, while vegetables, with only 3% of the UAA, contribute to the 21% of total agricultural production (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019, p. 8).[7]

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[4] Translated by the author.
[5] Author's translation of a statement by the Minister from Akesbi (2020).
[6] Whatsapp, 14 June 2020.
[7] Translated by the author.

Reconversion projects are mostly financed and coordinated by the Agricultural Development Agency (ADA),[8] which is responsible for the implementation of the GMP. The ADA is charged with the selection of food processing companies who, in turn, are responsible for the selection of farmers. These private companies have to offer farmers technical information and agricultural inputs to change their practices. After two years of technical guidance, farmers are considered "reconverted" and, subsequently, "modernised". Even if this policy is considered bottom-up oriented,[9] its final output is to teach farmers how to be virtuous and entrepreneurial.

Speaking about the cereal strategy, an agricultural engineer that had an important role in the biggest seed company of the country told me:

> The goal for the cereal sector is to put aside small farmers' production. This is very difficult. Farmers don't want to lose their cereals; it is not an automatic choice. It's because this project doesn't work that there are no data about it.[10]

Actually, even if the reconversion projects are so important, it is very difficult to find official data on their effective implementation. The number of hectares planted to cereals has been quite stable since the beginning of the GMP: if in 2008, they covered approximately five billion hectares, in 2016 this number was stable. It is true, indeed, that it had decreased in 2019 to a bit more than three billion, but this kind of variation follows the weather and cereal productivity, and it is not evidence of a "reconversion wave". Moreover, of the 30 000 or 40 000 farmers that should have been reconverted, only 720 units of less than five hectares have been included in projects for planting fruit trees. The number of reconvention projects is also very difficult to obtain: when I asked about it during the fieldwork, I was constantly re-directed and never finally had a clear answer. On the contrary, though, figures on fruit tree planting are strongly exhibited: according to the ADA, 438 455 fruit trees have been planted since 2008, which indicates the political will to make Morocco a recognised fruit-producing country (ADA, 2021b).

Indeed, it does not seem so simple to eradicate cereal crops in rural areas, and farmers have strongly influenced the way in which reconversion projects are viewed and shaped by politicians. During my research, when I spoke

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[8] 70% from the public sector and 30% from the private (Ministry of Agriculture, 2009).

[9] Interview with one of the managers of the ADA, Rabat, 28 February 2020.

[10] Zoom, 14 July 2020.

about reconversion projects with political[11] or private actors,[12] it emerged that farmers modify them on the basis of their own priorities: they benefit from the public support and plant the sponsored "highest added value" trees, but besides or between them they continue cereal cultivation, mostly of soft wheat.[13] This custom is not unknown and is reported also in some of the few works on the reconversion projects (Sajid, 2018; Mathez, 2020):

> A group of farmers in Southern Morocco agreed on a reconversion project and managed to get contracted on their own land by the service provider in charge of the plantation. Hence, for the duration of two years, they got a salary and could diminish the area of land dedicated to cereals. Yet, upon completion of the project, without that source of salary, the farmers re-increased their cereal production, while their animals ate the freshly planted trees (Mathez, 2020, p. 34).

Even administrations now accept this reality:

> By now we acknowledge that olives and fruit trees subsidised by GMP coexist with cereal crops, and that is a good thing! We want to maintain this coexistence in the new agricultural policy. But to do it, we have to improve the technical route in order to make sure that each cultivation has enough resources.

This was the reaction of one of the managers of the ADA[14] when I asked about the reconversion projects. Even the General Secretary of the Agricultural Ministry declared publicly that the reconversion projects often become "crop combinations" (MediTVAfrique, 2020).

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[11] Such as a local director of the National Bureau of Agricultural Advice (ONCA), Berrechid, 11 February 2020, or a member of the staff of the National Interprofessional Office for Cereals and Leguminous Plants (ONICL), Rabat, 17 February 2020.

[12] As an executive of the National Flour Mills Federation, Casablanca, 26 February 2020; a farmer of the area of Settat, 19 November 2019; or different experts of Moroccan agriculture who have witnessed this practice: two economists, Rabat, 27 January 2020 and Meknès, 18 December 2019, or a rural sociology professor at the University Hassan II, Casablanca, 12 December 2019.

[13] A retiree rural sociologist that I spoke with, Meknès, 21 November 2019, gave me the concrete example of his neighbour, who benefits from both activities at the same time. The large use of this double cultivation system was also presented in the conference *The evolution of Morocco Green Plan* of the economist Najib Akesbi, Rabat, 25 January 2020, in the High School of Management.

[14] Interview with an ADA manager, Rabat, 28 February 2020.

The fact that farmers can shape a political action so much that their appropriation becomes recognised by decision-makers as "needed to be accepted and included in the new policy",[15] can be seen as a form of resistance agency (Counihan, Siniscalchi, 2014; White, 2018).[16] It clearly shows a way in which "farmers influence the design of a development project in a situation where they had weak decision-making rights and limited access to patronage relations" (Fayasse, Thomas, 2016, p. 230). Nevertheless, observing how Moroccan farmers have adapted reconversion projects to their own needs, and how this has been accepted and adopted as agricultural policy, reveals not only the performative power of the individual, but also shows the historical nature of individual and collective agency (Archer, Maccarini, 2013): what today is considered as an unexpected farmers' practice, with political resonances, has deep historical reasons and can also be seen as the success of previous agricultural policies. Reconversion projects are, in fact, proposed in areas that have been at the centre of several policies for cereal production throughout Moroccan history, and the farmers whom they are approached are often well included in complex market structures and social chains focused on wheat or barley. For these farmers, cereals are at the same time a form of economical assurance (being included inside a family consumption strategy as food for animals and, in part, for humans); a way for accessing market exchanges (having the certainty to sell them for their importance in local alimentation); and an important tool for social life (being part of exchanges and gifts that contribute to structure human relationships). Cereals are at the very core of farmers' choices, being fully included in the multidimensional economy of the rural life.[17] We argue that the importance of cereals has then to be understood in its historical complexity.

Cereal cultivation practice as a success of former political choices

As told by one employee of the ADA "cereals are at the very core of Moroccan agriculture: we can't even think about it, without considering this culti-

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[15] Interview with one of the managers of the ADA, Rabat, 28 February 2020. The work of Nicolas Fayasse et al. on agency in Moroccan agricultural practices often shows this same dynamic: see their work on water management (2010, 2012) and project negotiation (2015, 2016).

[16] On what can be considered as resistance practice and how defining a practice like this as resistance subtends a dual approach to power relationships, see Mitchell (1990).

[17] Interviews with farmers in the region of Meknès, 11 November 2020; Settat, Berrechid, 1 November 2020; and Agadir, 7 December 2020.

vation".[18] They cover around 59% of the total UAA cropland (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019) and are grown in "favourable" regions (irrigated or with good rainfall) as well as in dry or "adverse" regions. In dry areas, cereals are the main crop and in 2006 made up 40% of national production (Ait El Mekki, 2006). If cereals are central to agriculture, agriculture is central to the Moroccan economy. The national report of 2017 recognises that agriculture brings in 13% of national GDP, employing 74% of the rural population (more than 40% of national employment) (Ministry of Agriculture, 2018). For its centrality in this sector, the cereal harvest is considered to have a strong influence on the Moroccan economy.

Morocco's wheat consumption is higher than the world average[19] and cereals have been considered a "strategic product" since the colonial period, subsidised and managed by the public sector along with sugar and oilseeds. Cereals are not only at the core of national food security strategies, becoming a matter of national stability, but are also considered a strategic good to maintain social order. Their historic role in regulating pastoral-agricultural relations, inner group stability and political equilibrium between central and local powers in precolonial times, during the French protectorate and since independence has been explored in several important works of rural sociology – a branch strongly developed in the Moroccan context to study rural populations.[20] This discipline has recognised cereals as a symbol of the *fellahs'*[21] traditional economy[22] and, in regions characterised by these crops, cereals are considered fundamental to maintain the integrated agro-pastoral system and the informal exchange economy between families (Bourbouze, 2000; Ait El Mekki, 2006).[23]

Acting on cereals means, in this frame, acting on *fellahs'* household economy, thus giving them "an enormous possibility to modernise [the] Moroccan rural context" (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019). Reconversion projects

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[18] Rabat, 28 February 2020. The same idea emerged in most of the interviews.

[19] Morocco's average is 173 kg per capita annually, while the world's is 152 kg (Ait El Mekki, 2006).

[20] The social and symbolic role of cereal emerges in the works of Robert Montagne (1951 [2016]), Jacques Berque (1955), Paul Pascon (1977, 1984), and Rémy Leveau (1985).

[21] Maghreb name to define small farmers.

[22] The multidimensional feature of cereal cultivation is also recognised in genetic studies (Jlibene, Nasserlehaq, 2011) and academic works (Jouve, 2006; Fornage, 2006), as well as other literature (Ait Kadi, Benoit, 2006; Moroccan Agriculture Ministry, 2019).

[23] Even if today the rural economy is multidimensional and cereals' role has changed (Rachik, Bourquia, 2011), cereal crops are still considered by policy-makers as the main source of income of the rural household economy.

therefore assume a symbolic role in political choices. *Fellahs* are often iden-
tified by the decision-making class as the main obstacle to Moroccan agri-
cultural development: they are considered to be resistant to change, unable to
use productive agricultural practices and blocked in household economy
networks.[24] The substitution of cereals with other kinds of productions is
therefore considered to be fundamental not only to change the economical
Moroccan system but also to transform farmer's mentality and priorities. The
idea that the intervention in agricultural practices can change the priorities,
rationalities and motivations of farmers is rooted in the approach of rural so-
ciology,[25] how it developed in Morocco during the twentieth century and af-
fected political choices (Chiche, 1997). This is due to the important political
roles that certain rural sociologists had in colonial and post-colonial Moroc-
co, such as the consulting role of Robert Montagne for tribal issues during
the French administration, or the presidency of Paul Pascon in the National
Irrigation Bureau after independence. It is also witnessed by publications of
some conferences where rural sociologists were called to inspire decision-
making process (Dresh, Dumont, Berque, 1963; HCP, 2005). Rural sociolo-
gy still today has a central role in the formation of the political class: by
shaping the vision of private and public figures in the agricultural sector[26]
but also outside it, influencing the educational path of, for example, the Di-
rector of the Court of Concurrence (Guerraoui, 1986; 2000), or of some ex-
ponents of the Commission for the New Development Model (Rachik, Bour-
quia, 2011; Tozy, 1990; 2004). The symbolic role of cereals (studied and
recognised by rural sociology) has positioned this crop at the very centre of
political priorities, so that Morocco is today seen as a country with a strong
"cereal vocation".[27]

There is a particular cereal, though, whose diffusion is most closely
linked to political effort: soft wheat. Before and at the beginning of the

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[24] The rural population has often been described as "fatalistic" and "not proactive", also in
my interviews with employees of the National Mills Federation, Casablanca, 26 February
2020, of the ONICL, Rabat, 3 March 2020, and of the American Association of Wheat Ex-
porters, Casablanca, 3 April 2020.

[25] For the history of Moroccan rural sociology see: Nicolas (1961); Rachik, Bourquia
(2011); Zahi (2014).

[26] As emerged during interviews with one of the executives of ONICL, Rabat, 3 March
2020, when he remembered with a smile its lectures on rural sociology; or with a manager of
Agricultural Credit, Rabat, 24 February 2020, who wrote his PhD thesis on *fellah*s' access to
credit.

[27] As emerged in the interviews with a sociologist, Casablanca, 27 October 2019, and a
politician, Casablanca, 26 November 2019.

French protectorate, soft wheat was grown in Morocco only in some oasis areas, and barley was the most widely cultivated cereal, followed by durum wheat. With the entrance of the French colonial empire, soft wheat became the most sustained crop: throughout the first half of the protectorate, French farmers were encouraged to move to Morocco to start soft wheat cultivation, in order to make the country a "French breadbasket": between 80% and 90% of colonial UAA was dedicated to soft wheat production and local varieties were replaced with foreign ones (Jlibene, Nasserlehaq, 2011). During the First War World, Morocco was important in assuring bread to soldiers and in peace times it supplied France with high gluten soft wheat, which is required to create French baguettes. As a demonstration of the centrality of wheat in the French protectorate's agriculture, it is possible to observe that during the entire period from 1929 to 1957 durum wheat production increased at an annual average adjusted rate of 0.37% (quite a stationary production), while soft wheat had a rate of 1.7% (Lambert, 1971).

The "wheat policy" (Swearingen, 1987, p. 41) of the French administration declined in the early thirties, when Moroccan soft wheat became a threat to France's production, and a new political choice was made: Morocco would abandon grain in favour of fruit trees and vegetables. The Second War World required the distribution of most of the cereal production to the army, and a strong famine fell on the Moroccan population, exacerbated by a typhus epidemic, periodical drought and the war economy. Nationalism increased progressively and the rural population stormed cities with hunger marches. To maintain stability, the colonial administration had to import soft wheat from France and the USA and distribute it to a belligerent and ravenous population (Rivet, 2012).

> Cereals remain the most important crop for small farmers because they still have a vivid memory of the drought of the forties. The 1944 famine left an unforgettable memory in the Moroccan countryside as well as in the political class … It was from this moment that the French administration began to distribute bags of flour, and that the kingdom learned to always keep the grain market under control and never abandon cereal production.

This is a statement by a manager of the National Office of Cereals and Legumes Interprofessional Organisation (ONICL),[28] an institution founded

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[28] Rabat, 25 February 2020.

in 1937 to administer, control and subsidise the cereal market. Since then, all agricultural policies have acted simultaneously on cereal production as well as fruit and vegetable production. This practice also had the benefit for the French administration to stifle nationalist movements by adopting an agricultural policy focused on *fellahs*. By following the "peasant doctrine" elaborated by Jacques Berque and Julien Couleau (1945), the French administration started to directly include rural sociologists and small farmers in agricultural change and, therefore, cereal crops regained a central role in its political choices.

With independence, this strategy persisted, and the modernisation of cereal agriculture became part of industrial development. The will to build a strong agro-industrial processing sector was expressed through economic and political support to the milling industry and by trying to adapt cereal production to agro-industrial needs. At first, the three autumn cereals, barley, soft wheat and durum, were sustained in the same way, by spreading the use of new strains and improving the use of chemical fertilisers and farm machinery with policies such as Opération Labour (1957–1962), Opération Engrais (1965–1966), and the Cropping Contracts (1969). During this period, soft wheat and durum production grew at similar rates, with a rate, respectively, of 5.1% and 5.5%. In order to maintain and stimulate this cultivation, the state subsidised the stocks, defined the prices and controlled the processing market of these three cereals but, nevertheless, the conversion of national cereal production to an industrial-oriented one remained difficult, and wheat imports grew progressively (Lambert, 1971).

These state-guided policies had high financial costs and, for demographic and economic reasons, during the eighties Morocco turned its agricultural and food policy to soft wheat. Policies like Opération Touiza (1981–1984), Intégrée (1981), Intensification du Blé Tendre (1985–1986) and Solidarité (1995) were concentred on this crop, and the adoption of soft wheat was also promoted by important public figures, such as the Minister of Agriculture and even the King himself (Jlibene, Nasserlehaq, 2011). Subsidies remained only for this cereal, and, in a general frame of liberalisation, the soft wheat market is still today in a situation of "conditional liberalisation".[29] It is, in fact, influenced by the presence of two types of subsidised flour, by state's subventions on national production's stocks and soft wheat seeds, and by a general public supervision on prices of wheat and flour in order to guarantee

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[29] An expression used by an ONICL employee (WhatsApp, 5 December 2020) to describe the activity of this Office.

the presence of a 1.2 dirham's bread. In just ten years, soft wheat's cultivation area almost doubled, from 859 000 hectares between 1980 and 1989, to 1 499 000 hectares in the period 1990 to 1998; and finally covering 2 296 000 hectares in 2018.[30] The diffusion of this crop is still visible today, observing the inversion that occurred in the relation between durum and soft wheat: between 1969 and 1980 soft wheat was 20-30% of the two cereal's production; in the year 1986/1987 it reached 50% and finally between 2012 and 2018 it reached first position, at 70% (Guennouni, 2018). With this strong political effort, internal consumption also changed: white bread, reserved during French domination to the colonial administration and to the national upper class, became widespread among the urban and rural populations during the sixties, to become today the most important product in national consumption (Ait El Mekki, 2006).

As the history of agricultural policy shows, the importance of cereal is historically constructed, and the strong diffusion of soft wheat is structured in the long term. The political emphasis on increasing soft wheat production has modified farmers' practices and rural consumption patterns and became, with time, a peculiar characteristic of the Moroccan agricultural context. The fact that today's farmers included in reconversion projects are so reluctant to abandon cereal cultivation not only makes us aware of the dialectical relationship between individual agency and social context, but also lets us see the present in the light of its historical roots.

Conclusions

The exploration of Moroccan reconversion projects shows the limits of viewing the response that the farmers gave to this political project merely as an act of resistance and an example of independent individual performativity. On the contrary, if we try to understand the individual motivation[31] that drives actions, we can find the historical roots of this response, and can use this example to reveal the overlap between past and present[32] and the unity of structure and subject. As the work of E. P. Thompson (1966) clearly

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[30] Data from HCP (1999) and from ONICL (2020).

[31] Intended here with Weber as a sense configuration that drives individual action. The articulation of subjective experiences, representations and individual goals, which becomes the real factor that orients and defines social action (Grossein, 2016).

[32] There is a clear reference here to the Bergsonian concept of "duration" in how it is used by Jean François Bayart (2016) and by Béatrice Hibou and Mohamend Tozy (2020).

demonstrates, bottom-up actions are the fruit of profound transformations in personal values. These come from understanding how individual actions and their relationship with state structures are based on historically constructed frames that influence what is considered "normal", "common", "right" or "wrong". As such, this example of contemporary agency can be a prism through which to explore the effect on the present of past structures and past policies.

In this sense, Moroccan farmers' appropriation of government reconversion projects and the subsequent political adaptation of these policies stimulate us to consider individual agency as a dialogue between the context and the actor. Instead of creating a distinction between those two perspectives, the concept of agency can combine them by providing a unitary interpretation of the construction of society. The example of agency examined here shows that this concept does not have to be perceived as stuck in the present, but it can, on the contrary, be a way to investigate the long-term structuring of society. Individual agency therefore becomes a way to observe how historically constructed rationalities influence contemporary one and contribute to indicate new interpretative paths, able to shape individual motivations and, therefore, to orient people's actions. To understand the Moroccan case study, agency must be conceived as a trace of the dialectic coexistence between different times and different components of social realities.

The example of the reconversion project shows that technical changes, which transform practices, personal priorities and social values, are brought into a changing society that continuously reinterprets and reconfigures new propositions by incorporating them into its own goals and aims. The example changes meaning based on the period in which it is observed. Focusing only on the Green Morocco Plan projects, one might think that the action of the farmers and the subsequent political adaptations of the project reveal only an unintentionally resistant form of agency, but able to change political action. Observing it in a wider historical context, however, shows that contemporary agency is also – and, maybe, mostly – the product of former policies, pointing to the mutual influence between individuals and structures, between past and present.

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PART II
AGENCY IN MEDIA, CULTURAL AND GENDER STUDIES

Introduction
Agency in Media, Cultural and Gender Studies

Pier Paolo Frassinelli and Varona Sathiyah

In this second part of the book, we move from political and social sciences to media, cultural and gender studies. This shift results in a change of focus to diffuse and culturally mediated versions of agency. These are revealed in specific practices and sites, as well as in activist, theoretical and (auto)ethnographic interventions. The first two chapters focus on how the media, particularly newspapers, provide avenues for the expression of limited agency. From there, we move to gendered versions of agency, and bring to the fore situated knowledge production, women's voices, forms of organising, embodied theorising and gender performativity. Agency is described and theorised as shot through not only with the power relations that define gender relations and hierarchies, but also with African women's diverse affects, embodiments and desires.

In Chapter Ten, "Navigating Patriotic-Oppositional Journalism in Zimbabwean Business Newsrooms", Collen Chambwera provides a pragmatic view of the limited agency exercised by journalists in Zimbabwean business newsrooms. Using data from interviews with selected journalists, Chambwera highlights the subversive strategies that journalists employ to maintain their journalistic integrity. The *Business Weekly,* which is overtly aligned with the ideology of the ruling political party – the Zimbabwean African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) – is contrasted with the *Financial Gazette* – a privately-owned business newspaper which serves the oppositional journalistic leanings of the main political opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Against the backdrop of these conflicting alignments and of a country mired in political and economic crisis, Chambwera argues that journalists exert a limited sense of agency and autonomy. They are constrained by a need to maintain their source of employment in a time of economic precarity irrespective of their distaste for pandering to the political will of institutionally

sanctioned power. Journalists on both sides of the political divide are therefore encouraged to self-censor their articles.

However, journalists express a strong allegiance to each other by passing on stories to colleagues across the political division to ensure that their interests and those of the reading public are best served. They also employ subversive strategies such as interviewing low-ranked workers when invited to glamorous corporate-funded public relations events. They tend to expose the underhanded dealings of corporate companies since they cannot openly criticise the government. In this way, they have highlighted problems with government policies. Journalists from the *Financial Gazette* lament that although they are not held to the same stringent rules as the state-controlled press, they too are also censored, albeit in a different way. If a journalist tries to cover a particularly damning report on corporate malpractice, the editors of the paper retract the article before publication due to pressure exerted by the newspapers' stakeholders for fear of litigation. Although his research findings concede that it is unrealistic to expect to exert total journalistic autonomy in a climate of state and corporate ideological repression and suffocating censorship, Chambwera celebrates small, nuanced acts of journalistic rebellion.

The next chapter, "Newspaper Reader's Writings, Horizontal Networks, and the Agency of Words in Colonial Tanzania", stays within the realm of newspaper publications. It focuses on the "Letters to the Editor" section of newspapers as an example of political resistance in the public sphere. By privileging the views of ordinary people who expressed their opinions in letters to the editor in colonial Tanzania, rather than the official narratives of colonial government records, Maria Suriano highlights the plight of Tanzanian citizens. While acknowledging that the correspondence from readers is not an accurate reflection of society – the writers were usually literate men from urban centres – Suriano adds the caveat that the sentiments of aliterate citizens may have filtered through to the letters to the editor. These were expressed in dialogues between readers over vast geographical distances and through Swahili anecdotes, poetry and proverbs. Astute readers in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, Zanzibar, Malawi and the Belgian Congo managed to foster debates with each other and the editors of newspapers to engage in political resistance in creative ways. These interactions mimicked the oral local tradition of lively verbal sparring and witty exchanges in a print medium. Political messages were ensconced within locally understood Swahili narratives, allowing messages and sentiments to circulate without attracting the ire of either the German or subsequently British colonialists.

As most newspapers were read out aloud in a public place by the formally, usually mission educated members of the community, dissemination of information had a wider reach than was suggested solely by the circulation figures of newspapers. The practice of reading newspapers out aloud was particularly well-suited to the performative nature of Swahili poetry, which reiterated and simultaneously reshaped the moral norms and cultural practices favoured at the time. Much like discussion boards on contemporary internet-based forums, writers maintained a sense of community via the "Letters to the Editor". These letters were further infused with local nuances via insertions and interpretations made by the person reading the poetry and letters aloud in the public space. These embellishments increased the prestige of the person reading the content aloud as he – it usually was a "he" – was able to demonstrate his linguistic and creative acumen to the listeners. Suriano concludes by acknowledging the difficulty of ascertaining the actual reach of the messages embedded in the letters among women, aliterate and rural communities as well as across class and age-based hierarchies.

In Chapter Twelve, "An Indian South African Researcher's Reflections on Conducting Fieldwork in the Global South", Varona Sathiyah emphasises the prominence of race and its impact in South African research. She uses her experience of conducting research at two cultural tourism camps in Limpopo, South Africa, as the entry-point for the self-reflexive contemplation of the roles of race, social capital and perceived legitimacy in encounters with research participants while conducting fieldwork. Reminiscent of a confessional account, the author's own implication in the ethically ambiguous collaboration with a for-profit tourism management company is brought to the fore, as is the problematisation of a woman of colour accruing benefits from documenting the lived experience of other women of colour without necessarily conveying any tangible upliftment or benefit to the research participants.

Fleeting anecdotes of rapport during fieldwork are interspersed throughout the chapter to capture the sense of humanness and subjectivity in the research encounter. Survivalist strategies are used to manoeuvre through the pitfalls inherent in conducting research in the Global South. Issues of researcher positionality such as race, class and gender are flagged as key variables that affect the research. The chapter concludes with the admission that researchers are not exempt from larger societal prejudices, as fieldwork is often a microcosm which reflects societal patterns. The final reflection is a cautionary reminder for researchers to be aware of potentially trampling on the rights and agency of members of research communities in their zeal to complete a research project.

Chapter Thirteen unveils "Feminist New Activism in the Age of Silence". Shereen Abouelnaga starts with the premise that precarity has become the norm in the Arab world, together with silence: both conditions are the upshots of state repression and the expansion of spaces of surveillance that have followed the Arab Spring of a decade ago. In these oppressive locales, however, we also find gendered agency and resistance that manifest in new forms of feminist activism, defined by informal networks, transversal alliances, and collectives that organise outside of institutionalised forms of politics and knowledge production.

The Cairo *Ikhtyar* collective, for example, was established as an "open space for people interested in discussing gender issues, and in documenting/developing a gender knowledge base in Arabic". The activities of the collective are based on the explicit recognition that knowledge production is a form of activism. This translates into their publishing original work as well as in translating feminist scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Kimberle Crenshaw into Arabic. The second example of feminist knowledge production presented by the author is the online journal *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, launched in Lebanon in 2015. Identifying itself as "a progressive, feminist journal on gender and sexuality in the Middle East, South-West Asia, and North Africa regions", *Kohl* demonstrates how women are organising to breach the attempt to silence feminist discourse across the Arab world. This is reiterated through the third example, *Tal'at*, a Palestinian transnational feminist movement. Organising against gender-based violence and honour killings through marches and demonstrations, the movement bridges the gap between traditional modes of activism and new feminist discourses and forms of organising. From there, the author ends with episodes of gender violence in the Arab world that have been turned into sites of contestation that illustrate the value of situated feminist knowledge production in disrupting dominant patriarchal narratives and understandings.

Chapter Fourteen, "In the Belly of the Beast: Collective Agency to Combat Sexual Harassment at Cairo University", also examines activism, this time in an institutional setting. The work of the Anti-Harassment Unit at Cairo University is a story of successful activism, which enabled the institution to stop denying sexual harassment and implement a zero-tolerance policy. Maha El Said starts with a discussion of agency, which she theorises as "power to" bring about change and speak up to power (or "power over"). This discussion is enriched by an analysis of the relation between individual and collective or "communion" agency. This agency is embedded in and struggles against unequal power relations and broader and widespread forms of violence against

women, which in Egypt – or indeed the rest of the world – are compounded by a cultural environment that tolerates and rationalises sexual harassment.

The success of this activism, derived from what the author describes as "transformative agency", involves building coalitions and partnerships. Here too, agency makes its presence felt through the constitution of collectives that emerge outside of institutionally designated spaces. This kind of agency, even though it does not manifest itself in form of traditional political actors or strategies, is nonetheless strategic, in that it deliberately confronts issues of "power, long-term consequences, and appropriate forms of action". The chapter ends with a paradox: the very success of this form of agency also led to the loss of its initial power as a result of institutional recognition and incorporation, which resulted in the loss of "many of its driving elements".

From Egypt, we cross the African continent to South Africa. Here, in "Between the Feminised Other and Black Women's Power", Tumi Mampane seeks to develop a Black feminist theoretical framework that gives voice to the women she studies, starting from the assumption that these women already have a voice and agency, and that it is the task of the Black feminist scholar to retrieve, historicise, contextualise and theorise them. This position derives from the theoretical elaboration the author developed for a study conducted between 2018 and 2020 on Pentecostal charismatic constructions of femininity in Alexandra Township. Mampane's intervention is autoethnographic, as she speaks as a voice – albeit a critical and non-conforming one – from within the Pentecostal charismatic movement, and also as a Black woman and an African feminist and womanist.

Mampane focuses on gendered agency by disclosing Black women's power through the lens of Black feminist theory, which sees the feminine "as a multiplicity of relations, performativity, will and 'flesh'". Setting Judith Butler's theorisation of gender as contradictory, unstable and shifting in conversation with Danai Mupotsa's reading of the reproduction of gender in African wedding rituals, Mampane defines African femininities as incomplete. This results in an agency, powerful yet too often rendered invisible, located in "the cracks between the Black feminised other and Black women's power".

Chapter 10
Navigating Patriotic-Oppositional Journalism in Zimbabwean Business Newsrooms

Collen Chambwera

Introduction

Zimbabwean newsrooms contend every day with political, economic and proprietor pressures that have turned the journalism profession in the country into an antidemocratic force (Mano, 2005). These pressures not only affect journalists in publicly owned but state-controlled newsrooms, but also those in privately-owned newsrooms. In this environment it is easy for journalists to pursue self interests that may be contrary to good journalism practice. These pressures arise from the country's political and economic crisis, which became more pronounced at the turn of the new millennium (Mhiripiri, Ureke, 2018), but arguably started from the time the country gained independence from Great Britain in 1980 (Chambwera, 2020). What has sometimes come to be known as the Zimbabwe Crisis (Raftopoulos, 2006; Mhiripiri, Ureke, 2018) has had implications for the way journalists practice their profession in the country.

For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) had a near hegemonic control of the political narrative in much of the country. However, a formidable opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), began in 1999. With it arose a polarisation of the media, with state-controlled media siding with the ruling party and most of the privately-owned media being more sympathetic to the opposition. Thus, began what has been termed patriotic and oppositional journalism (Ranger, 2005; Chuma, 2008). This polarisation has had an impact on how journalists view and carry out their work. While such polarisation has been documented concerning political journalism, not much has been written con-

cerning how these developments have impacted business journalism, particularly the extent to which journalists are able to exercise agency.

An economic crisis tends to cast a spotlight on how business journalists report the crisis, as happened in the 2008 global financial crisis (Berry, 2013; Starkman, 2014; Rafter, 2014). In the context of the Zimbabwe financial crisis, while the ethics of business journalists were scrutinised (Mare, 2010), attention was not paid to the way in which business journalists navigate the patriotic versus oppositional journalism dichotomy. This is particularly important considering Mano's (2005, p. 56) assertion that "Zimbabwean journalists have resisted, rebelled, and are developing sophisticated ways of negotiating the pressures exerted on them". The nature of resistance in the business press, whose operations are somewhat different from those of the political press, deserves attention. It is necessary to establish how such resistance, if any, plays out in the business press. This study uses Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to understand the nature of journalistic negotiation in a polarised field.

Journalistic practice in a politically volatile and economically limping Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean journalism has gone through several transitions from 1980, when a majority black government took over from a minority white government. Early promise of a vibrant free press was quickly dashed by government interference in the publicly owned press. In the first decade of independence, journalists were routinely reprimanded for writing critically about the government, and some lost their jobs (Saunders, 1991). Journalists were generally expected to be patriotic by writing positively about government officials and the developmental state. However, journalists still managed to find ways of writing critical stories from time to time. A case in point is the exposure of a corrupt scheme by government officials which came to be known as the "Willowgate" scandal. The journalist behind the story, Geoff Nyarota, who was editor of the publicly owned *Chronicle*, was "promoted" to head office in Harare after his story led to the suicide of a cabinet minister and the resignation of several others.

The business press had less government interference in comparison to the political press (Chambwera, 2020). Journalists who worked for the *Business Herald* – a pull-out section in *The Herald* – found ways to write stories that reported the true state of the economy despite government efforts to suppress it. Journalists in the business press suffered less retribution because it was elit-

ist and considered to have a smaller readership (Saunders, 1991). The privately owned press was largely left alone, although government officials occasionally raised their displeasure at what they called negative coverage from privately owned newspapers such as the *Financial Gazette* (Saunders, 1991).

As its hegemonic control over Zimbabwean political discourse waned in the early 2000s, the ZANU-PF government adopted more repressive tactics. Journalists from publicly owned media were required to be "patriotic". The form of patriotism was one that viewed everyone in opposition to ZANU-PF as a traitor (Ranger, 2005). The kind of patriotism defined by Samuel Johnson as "the last refuge of a scoundrel" (cited in Ranger, 2005, p. 10), it was part of "a great orchestration of propaganda" (Ranger, 2005, p. 11) unleashed by ZANU-PF. On the other hand, journalists from privately owned media practised oppositional journalism (Chuma, 2008), a "nothing-good-can-ever-come-out-of-this-ZANU-PF-government" approach to reporting on government and ZANU-PF officials. For example, in the 2000 parliamentary elections, the then only privately owned daily newspaper, the *Daily News*, considered its role as that of providing alternative perspectives to those offered by ZANU-PF. These "competing journalisms" (Chuma, 2008) have continued till today.

The political-economic situation continues to fan the flames of these competing journalisms. ZANU-PF remains in power and continues with its vice-like grip on publicly owned media. As a result, journalists "are consciously and knowingly involved in this polarised newsmaking culture" (Mabweazara, 2011, p. 105). Journalists from both sides acknowledge that they are socialised into different newsmaking cultures when they join different newsrooms (Mabweazara, 2011). Apart from overt interference such as government officials forcing editors to print ready-made stories from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services, covert efforts such as surveillance also keep journalists in check (Munoriyarwa, Chiumbu, 2019). When the printing press of the *Daily News* was bombed, it was suspected, though without proof, that state security agents were involved (Mathe, 2020).

Even when journalists try to use alternative platforms such as social media, the government weaponises the law to harass them (Madenga, 2020). Worsening economic conditions make it difficult for journalists to resist undue interference for fear of losing their jobs (Mabweazara, 2013; Mathe, 2020). Nevertheless, Zimbabwean journalists do find ways of navigating this treacherous environment (Mano, 2005). It is therefore necessary to establish the extent of conformity or resistance (if any) among business journalists. The patriotic–oppositional journalism dichotomy cannot be said to be cast in

stone, especially in the context of business news. Ultimately, journalists from either side work in the same industry, which is relatively small. They call each other colleagues since they work in the same space. Do those in the business press prioritise the demands of their "field", or political and economic demands? This is a question worth interrogating.

Field theory and journalistic agency

Bourdieu's field theory is relevant for the study of journalism practice (Wu, Tandoc, Salmon, 2019). Bourdieu (2005, p. 30) argues that a field is "a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field". Notably, the field is "a site of *actions* and *reactions* performed by social agents" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30 own emphasis). These social agents, journalists in this case, "are endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experience of these social fields" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). Furthermore, they "react to these relations of forces, to these structures; they construct them, perceive them, form an idea of them, represent them to themselves, and so on" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). More simply, a field is a structured social space where individuals act collectively according to set certain rules (Stringer, 2018). Bourdieu calls these rules "doxa". The rules "include accepted institutional roles, ethical standards, and epistemological frameworks, including an understanding about methods and styles of constructing truthful news stories" (Vos, Craft, 2017, p. 1506).

A mastery of doxa helps one accumulate cultural capital (Benson, Neveu, 2005). "Cultural capital of the field takes the form of intelligent commentary, in-depth reporting, and the like – the kind of journalistic prizes rewarded each year by the US Pulitzer Prizes" (Benson, Neveu, 2005, p. 4). The nature of such capital necessitates a constant struggle to maintain it through fending off both external and internal forces (Vos, Craft, 2017). Another form of capital, according to Bourdieu, is economic. In the journalistic field, economic capital refers to metrics such as circulation, advertising revenue and audience ratings (Benson, Neveu, 2005).

Bourdieu (2005) calls field theory a research tool that enables the scientific construction of social objects. Using the theory, we can therefore understand the attitudes, perceptions and actions of business journalists in a journalistic field fractured by political contestations and complicated by a prolonged economic crisis. The theory helps us understand the journalistic field

in Zimbabwe as a structure which shapes and is also shaped by agents (journalists) using the dispositions they have acquired through experience of the field or what Bourdieu terms habitus. Habitus refers to:

> … systems of durable, transposable disposition, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 53).

Key to this definition and to understanding journalistic agency is that habitus is not only a "structured structure" (that is structured by the field) but is also a "structuring structure" (that is, structuring the field). Thus, journalists' habitus is both influenced by and influences the journalistic field. Bourdieu (2005) argues that the journalistic field is heteronomous although at the same time he acknowledges it is also autonomous. It is only weakly autonomous, however. Acknowledging that the journalistic field is heteronomous makes it necessary to consider the environment within which the journalistic field exists. For business journalism, the volatile economic conditions have had an impact on the range of stories that can be written due to a dwindling business sector and a decline in advertising, leading to the underfunding of newsrooms. While all these factors are important to consider, it is equally important to highlight the level of autonomy of individual agents/journalists in business newsrooms. As argued by Bourdieu:

> … to understand what happens in journalism, it is not enough to know who finances the publications, who the advertisers are, who pays for the advertising, where the subsidies come from, and so on. Part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless one conceptualises this microcosm as such and endeavours to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 33).

To ignore the extent of agency of individual journalists is therefore a rejection of full understanding of the journalism field. The journalistic field in Zimbabwe loosely fits the characterisation of Bourdieu's (2005) description. He argues that "the journalistic field … is structured on the basis of an opposition between these two poles, between those who are 'purest,' most independent of state power, political power, and economic power, and those who are most dependent on these powers and commercial powers" (Bourdieu,

2005, p. 41). Going by what has been found concerning Zimbabwean journalism (Ranger, 2005; Waldahl, 2005; Mano, 2005; Chuma, 2008; Mabweazara, 2011), the state-controlled press has been most dependent on state power, while the privately-owned press has largely been independent of it. However, it becomes complicated when economic and commercial power is considered. This study interrogates how journalists negotiate those forces that bear on the journalistic field in Zimbabwe as well as the field itself. In doing this, the study takes the view advanced by Bourdieu (2005) that part of what is produced in the world of journalism cannot be understood unless we unpack how the journalists themselves interpret their work and how such interpretations influence how they relate among themselves. It is how they relate among themselves that ultimately influences the journalistic field.

Methodology

The study is qualitative, based on semi-structured interviews with business journalists. Interviews were conducted between December 2018 and April 2019 as part of a bigger project (Chambwera, 2020). Six journalists each were purposively sampled from two prominent business newspapers in the country, the *Financial Gazette* and *Business Weekly*. The *Financial Gazette* is the country's oldest financial newspaper having been established in 1969. For a long time, it tended to be associated with the opposition in the country. At the time of data collection, it still offered strong critique of government policy although it was now reportedly owned by a consortium led by former central bank governor, Gideon Gono, a member of the ruling ZANU-PF party. *Business Weekly* is an offshoot of the country's oldest newspaper, *The Herald*. The paper had traditionally had a strong business pull-out section every Thursday and in 2018 this pull-out became a stand-alone newspaper when the paper's parent company, Zimpapers, reorganised its newsrooms. Zimpapers has tended to support the ruling ZANU-PF party despite it being publicly owned and listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange. The interviews were conducted at the respective newspapers' newsrooms. Collected data was analysed thematically.

Findings

Covert collaborations to cheat the system
In a similar way to their counterparts on political desks, business journalists from both the *Financial Gazette* and *Business Weekly* collaborate with colleagues from across the media divide (Mano, 2005). Due to their understand-

ing of the economic field in Zimbabwe, business journalists pass on to colleagues in "opposing" newsrooms stories they know are not acceptable in their own newsroom. Journalists, particularly from *Business Weekly,* acknowledged that there are certain stories they know would not be published in their own newspaper, so they pass them on to colleagues from competing media houses. As stated by one journalist: "…it is not proper for me to take an economic story that is too critical of the government, I pass it on to my colleagues in the private press. You must understand we are colleagues though we work in opposing newspapers" (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

This was echoed by another journalist who said:

> We have stories that we give to our "cousins" from the other side, and likewise they have stories they say, these are for *The Herald*. At the same event there are stories you can actually say, these are for *Newsday*, and these for *The Herald* … we are a fraternity, it's just maybe ideologies (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

Journalists from the *Financial Gazette* confirmed that they receive stories from colleagues who work in state-controlled newsrooms, and likewise they pass on certain stories that they deem unsuitable for their paper. One journalist stated, "I get stories from state-controlled media journalists because these are guys I went to college with, and we interact quite a lot" (personal interview, 16 April 2018).

This practice casts light on how journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms understand professionalism. Scholars such as Tuchman (1978) argue that professionalism in journalism serves organisational interests. If we take this view, the question then arises as to whether journalists are still serving organisational interests by passing on non-compatible stories to journalists "on the other side". These journalists' loyalty and professionalism is to the field, not just the organisation. Hence, as Bourdieu (2005) argues, journalists' autonomy, however limited, needs to be acknowledged when analysing the journalistic field. It is this autonomy that prompts journalists to pass on stories. While it is true that organisational and other outside forces shape what journalists write as news, there is covert resistance from journalists across the media divide. Journalists are trained to be objective and truthful so when they encounter situations where these ideals are deliberately compromised, they "rebel" by passing stories on to colleagues in newsrooms that will accept them.

Cottle (2000, p. 22) argues that journalists "are more consciously, knowingly and purposefully productive of news texts and output than they have been theoretically given credit for in the past". Hence despite working in an environment that is dictated by acute political contestations and economic depression, journalists still have the privilege of being the ones who come up with story ideas. It is also in this process that they demonstrate their agency, writing stories that may not be acceptable in their own newsroom, and that they may have to pass on to others.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the autonomy journalists speak of is limited (Bourdieu, 2005). There are certain conventions within the journalistic field that journalists cannot ignore. Thus, business journalists use creative ways to circumvent the constraints placed by proprietors (Mano, 2005). In this case their habitus leads them to what is news, based on experience, but their awareness of what their paper cannot publish leads them to pass on the story, demonstrating agency in the journalistic field.

Driven by professionalism and credibility

In the 1980s and 1990s journalists from the *Business Herald* (now *Business Weekly*) found ways of reporting the truth of what was happening in the economy without attracting much attention from government officials (Chambwera, 2020). This practice remains alive at the *Business Weekly*. Journalists argue that in spite of the requirement to adopt "patriotic" journalism they still find ways to play their watchdog role. Commenting on government policy of nationalising all land in the country and providing 99-year leases to farmers, one journalist from the *Business Weekly* stated that:

> In the *Business Weekly* we have run a number of stories where we have said the 99-year lease they were given are being rejected by banks – it's not collateral but just an improved offer letter – no one can use it as basis for borrowing money from the banks. We have written that, but these guys [government] insist that they are improving that so that it becomes bankable, but the underlying factor is that they don't want that thing [99-year lease] to be transferrable (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

This way of reporting is a departure from what started off as "developmental" journalism (Mukasa, 2003) and later morphed into "patriotic" journalism (Ranger, 2005). Mukasa (2003) argues that government's form of developmental journalism is where journalists collaborate with government to develop the nation and refrain from criticising government policies. Such

criticism should only come from within the ruling party itself, not from journalists. "Newspaper editors can represent the press in their capacity as members of the party, and if they have any complaints or concerns, these must be raised during the party meetings rather than editorial columns of papers" (Mukasa, 2003, pp. 175–176). There are a handful of journalists, however, who stick to independence and professionalism (Mukasa, 2003).

The prolonged economic crisis has resulted in newsrooms being left underfunded. Corporates take advantage of the situation by inviting journalists to come and cover their events, sometimes in places far from Harare. They provide transport and per diems with the intention of getting positive coverage. For newsrooms this is convenient because it means they get news without paying anything. Journalists have found strategic ways of circumventing the risk of becoming mere public relations parrots for corporates because they consider professionalism to be more important. A journalist from *Business Weekly* chronicled how he navigates public relations invitations:

> My philosophy when I get invited, I prefer to get a story not from the CEO but from the ordinary worker. That person will give you a better picture of what's happening. Of course, you then do your investigations but they actually give you a better picture (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

While this may appear normal journalistic practice, journalistic agency is demonstrated in that journalists do this at the risk of losing not only sources, but advertisers and ultimately their jobs as well, since the corporate sector continues to shrink due to adverse economic conditions. Again, habitus and journalistic field principles inform the choices journalists take. It is easy to just write what the corporates who would have funded their expenses want, but they choose to rebel against this. Such autonomous decisions, though, are shaped by the journalistic field. They also help shape the business journalism sub-field as one that is more concerned about credibility than the general journalistic field in Zimbabwe.

Journalists at the *Business Weekly* noted that being "patriotic" meant that even when reporting company financial results, they refrain from any statements that portray the government in a bad light. One journalist pointed out that sometimes in financial statements companies highlight the environment in which they are operating. This includes issues of high unemployment, foreign currency shortages, and a highly regulated environment. Journalists from the *Business Weekly* have a "patriotic" duty to not repeat such sentiments. He stated that:

> When it comes to writing company news that is not too directly related to the wider economy, we have the freedom to write, but to a certain extent. Say it's reporting season on the stock exchange, and you have five listed companies reporting – you are writing your report and then you realise these companies are giving similar reasons for their performance. Probably they are blaming government policies, foreign currency shortages, etc. You can actually come up with a very good analysis but the moment you then say these companies failed because of A, B, C, D, that's the challenge. But if you are writing that Delta has made a profit of $2 million or a loss, blah-blah, without attacking the government, then it's okay (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

If journalists from the *Business Weekly* are constrained in relation to government and ruling ZANU-PF party policies, they also face constraints when it comes to coverage of private companies. However, these journalists argue that they owe it to their profession to expose corporate malfeasance. They argue that while there are instances where corporate pressure may see certain stories not making it into the paper, mostly they ignore such pressure. Responding to a question on how they deal with calls from corporate executives complaining about coverage, one journalist stated:

> We do get them. Some of them as early as 01h00 'cause the newspaper would have been released at 12, midnight. So immediately after midnight the phone calls start flooding in. But we have developed thick skin. Some of them they threaten, you know. Some companies are connected to people they think are powerful, but we know they are not. It's an assumption. They don't intimidate us in any way. Usually, we tell them we stick to our story. If you think what we have reported is not truth, provide an alternative voice. If it's worth it, we publish that alternative voice. But usually, they won't have a case to stand on 'cause normally we would have done due diligence to make sure we have a strong case. Especially where you see that they can be damaging to a corporate, we go an extra mile to verify the facts (personal interview, 21 September 2018).

However, a journalist at the *Financial Gazette* noted that as much as they work to expose corporate malfeasance, there is nothing they can do when corporate executives decide to talk to their superiors to have damaging stories "killed". The journalist stated that, "They [corporate executives] go to higher authorities – at shareholder level, or they consult lawyers, and the editor may be forced to back down because of the fear of litigation" (personal interview, 21 September 2018). Another journalist from the *Financial Ga-*

zette echoed similar sentiments, stating that while he was free to write stories critical of certain big companies, there was not much he could do if company executives discuss their issues at shareholder and editorial levels.

Navigating oppositional journalism

While they have occasionally been called opposition journalists, journalists from the *Financial Gazette* prefer to view their role as holding government and corporate officials to account. One journalist explained:

> We are not here to oppose the government for the sake of it. We provide information for people who read our paper. Some of the information, probably most of the times, happens to be critical of government. We are writing warnings about Treasury Bills and the consequences of government default. We are expanding debt – up to $5 billion TBs issued yet government is fragile. We write that the creation of RTGS is inflationary. Is that opposing government or …? (personal interview, 16 April 2018).

The same journalist pointed out that when they write stories, they do not just criticise government but seek change for the good of Zimbabweans. He stated that:

> We have written stories that have changed policy. For example, a story that exposed the low prices paid to cotton farmers by merchants. Government took the issue up after we published the story, and intervened. As a result, we got a lot of complaints from the merchants. I am not an activist, but I have contributed to life-changing policies (personal interview, 16 April 2018).

However, another journalist from the *Financial Gazette* lamented the pressure on journalists to self-censor. She noted that "Zimbabwean journalists practice self-censorship because of the political environment." She gave an example of a story that exposed the hypocrisy of the Mnangagwa government in the agricultural sector. The story implicated army chiefs, so certain facts had to be watered down. On the other hand, former white farmers were not happy with the story because they felt that it would jeopardise their efforts to re-engage the government.

Another journalist emphasised the issue of holding government to account. He commented that "when government officials make noise through phone calls, you know you are holding them to account" (personal interview, 16 April 2018). He noted, however, that because they are from a privately

owned newspaper, government sources are not always willing to give them information. On the other hand, there are sources that would rather give information to journalists from privately owned media because such information would never be published in state-controlled media.

It is not just government that is held to account, but business as well. Journalists from the *Financial Gazette* argued that it is not correct to call their work oppositional journalism because their main concern is business. They noted that there was less political news since new owners and a new editor[1] had taken over the paper. One journalist stated, "From mid last year the focus of the newspaper changed drastically. The new owners decided to focus entirely on business news" (personal interview, 16 April 2018). The editor justified the shift, saying they needed to focus more on their target market, which is people interested in business. He stated that readers could always get political news from other newspapers, so they chose to focus on their strength. This is despite the fact that the newspaper attracted a large readership in the 1980s and subsequent years due to its coverage of political news (Saunders, 1991).

Discussion and conclusion

Newspapers are "imbedded in capitalism and the structures of power" (Parsons, 1989, p. 2). Hence newspapers in Zimbabwe have been found to take the form of the politics in the country (Chuma, 2008; Mabweazara, 2011). The journalistic field in Zimbabwe is therefore inevitably shaped by politics, the economy, and proprietary demands. While political journalists tend to stick to either "patriotic" or "oppositional" journalism, the division is less pronounced in business journalism. Business journalism has historically tended to attract less attention from government and ruling ZANU-PF officials (Saunders, 1991; Chambwera, 2020). Hence some journalists from the *Business Weekly* can still write stories that seem to criticise government economic policies. However, they still find ways of framing the stories to avoid getting backlash from government officials. This proves Bourdieu's (2005) assertion that a field is heteronomous although agents exercise some limited autonomy. Such autonomy at the *Business Weekly* is a result of efforts to stay true to what journalists hold to be professional business journalism. As argued by some journalists in this study, it is their duty to critique government policy such as issuing of treasury bills (TBs) without consideration of

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[1] This editor has since left the newspaper.

government's ability to pay debts. This helps the business community to make informed decisions. However, government has not been too willing to listen to criticism, even when coming from state-controlled newspapers such as the *Business Weekly*.

To demonstrate their agency, journalists from both newspapers engage in the practice of passing on stories that they know are not acceptable in their own newsrooms. This demonstrates that journalists do not merely submit to social realities dominated by political and economic constraints, and proprietary demands. Their training has led them to espouse certain news values that they cannot ignore. Writing about business journalism, Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (2016) argues that this journalism sector is caught up in a crisis between writing for corporates' interests, and the public interest. In the case of Zimbabwean business journalism, particularly the cases studied, there is no doubt among journalists that despite interference from various forces, public interest remains important. In adherence to the principle of public interest, journalists pass stories that are of public interest but are unacceptable in their own newsroom to colleagues on the opposite divide. This is agency driven by professional principles.

The exchange of stories is also part of accumulating social capital among one's peers. Bourdieu argues:

> This field is the site of an opposition between two models, each with its own principle of legitimation: that of peer recognition, accorded individuals who internalise most completely the internal "values" or principles of the field; or that of recognition by the public at large, which is measured by numbers of readers, listeners, or viewers, and therefore, in the final analysis, by sales and profits (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 70).

Peer recognition does not just come from the ability to write excellent stories, but the ability to develop good networks among journalists across the divide. Part of building such networks is being flexible enough to give fellow journalists stories that are more suitable for their newsrooms. Capital is gained through recognition as someone with a nose for news even if it is not suitable in one's own newsroom. Journalists acknowledge each other's work because they "share basic values and definitions of what constitutes news" (Mabweazara, 2011, p. 104).

As noted by Bourdieu (2005), the journalistic field has weak autonomy because of the encroachment of the political and economic fields. In Zimbabwe this is particularly true in a context of crisis. There is no doubt that the

political environment and the diminishing corporate sector in the country place pressures on the business journalism sub-field. Nevertheless, journalists exercise agency by finding creative ways of circumventing pressures from corporates and the government. Their creative ways can be said, however, always to remain within the principles of good journalism as defined in the journalistic field.

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Chapter 11
Newspaper Readers' Writings, Horizontal Networks, and the Agency of Words in Colonial Tanzania

Maria Suriano

Historians and literary scholars of colonial Africa have increasingly shifted their attention from conventional primary sources, i.e., official documents stored in national, municipal, community, school, or church archives, to private papers (letters, diaries, photographs, and memoirs), and the press. Being largely kept in family and personal archives and rarely housed in archives' special collections, private papers are difficult to access. On the other hand, several African newspapers have been collected by librarians or archivists and are available in a few public and university libraries on the continent. Digital copies are housed in major libraries mostly located in the former colonies and in US universities. Throughout the twentieth century, editors of government- and African-owned newspapers used the press to disseminate local and international news, spread the colonial ideology and host public debates. Inter-war East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda) was a dynamic area of literary and textual creativity, characterised by the cohabitation between Swahili and English-language newspapers – and, to some extent, minor local languages. Readers from urban and rural locations – mostly men with basic formal education – eagerly participated in print debates in the local newspapers. Variously referred to as "obscure literati" (Barber, 2006, p. 3), thinkers (Brennan, 2006), intellectuals (Bromber, 2006a), "intelligentsia" or "elite literati" (Glassman, 2000, p. 395), these newspaper readers largely contributed to public debates through letters to the editors.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Africanist historians situated the press in the wider colonial and global context and began to conceptualise it as a channel of communication between the emerging African elites and the colonial state, and as a site of public deliberation and political contestation (for East

Africa, see Omari, 1972; Scotton, 1973, 1978; Iliffe, 1979; Gadsen, 1980; Westcott, 1981; Anthony, 1983; for South Africa, see Couzens, 1985). Key scholars of East Africa have expanded these arguments, and since the early 2000s newspapers have become a privileged source for intellectual history, especially in British and US universities (Glassman, 2000, 2004; Willis, 2002; Burton, 2005; Ivaska, 2005; Brennan, 2006). News articles, editorials and debates in readers' letters can illuminate African thinking, self-making, community creation, and parallel processes of exclusion of poorer, rural, and less educated Africans, including women. In his study of readers' usage of newspapers during the British protectorate in Zanzibar, Jonathon Glassman put forward the argument that correspondents "spoke to one another more than they addressed the colonial state or responded to its demands" (Glassman, 2004, p. 732). Subsequent studies of newspaper writing in colonial Africa, including my own, have followed a similar path (Frederiksen, 2011; Suriano, 2011). Furthermore, historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists of Tanzania have examined poems in the Swahili press to underline readers' interactivity (Bromber, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Suriano, 2008, 2011; Askew, 2016).

A different body of scholarship has offered insights into African print cultures elsewhere, seen as a lens to understand the formation of novel social networks and public spheres, and to illuminate power relations and processes of cultural (self)representation and (self)determination (Ogude, 2001; Barber, 2005, 2006; Hofmeyr, Kaarsholm, Frederiksen, 2011; Sandwith, 2014). Referring to letter-writing in South African colonial newspapers, Bhekizizwe Peterson claimed that the correspondents built a "sense of community" (Peterson, 2006, p. 253). Likewise, for Vukile Khumalo, through early twentieth-century private letters, Natal-based African writers formed "a *sphere*; that is, an imaginary environment where" they "felt free to converse among themselves about issues that affected their lives" (Khumalo, 2006, p. 115; also p. 118, p. 121; italics in original). Even petitions to the government, common in pre-apartheid South Africa, are a genre through which Africans imagined multiple readers (Peterson, 2008). Recent studies have sought to push the debate further, stressing the need to move away from the use of the press as a source for data conveyance or to assess public opinions, to the claim that African newspapers should be treated as *subjects* of historical and literary studies in their own right. This approach encompasses the examination of the editors' creative work (Peterson, Hunter, 2016; Hofmeyr, Peterson, 2019).

Agency, colonial vulnerabilities, and the interplay of foreign and local discourses

The concept of agency has long been a topic of scholarly inquiry, primarily within the fields of sociology and anthropology. Much of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century European sociological literature hinged on the dialectic (or dichotomy) between agency and structuration, and on the socio-political and economic structures that undergird agency. For example, social anthropologist Fredrik Barth placed agency at the centre of his ethnographic analysis of a Pakistani population as early as 1959. According to Barth, individual actors can change larger structures, and social transformation "is built up and maintained through the exercise of a continual series of individual choices" (Barth, 1959, p. 2). A substantial contribution to the understanding of agency in the social sciences came from France in later decades: Michel de Certeau (1984) is credited for having given epistemic privilege to everyday life and to the performative notion of practice. In his theorisation of agency and freedom of choice, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) exposed the array of alternatives available to individuals and their role in taking responsibility for their social condition. An essential component of Bourdieu's analysis is socially embedded agency, conceived as a defining human property.

Likewise, the notion of agency has been a cornerstone of Africanist scholarship since the mid-1970s. It underpinned what came to be known as "social history from below", a method that gained ground within the Johannesburg-based History Workshop, an offshoot of the British History Workshop. This anti-elitist and decolonised approach produced pioneering studies of popular struggles primarily in black working-class urban localities before and during apartheid (La Hausse, 1988; Nasson, 1989).

Since the early 2000s social historians of sub-Saharan Africa have largely focused on the limits and vulnerabilities of colonialism, no longer seen as successful as previously assumed – if we take power as a process of negotiation rather than a given, we can detect some sense of agency even in the most oppressive contexts. As sociologist Jonathan Hyslop aptly put it, referring to the British Empire, "the colonial state leaked like an old rowing boat" (Hyslop, 2009, p. 51). A substantial body of work on the imperial encounter has conclusively shown that colonial wishes were always confronted with the complex workings of local agency; colonised subjects, either prominent or non-elite individuals, both in urban and rural contexts, retained some degree of agency despite the constraints in which they operated. As far as East Africa is concerned, the most outstanding case in point is in my view Laura

Fair's *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945*. Through a combination of oral and archival sources, Fair offers a vivid and compelling depiction of the daily grassroots struggles in Zanzibar Town's underprivileged neighbourhood. Political resistance – from anti-British protest to gender and class struggles against local elites complicit with colonialism – was chiefly expressed outside the realm of official politics, in leisure domains such as popular music and football matches (Fair, 2001). As John Lonsdale reminds us, "local case studies of linkages between the personal, the social, and the political, can … suggest answers to 'the big why questions' of larger historical process" (Lonsdale, 2000, p. 5).

Inspired by Carlo Ginzburg's landmark microhistory of medieval Italy, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Ginzburg, 1982 [1976]), historian Jonathon Glassman has illuminated the complicated set of relations between the colonised and the coloniser in Zanzibar. It is "as misleading", he writes, "to speak of two discrete spheres of discourse – one colonial, the other indigenous – as it is to speak of the colonial state's domination on its subjects' consciousness" (Glassman, 2004, p. 734). Local populations and colonial officials, in Africa as elsewhere in the Global South, influenced their mutual worldviews of one another, and their interactions had wide-reaching consequences for their cultural and political landscapes. At particular moments in the colonial period, elders were key in formulating, portraying, disseminating and correcting ideas about their fellow Africans. In Tanganyika, the very opinions British administrators held on African society were partly fashioned by indigenous knowledge, especially by middle-aged local elites (Burton, 2005).

In what follows I will reflect on readers' interactivity and community formation, interrogate the choices that ultimately made newspapers matter, and offer some representative examples of the interplay between individual and collective agency. Despite the scant sources on writers and text reception, and notwithstanding the difficulty in establishing to what degree individual thoughts were manifestations of the collective wisdom of the times (that is, socially embedded agency), agency could be achieved by recasting communal values according to personal identity, ideas, and ambitions. A point that runs through this essay is that if contributors' views often overlapped with colonial discourses, they seemed largely unconcerned with them – their primary interest lay in exposure to, and dialogue with, their fellow African readers. What defined and sustained this horizontal dialogue in Tanganyikan newspapers was the well-established local tradition of verbal ex-

changes and reiteration of core Swahili values (without, of course, implying unanimity within the society). While empirical and partial, my argument has wider resonances concerning the interaction between personhood and communal views, for we cannot reduce agency to the working of a single individual.

Mastering colonial modernity and "paracolonial" networks

A crucial assertion of recent analyses is that the imperial encounter was intertwined with colonial modernity, and African elites' participation in the public sphere involved mastering the tools of modernity acquired through missionary education. In the early twentieth century, wearing formal western attire or understanding the conventions of letter-writing were activities and forms that enabled Africans to state their equality with Europeans and, in later decades, their ultimate ability to govern themselves. In his focus on Jomo Kenyatta's attempts to assert his subjectivity and selfhood in British colonial Kenya, literary scholar Simon Gikandi has pointed out that anti-colonial elites had to grapple with the twofold and contradictory task of accepting and cultivating colonial modernity, while trying to challenge and reformulate it (Gikandi, 2001). Many works on colonial Africa have shared this broader argument. Other scholars of the colonial encounter have focused on the multiple trajectories of modernity, which was not brought to the continent only by the colonial powers and the missionaries. Africans have long creatively recombined western elements with pre-colonially derived ones, and studies concerned with African modernity (or, rather, modernities) have claimed that far from merely imitating the West, colonised Africans "followed their own cultural logic" (Deutsch, Probst, Schmidt, 2002, p. 10). Partly local, such multiple routes can be unveiled by a genealogical approach and should be "understood relationally" (Geschiere, Meyer, Pels, 2008, pp. 4–5).

The notion of agency has thus underpinned many recent historical analyses of colonial societies, regardless of their disciplinary angle. In her pioneering analysis of the rise and demise of literary clubs in early twentieth-century colonial Ghana, Stephanie Newell traces club members' appropriation of Anglophone literature to make a statement about modernity and affirm personal and social authority. To portray "the local cultural productivity", and the new horizontal (or South–South) "cultural flows" as well as the "affiliations" that developed "alongside" and "beyond the reach" of the colonial state, Newell coined the neologism "paracolonial" networks (Newell,

2002a, p. 44). Through an analysis of club debates, Newell convincingly argues that, while the creation of a space for Africans to experiment with new cultural forms was a by-product of the British presence, for educated West Africans far more was at stake "than a strategic mimicry of western culture" (Newell, 2002a, p. 43). They intentionally "created meanings which were not anchored to meanings generated in the metropolis. Rather than adopting the master's voice", the key aim of social clubs in the inter-war years was "to gain prestige in local (rather than imperial) systems" (Newell, 2002b, p. 350). Club activities also enabled Africans to localise "the most foreign discourse, gleaning wisdom from it which would assist in their efforts to 'civilize' the locality" (Newell, 2002b, p. 351). Although agency is not at the core of Newell's examination, it remains an underlying theme.

Africanist historians, literary scholars, and anthropologists should be credited for having provided rich empirical data on the negotiations over power and modernity resulting from the colonial encounter in different African contexts and periods, both inside and outside the conventional political arena. The shared argument is that African individuals and groups were able to shape social structures and influence the course of history under given circumstances. As mentioned before, agency can be detected everywhere, even in the most oppressed spaces. However, the need to give voice to the subaltern has often resulted in an exaggerated emphasis on agency, coupled with a propensity to discredit macro-level analyses. Lynn Thomas challenges this framework, which seemingly assumes and perpetuates a dichotomy between agency and structure. She perceptively questions the recent scholarly tendencies to elevate agency to a "master trope" and a concluding argument, no longer a conceptual tool or a category of analysis (Thomas, 2016, p. 324).

Reconfiguring individual affirmation and communal values through the press

Aside from romanticising and overemphasising agency, Africanist historians have perhaps not looked closely enough at how African public opinions were shaped by the interface between agency and structure. Furthermore, although Newell's point on the localisation/Africanisation of foreign discourses, flaws, and genres has been taken up in a number of ensuing studies, less so has been her argument about the conscious use of foreign genres to affirm personal and collective authority, as well as to educate unschooled Africans.

This essay claims that examining the usage of newspapers in the twentieth century, especially during the booming print industry of the late colonial

years, allows us to grasp how colonised Africans shaped prestige and reconfigured agency. Conscious of the stark differences with colonial Ghana – Tanganyika was a neglected British Mandate that lacked literary societies, large reading circles, and other cultural amenities – I aim to underline the everyday process of self-making and community-building in Tanganyika through an examination of newspapers' letters to the editor.

My choice of epistolary exchanges was prompted by contributors' comments in the press and by my informants' memories, which point to the publics' preference for these formats over news and editorials. Without denying that newspaper contributors had internalised colonial modernity and were grappling with its contradictory values, the key claim is that readers' opinions were to a great extent rooted in age-old Swahili wisdom, in turn largely based on pre-existing oral forms, characterised by moral judgment. In other words, newspaper writings were enmeshed in local aesthetic norms and conventions, which condemn people's public (mis)behaviours. Readers' interventions in the press, a foreign-derived genre enthusiastically embraced by school-educated Tanganyikans, became a public forum for expressing both individual affirmation and the importance of upholding community values, thus revealing individual and collective agency. The attempt to enhance individual status and communal values can be detected in the writings of both Muslim and Christian readers, irrespective of whether they had attended mission schools, and regardless of whether they wrote to government-controlled or African-owned newspapers.

Newspapers' circulation rates in Tanganyika

Published by the Anglican Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), African-language newspapers first appeared in present-day Tanzania in the late nineteenth century – in 1888 in Zanzibar and in 1891 on the mainland. The establishment of German colonialism in 1890 saw the growth of print media in various vernacular languages and in German. Some publications were the initiative of European missionaries and German settlers. Most were short-lived and only appeared periodically. This was partly because few publishers had the money or facilities to publish weekly or monthly, partly because the overwhelming religious content of missionary newspapers did not appeal to African readers, and partly because the government silenced settlers' opposition to its policies in German-language papers (Sturmer, 1998). The First World War brought about an interruption of print activities. The establishment of the British Mandate in 1919 in newly renamed Tanganyika

precipitated an increase in the press in English, Swahili, and to a lesser extent in Gujarati – the latter targeting the population of Asian descent. Although Swahili newspapers existed alongside the English-language press, basic instruction was offered in Swahili, which was widely understood across the territory. The English press did not reach the circulation rates of its Swahili counterpart. Mostly government-promoted and controlled, newspapers aimed to provide Africans with information about British activities, educate and entertain readers, as well as spread the Swahili language "as a medium of instruction in primary schools" (Sturmer, 1998, p. 52). Government newspapers could not host radical views, and topics under discussion were the result of deliberate choices made by the editors, which tended to exclude voices that did not fit into the given agenda (Hunter, 2012).

By the 1950s Tanganyika boasted about 50 newspapers and magazines (Sturmer, 1998). Concerning the average Swahili press circulation rates, the undercapitalised and short-lived African-owned *Kwetu* (Home), established in 1937, appeared in a print run of 1 000 copies (Sturmer, 1998). *Kwetu* circulated in the main Tanganyikan towns, in "many obscure corners", and in adjacent colonies: it was read in Kampala and Nairobi (Westcott, 1981). However, its content "was very much a representative voice of Dar es Salaam" (Anthony, 1983, p. 175). The newspaper that reached the widest circulation was the government-subsidised monthly magazine *Mambo Leo* (Current Affairs), launched in 1923 by the Department of Education, whose staff selected the news according to government policies (Sturmer, 1998). With a print run of 6 000 copies in its first year, by 1930 *Mambo Leo* sold 9 000 copies a month (Sturmer, 1998), a figure which had increased nearly threefold by the early 1940s, with 25 000 monthly copies (Westcott, 1981). Available for 10 cents (on average salaries in Tanganyika, see Iliffe, 1979), by 1952 it had "reached a circulation of 50 000 monthly" copies (Scotton, 1978, p. 7; see also Sturmer, 1998). This was a significant number, considering that Tanganyika had nearly nine million inhabitants by 1957 (Iliffe, 1979), but was able to enrol only 318 pupils in the class of Standard 12.[1] Issued until 1963, *Mambo Leo* was distributed beyond the Tanganyikan borders: from my perusal it emerged that readers' letters were sent from Zanzibar, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, and even the Belgian Congo. *Mwangaza* (The Beacon), the only Swahili daily newspaper, was founded in 1951 and pub-

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[1] For formal education as male-dominated, see Iliffe, 1979, p. 300; p. 345; for government's educational expenditure, pp. 354–356; for literacy in Dar es Salaam, see Burton, 2005, p. 58.

lished until 1958. In its first year it sold 900 monthly copies; by 1953 it had reached 1 600 copies and had a print run of 9 000 copies by 1956 (Sturmer, 1998). Though government-controlled, it had a loose editorial policy and was "receptive to nationalistic tendencies" (Sturmer, 1998, p. 61; see also Omari, 1972). The page hosting letters to the editor carried the following note: "All the letters on this page come from our readers, who express their own opinions. These views do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor" (*Barua zote katika ukurasa huu zatoka kwa wasomaji wetu, wakitoa maoni yao. Maoni hayo si lazima kuwa yale yafananayo na ya Mhariri*). Launched in 1957, the fortnightly *Mwafrika* (The African) was loosely affiliated to the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU, founded in 1954), and increased its circulation from 4 000 to 20 000 copies within the first three issues (Omari, 1972; Sturmer, 1998). Established in 1950, the monthly Catholic *Kiongozi* (The Leader) was also quite popular, with a print run of 8 000 copies in 1953 (Sturmer, 1998).

Historians concur that mainstream print media in Tanganyika saw a significant growth only in the late colonial and early postcolonial period, when the new media agenda incorporated more African input as opposed to colonial concerns. Justin Willis (2002) notes that before the 1950s, African contributions to the making of the African-language press in East Africa were minimal, and the few active writers and editors were usually schooled townsmen.

Traces of orality and street corner debates in Swahili newspapers

In terms of content, Tanganyikan newspapers shared some features with other colonial contexts in the Global South, such as editorials, commercial advertisements, letters to the editors, and the absence of foreign correspondents and intellectual copyright: international news was circulated through newspaper clippings, with information taken from elsewhere, then translated and reprinted (Hofmeyr et al., 2011; Hofmeyr, 2014). However, most Swahili newspapers held a unique feature that appeared as early as the German period: relatively short lyrical rhyming poems composed by readers in the form of *mashairi* (singular, *shairi*) in canonical verses (quartine: *ab ab ab, ba/bc*) – as opposed to the longer *tenzi* or *maghazi* (epic poems; narrative), *kisarambe* (religious and moralising poetry) and *tahamisa* (moralising poems). The *shairi* genre, with its refrain (in Swahili *mkarara* or *kipokeo*) summarising the argument of the entire poem, flourished in the nineteenth century and has since been the most common canonical verse for the expression of so-

cially engaged, political, and controversial issues (Bertoncini-Zúbková, 1985).

Philosophical and topical Swahili poetry is richly documented and researched, with important insights offered by renowned scholars from the region (Mulokozi, 1975; Abdulaziz, 1979; Topan, 2001). Press poems form part of a longstanding Islamic-influenced public tradition of moralising about life while stating what is right and what is wrong, often through metaphors and proverbs. This practice is by no means unique to Tanzania. Not only is newspaper poetry socially relevant, but it is also written in a language accessible to the average person – unlike canonical verses, often not relevant to the layman (Harries, 1972). Many Swahili newspapers still dedicate one page to readers' poems, which address topics ranging from politics to the offensive language of Swahili hip-hop. As the late poet and novelist Euphrase Kezilahabi stated, contemporary Swahili newspaper poetry is situated within a well-established East African literary tradition, with strong links with orality, with the poet's personality, and with the community (Kezilahabi, 2008. For media's interaction with oral traditions in Nigeria, see Furniss, 2004; Barber, 2009).

Another important feature of colonial Swahili newspapers is that despite low circulation rates, their content was often read out loud. Amani Magongo and Saidi Konomi, two elderly men I interviewed respectively in 2005 and 2009 in Mwanza and Tanga, recalled that those who could read would go to a *baraza* (public gathering) and publicly recite newspaper poetry.[2] They, together with two men I interviewed in Dar es Salaam and Mwanza, mentioned *Mambo Leo* as the most popular newspaper in the 1950s.[3] According to former musician Gideon Banda, in those years newspaper readers were mainly interested in poems, and often sang them in public.[4] Well-known Tanga poet Saleh Kibwana, who contributed press poems in the 1940s and 1950s, once "described his experience of reading *Mambo Leo* in public and being asked to explain its content and purpose to two passers-by, neither of whom could read" (Hunter, 2012, p. 294; for colonial Zanzibar, see Glassman, 2004). Therefore, unschooled listeners from poor backgrounds were to some extent exposed to press debates, and it is quite likely that they played a

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[2] Amani H. Magongo, interview, Uhuru Street, Mwanza, 20 September 2005; Saidi Konomi, interview, 14th Street, Tanga, 26 January 2009.

[3] M. Ally, interview, Mtakuja Street, Mwanza, 7 September 2005; S. Lubala, interview, British Legion, Dar es Salaam, 3 November 2006.

[4] Gideon W. Banda, interview, Ubungo, Dar es Salaam, 6 February 2009.

role in shaping them, though mostly verbally. Some uneducated individuals might even have dictated their poems to amanuenses, thus also contributing in writing. Therefore, press poetry and debates on newspapers' content had the potential to enable "the movement of ideas from below upwards", as Kezilahabi (2008, p. 191) argued for contemporary newspaper poetry in Tanzania – an argument reminiscent of Carlo Ginzburg's (1982 [1976]) early insight that lower classes and "street corner" debates have historically influenced high-class culture.

Contributors' identities, pen names and self-affirmation

Except for a few prominent individuals, it is difficult to reconstruct correspondents' identities and aspirations. Some information can be gathered from signatures, which sometimes included a writer's full name, postal address, and hometown or place of work. Most correspondents were men, sporadically women. They wrote from coastal and inland towns, including minor towns and semi-rural places all over Tanganyika. Although some letters and poems may have been prompted by the editors, there is no indication that readers' interventions were commissioned – they presumably participated on their own volition. Signatures were often accompanied by an indication of type of employment. Among the writers were clerical workers, middle and secondary school teachers, railway and Labour Office employees, as well as demobilised soldiers. While some had been exposed to missionary education, others belonged to the "self-styled" African elite, commonly made up of Muslim businessmen.[5] If letter-writers were part of a tiny literate minority compared to the overwhelmingly non-literate bulk of Tanganyikans, most had not progressed beyond primary school.

Notably, some contributors added sobriquets to their real names, like Mohamed Ramadhani, a regular contributor of poems to *Mambo Leo*, who unassumingly called himself Chipukizi (Beginner). While most signatures suggest individual authorship, cases of shared composition are not rare (for Nigeria, see Barber, 2006), especially in Swahili press poetry, and even those letters or poems that carried the name of a single author may have been composed by several people. Repeated invocations to Allah and poets' names suggest that newspaper poetry mostly reflected the Islamised coastal urban culture, while letter-writers were not only Muslims, but also products

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[5] For the process of class formation and differentiation in Tanganyika, see Iliffe (1979). For self-styled elites in Dar es Salaam, see Burton (2005).

of Christian literacy. Although contributors of rhyming poems were not professional writers, some remarkable exceptions are represented by the poets Shabaan Robert (Iliffe, 1979); Akilimali, who published his *mashairi* under the nom de plume of "Snow White"; Saleh Kibwana; and S. H. M. Mdanzi bin Hanassa from Tanga – the latter both remembered by Saidi Konomi.[6] After independence, even Mwalimu Julius Nyerere participated in conversational poetry (Yahya-Othman, 2020). Other writers used pseudonyms, which annoyed some readers (Mbaga, 1941 – this contributor used the possibly fictitious name of "Mc Donald"). In her compelling study of anonymity in colonial West Africa, where many newspapers were African-owned, Newell interprets pseudonyms as part of the process of formation of print-mediated subjectivity that reveals correspondents' tacit attempt to convey "that the message was more important than the messenger", even if "the person behind a pseudonym or abbreviation may well have been known to the reading public" (Newell, 2013, pp. 9–10). They were also "vehicles for burlesque or parody" (Newell, 2013, p. 7), and signs of writers' "powerful sense of their place in the world" (Newell, 2013, p. 8). Therefore, an inquiry into pen names in colonial contexts can be an inquiry into agency. This is, however, outside of the purview of this essay.

Moralising interventions and local wisdom

A perusal of the Swahili press from the 1920s to the 1970s indicates a common thread: poems and letters to the editor, articles and editorials continuously assessed the level of moral and social progress of the society. Readers made passionate interventions on a wide range of issues, including the changing fashions, from sunglasses to make-up, music performances, beauty contests, alcohol and marijuana consumption, gambling and the black market, football matches and local cups. They judged social drinking a self-indulgent danger (*hatari*), condemned short female outfits for being disgraceful (*fedhea*), advised spectators of football matches to refrain from disorder (*fujo*), and fights that caused the interruption of ballroom dances were antithetical to good manners (*ustaarabu*). This was a partial result of exposure to missionary and colonial ideas, internalised even by those Muslims who had not attended mission schools. If it is undeniable that moralising views largely converged with colonial or missionary notions of what was

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[6] S. Konomi, interview, 14th Street, Tanga, 26 January 2009.

morally, socially and aesthetically appropriate, they were not mere reflections of colonial modernity.

The incipit of a 1928 editorial published in *Mambo Leo* enticed the readers through the description of a thick letter about a certain type of *ngoma* (traditional dance) that had landed on the editor's desk. The editorial embarked on a tirade against dancers, labelled as "ignorant"/"stupid" (*wajinga*) people who wasted their money in this "futile" (*mbovu*) activity, and whose bodily ornaments were "rubbish" (*takataka*). Traditional dances were unsuitable for sophisticated and judicious Africans. Even if many dancers boasted that even Europeans were attending their performances, white spectators indisputably disdained the "nonsense" (*upuuzi*) represented by *ngoma* dances (Editorial, 1928). While this editorial may seem a typical product of the colonial encounter, whereby whites were arbiters of African civilisation – and European culture was the yardstick for its achievement – its outlook did not coincide with the guidelines dictated by the colonial-controlled Department of Education (after 1945, Public Relations Department) which oversaw *Mambo Leo*. British administrators did not object when Africans carried on with their traditions. They readily allowed these performances, provided that dancers obtained a written permit (*kibali*), and that *ngoma* did not constitute a political threat and was not too loud and unruly. Little did they know that, far from being a fixed legacy of the past, *ngoma* were continuously remoulded and often turned into subtle mockery of the colonisers.

Importantly, this editorial, along with the abovementioned examples of condemnation of wrongdoings in press letters and poems, resonated with local notions of temperance and good manners. Rooted in Swahili wisdom, *ustaarabu* entailed self-improvement and social progress. Rather than mere reiterations of dominant colonial views, print displays of judgmental views were legacies of enduring oral forms celebrating morality, first expressed in oral and written Swahili poetry – the main precolonial literary genre in Eastern Africa. Poetry in particular – especially *mashairi ya maadili*, "poems of righteous conduct" – facilitated the expression of well-established values in Islamic-dominated contexts, a constant feature being warnings (Knappert, 1970; Bertoncini-Zúbková, 1985; Cook, 2000).[7] Readers' opinions, as pioneering historian John Iliffe wrote about inter-war Swahili press poetry, which he deemed "trite", mirrored "typical coastal values", such as "delight

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[7] More generally in Africa, songs and poems have historically legitimised the content, allowing marginalised people to openly criticise power. Free expression was tolerated and sometimes even welcomed in the sung form (Vail, White, 1983).

in moralising and verbal elaboration" (Iliffe, 1979, p. 379). In his insightful discussion of didactic poetry as a tool for social and moral education in Mombasa, Kai Kresse (2009) examines the key elements of Swahili wisdom, which are verbal and social skills along with the ability to engage with common social concerns in a manner that leads to further insight and intellectual orientation for others. In this sense, social responsibilities and moral obligations in the use of knowledge play an important role. However, as Kresse warns us:

> The transmission of moral knowledge through poetry does not per se entail "wisdom" of the poet: reiterating existing descriptions of social values does not characterize someone as "wise". So, if, in the Swahili context, poetry as a didactic educational means has to do with the perpetuation of moral knowledge in society, where does a link between poetry and wisdom come in? We have to look at the composition of a poem, the creative act of the individual poet. It would be in and through the formulation of insights that are relevant for a wide variety of members that wisdom comes into play. This can be in the sense that a piece of common social knowledge is phrased in such an extraordinarily beautiful and memorable way that this now becomes a common expression; or, a new and relevant insight shines out of the creative and innovative use of language within a poem (Kresse, 2009, p. 157).

Therefore, community members are expected to scrutinise and approve the poet's wisdom and linguistic inventiveness, and individual expression has to turn into – and resonate with – common social knowledge.

An important clarification is needed at this juncture: even if press poems were mostly composed by Muslim men, the issues discussed involved the whole society. Swahili wisdom was not confined to the Islamic-dominated coastal society (which was by no means homogenous). Swahili culture and language, which arose in the eleventh century and reached its peak in the fourteenth century, expanded to the African interior in the nineteenth century, a time of growing commercialisation and globalisation. By the early twentieth century, Swahili values had spread beyond Islamic circles and were accepted in the largely Christianised hinterland.

If self-making and community creation are mutually dependent in Swahili poetry's form and content, the next section illustrates that this also characterised letters to the editor. Print disapproval of a vast array of (mis)behaviours echoed what lay at the core of the community's value system, and virtuous behaviours underpinned good personhood and a respectable community. In

the process, generational, class, gender, and urban-rural tensions emerged, old identities were reiterated, and modern ones were shaped.

Networks, reception and individuality

Several indicators suggest that the Swahili press was an important public forum where agency surfaced despite limited freedom of expression, especially in government-controlled papers. The key concern here is not with the form of press poems and letters to the editor – though pleasant, rhyming poetry was not always of the highest quality, and some letters were not exquisitely written – but with their content.

The first feature of these writings is the constant shaping of horizontal, "paracolonial" conversations between readers/audiences rather than with the colonial authorities. "The joy of [writing] letters is in corresponding" (*Tamu ya barua ni kujibiana*), H. O. Kallaghe wrote to *Baragumu* (The Trumpet) (Kallaghe, 1959). Readers scattered across Tanganyika often continued print conversations over time. Networks became so strong that newspapers came to host announcements about the deaths of regular writers, and some contributors "turned textual connections into face-to-face connections: one regular correspondent recorded his joy when a fellow correspondent turned up in his home town eager to meet him" (Hunter, 2012, p. 295).

Secondly, correspondents used a set of terms to designate their networks: "club members" (*wanachama*), presumably denoting regular writers, or *baraza* – literally, "gathering", *baraza* is a well-known precolonial Swahili institution which may be translated as "public forum". In 1945 a reader invited others to challenge his opinion by "joining in the forum" (*kujitosa barazani*). Some referred to themselves and other contributors as "we" (*sisi*). Other recurring words were "brothers" (*ndugu*; *kaka*), "fellows", or "fellow readers" (*wenzetu* or *wasomaji wenzetu*).

Poetry may have lent itself to the dialogic form slightly more than letters, with mutual greetings being a common trope. At the end of his poem celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany, Seif Hashil wrote: "Here I end, goodbye; I bid farewell to you, [my] brothers in Kilwa and Dar es Salaam; and those at the borders" (*Kad-tamat salamu, ndugu nawasalimuni/Kilwa na Dar es Salaam, na walio mipakani*; Hashil, 1945. For press poetry on the Second World War, see Bromber, 2010).

Both letters to the editor and oral sources provide some glimpses into text reception. While some readers preferred newspaper poetry, others were interested in letters, or bought newspapers because of their comic strips. In 1938,

"K. A.", writing from Kampala, stated that every month readers based in Uganda looked forward to buying *Mambo Leo* for its letters and poems (K. A., 1938). In an interview conducted in Tanga, Saidi Konomi recalled that Saleh Kibwana published poetry in *Mambo Leo*, but could not remember the names of any letter-writers.[8] In 1957, Juma Shabani, writing from Tanga where he worked at the Town Council, wrote to the daily *Mwangaza* to express his "dream" that the weekly *Baragumu* cost 20 cents, and suggested that the price of *Mwangaza* be increased to 10 cents, to give more space to letters to the editor, which in his view readers favoured (Shabani, 1957).

Concerning reasons for writing, like the members of Ghanaian literary clubs examined by Newell (2002a), some engaged in press debates because of a sense of moral obligation towards their fellow Africans who were less educated. For other writers, performing their subjectivities in a public forum was not just an attempt to impart knowledge, but was a means to gain much sought-after individual respectability (*heshima*) and wisdom (*hekima*), crucial local virtues.

Both stylistic and content-related features suggest that readers' interactions and writing itself were conscious acts of self-affirmation. Many poems and letters featured commonly accepted social principles such as the need to respect the elders and the brief nature of life.

Proverbs, which are one of "the main communicative tool[s] in Swahili poetry" (Kezilahabi, 2008, p. 194), were used in poems and letters to enhance a contributor's social standing. To be sure, topics addressed in letters and especially in poetry could not circumvent the heavily charged educational message deeply rooted in local idioms. However, far from being an imposition upon the readers, moralising was the very manifestation of their expectations: those who bought newspapers and read poems and letters were *hoping* to receive an ethical message.

Notably, letter-writers and poets also set up dualistic rivalries, creating a call-and-response pattern. These competitions were a continuation in writing of a regional tradition of public praise and criticism through poetry and songs, a practice that can also be found in southern Africa. This was a legacy of well-established Swahili oral linguistic forms (for the role of dialogue in Swahili society, see Shariff, 1983). Conventionally provocative, Swahili poems were often characterised by sharp verbal exchange widely known as *kupokezana* or *kujibizana*, *malumbano* or *mashindano* ("eliciting answers from each other"; Biersteker, 1996, pp. 20–21; see also Suriano, 2011).

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[8] S. Konomi, interview, 14th Street, Tanga, 26 January 2009.

Specific verbal patterns used by writers also point to the importance attributed to these public spaces. At the very beginning of poems and letters to the editor, most contributors addressed the newspaper's editor or producer, who came to replace Allah, traditionally invoked in Swahili poetry. They requested a personal space for expressing their views or responding to a previous opinion.

A wide range of issues sparked antagonism, from whether the ill should be served hot or cold tea (*Chai cha wagonjwa baridi*), to racial politics. It was not uncommon for letter-writers to respond to the author of a previous letter by mentioning the rival's name. "I did not like your answer at all" (*majibu yako sikuridhika nayo hata kidogo*), said Ramadhani Yusufu, "the Inquirer" (*Mchunguzi*), to S. N. Mkwawa, who had responded to a previous letter Yusufu had authored (Yusufu, 1959, p. 4). Mohamed Hussein from Zanzibar, a proud member of the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), accused one W. W. Magwaza of misinterpreting his previous letter. He called Magwaza a "traitor" (*mtimbakuwili*) who had allowed himself to be conned by "mediocre politics" (*siasa za vichochoroni*) and who claimed to be a member of ASP, but was reproducing the discourse of the Zanzibar African Youth Movement (ZAYM), made up of ASP radicals (Hussein, 1959, p. 15).[9] The age-old call-and-response pattern was transferred to letters to the editor, a genre that emerged during colonialism. In the process, letters acquired pre-existing elements of Swahili poetry like verbal attacks, sarcasm, and quarrels. These interactions can be seen as signs of enjoyment of the creative process of writing.

Another feature indicating individual creativity was the use of jokes, in Swahili *utani*, and humorous remarks (for Mombasa, see Kresse, 2009). Penned by J. M. Meshack Ntuwa, a detailed letter to *Baragumu* compared beauty contests with knowledge competitions, and claimed that the latter should be favoured. After giving a set of serious reasons, the author wittily concluded, "Perhaps many people will think that I am old, that's why I enjoy knowledge competitions more than beauty contests" (Ntuwa, 1957, p. 7).

For some readers, weekly cartoons, which frequently derided naïve country bumpkins (invariably young men), were a key motivation for reading newspapers. On 29 June 1957, *Mwangaza* published the last comic strip of the series of Hamisi Mhuni, a clumsy, uneducated youngster facing modern town life – the Swahili term *mhuni* or *muhuni* means "idler". Readers' reac-

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[9] For an analysis of the print discussions by which Zanzibari intellectuals crafted chauvinistic concepts of racial nationalism (debates running parallel to the racial nationalism promoted by the British authorities), see Glassman (2000).

tions were prompt. This is how Selemani Abdallah entreated the newspaper's producer:

> We are saddened that *Mwangaza* has stopped publishing the series of Hamisi Mhuni; we want to know if it will continue or not. If not, we plead with you that you do not suspend that tale, for it is one of the main reasons that many of us buy the newspaper (Abdallah, 1957, p. 3).

After two days, *Mwangaza* published another irate letter directly challenging the author of the comic strip, P. P. Kasembe. Certain that both urban and rural residents were dissatisfied with the termination of this cartoon, Ibrahim Issa questioned if the cartoonist had grown tired of it and objected that readers of *Mwangaza* did not relish the new story of Nsoko "at all" (*hata kidogo*). When aficionados, he added, realised that Hamisi Mhuni's strip had been terminated, they lost pleasure in reading the Saturday issue of *Mwangaza*. "You should know" – he provocatively addressed the cartoonist – "that not all [readers] are interested in the news printed in *Mwangaza* but only follow the tales, and they have stopped buying *Mwangaza* on Saturdays" (Issa, 1957, p. 3).

Conclusion

Located in a body of work that considers print cultures as facilitating the formation of new public spheres, this essay has focused on some of the ways in which Tanganyikan readers used Swahili newspapers to establish a network with a community of peers. Press writings indicate that correspondents established a dialogue, one that allowed them to exchange ideas with fellow readers (and, to some degree, with their listeners). These mostly male, self-confident contributors scattered throughout Tanganyika wrote to gain visibility, prestige, and approval within an imagined community, and to simultaneously assert their individuality.

Moral judgment was neither the sole product of readers' exposure to missionary and British ideas (namely, colonial modernity), nor a replication of editorial views – which, in government newspapers, could not depart from colonial interests. While these writings partly overlapped with colonial and missionary ideas, they were primarily responses to local impulses, idioms, and discourses rather than attempts to promote their proximity to the colonial authorities. The term "paracolonial" is well suited to define the horizontal connections that bypassed the colonial authorities and were significant manifestations of agency.

The dialogic form and readers' penchant for judgmental opinions were key Swahili conventions discernible in both stylistic and content-related local features, which suggest that the act of writing complemented rather than replaced oral culture. However, topics addressed in the *shairi* metre and in letters to the editor were far from being trite carbon-copies of oral forms and canonised social values.

As shown in the examples presented, epistolary and poetic interactions were characterised by linguistic creativity, wit, sarcasm, mockery, reciprocal attacks, and the creation of friendly bonds (*udugu*). These ingenious qualities served to gain individual prestige and reshape local values in a colonial context, even if self-affirmation was always expected to interact with communal values and could not completely depart from them.

Lastly, some questions that remain unanswered should be flagged. Since there is no archive that holds unpublished items, we cannot determine whether the editors chose to publish certain writings to indirectly respond to readers' views that remained unpublished. Moreover, under what circumstances were the topics addressed in letters and poems shaped and discussed, and by whom? To what degree did African women and unschooled audiences participate in the making of printed opinions? How did illiterate individuals receive, contribute, and gain exposure to print debates? Did Islamic-infused poems gain more popularity than letters? How often did public reading occur, and where? Did silent, individualised reading prevail, or were newspapers mostly circulating in urban streets corners and *baraza*, as well as in the Welfare Centres (after 1945, Community Centres), provided by the British? And how extended were these networks in rural spaces? Attention to such factors may unveil how a society builds its class, gender, and age-based hierarchies in order to advance its interests – namely, its collective agency. But matters of readership/audience, reception, consumption, circularity, and performativity are difficult to reconstruct thoroughly, as most participants and witnesses of colonial debates are no longer with us.

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Chapter 12
An Indian South African's Reflections on
Conducting Fieldwork in the Global South

Varona Sathiyah

Introduction

This chapter provides a self-reflexive account of my positionality as an Indian South African woman conducting empirical research in the Global South. Despite experiencing 27 years of democracy in post-apartheid South Africa (SA), one's race and class are still closely entwined (Cotterill, 2021). While there has been a burgeoning middle-class comprised of people of colour in South Africa since 1994, poverty is rife within the general population, with the harshest impacts of poverty being experienced by black people (Bond, 2000; Mabasa, 2019; Moodley, Adam, 2000). "The national jobless rate was just over 32 percent at the start of 2021. It is almost 48 percent for black South Africans and 74 percent for the young" (Cotterill, 2021, n.p.). Systemic racism is still firmly entrenched in South African society in terms of the diminished quality of life of most of the black population with regard to access to nutritious food, electricity, clean water and safe housing. The society is still riddled with racial inequities (Mabasa, 2019; Bond, 2000; Freund, 2013). Race is a pertinent aspect in any discussion about power relations in South African society. This country still bears the scars of years of oppression. This view is expressed by the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State, Professor Jonathan Jansen, as he asserts:

> We were the last country in post-colonial Africa to taste freedom and democracy. The sheer duration of colonialism and apartheid over centuries stripped us of our dignity and so much of our humanity … a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was not going to undo this damage; what we need is a national trauma unit (Jansen, 2011, p. 5).

The discussion on race led to the contemplation of my research positionality in the South African context. In SA, gaining access to research sites and interview respondents depends on having enough social capital to gain the trust of gatekeepers, as one's legitimacy as a researcher is often judged based on one's race (Hoogendoorn, Visser, 2012). For a researcher of colour, it helps to borrow social capital from others (Burt, 1998). I was fortunate to be supported by a research team that helped me to assert my legitimacy as a researcher. Although these reflections are context-specific, they shed light on the power dynamics at play in the researcher-researched dichotomy in South Africa. The fact that the findings are not generalisable does not detract from their value as a case study in the South African research milieu (Byrant, 2014).

My fieldwork entailed investigating two indigenous communities in Limpopo, South Africa, who are the owners of two respective cultural camps. They are the Tsonga owners of the Baleni Cultural Camp, and the Venda owners of the Fundudzi Cultural Camp on the African Ivory Route (AIR)[1]. The owners are members of the community who reside in proximity to the respective camps. The establishment of the African Ivory Route (AIR) as a marketable tourism entity began in 1998 at the South African provincial level of governance when the Limpopo Economic Development, Environmental and Tourism (LEDET) department co-established the camps on the AIR in collaboration with another provincial governmental entity, the Limpopo Business Support Agency (LIBSA). In 2011, LEDET approached Transfrontier Parks Destinations (TFPD) to enter into a 25-year lease agreement where TFPD would manage the logistical and operational aspects of maintaining the camps as the lack of proper transportation routes, advertising, stock management and booking systems at the camps had resulted in low occupancy rates at the camps. From 2012 until the present (2021), TFPD has managed the camps in collaboration with a secondary co-operative constituted by representatives from the communities surrounding the camps as well as a primary co-operative constituted by the various stakeholders from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community representatives and community mediators (Sheik, 2013).

There is a distinction drawn between a cultural village and a cultural camp – a cultural village is a commoditised space used to depict an essentialised and often anachronistic version of a culture. Cultural villages may be considered as

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[1] For more information, please see the webpages of the respective camps: https://www.tfpd.co.za/cultural-camps/baleni-cultural-camp and https://www.tfpd.co.za/cultural-camps/fundudzi-cultural-camp

cultural immersion experiences with an attempt to envelope the tourist in a particular temporal and spatial depiction of reality (Jansen van Veuren, 2004), while cultural camps, like those on the AIR are established primarily to provide tourist accommodation. Cultural camps are a contested space as they depict an anachronous sense of primitivity while perpetuating colonial tropes (Ndlela, 2002; Ndlovu, 2013). When there are cultural activities and engagements between tourists and cultural performers at cultural camps, they occur on a more social basis and within a less overtly commoditised one. In other words, in a cultural village it is as though the tourist has travelled back in time and has landed within a particular society and all the cultural performers at the village work within a commoditised framework – through the payment of village entrance fees and gratuities – to maintain the illusion, whereas in a cultural camp the main offering is the food and accommodation, similar to a bed and breakfast, but with cultural nuances such as themed deco, meals or activities on offer. The difference between a cultural village and a cultural camp lies in the emphasis on different aspects of their offering: one is primarily a cultural immersion experience while the other is a bed and breakfast with a cultural nuance (Boonzaaier, Wels, 2018).

In the following sections, I discuss the ethically-ambiguous aspects of my collaboration with a for-profit tourism management company, Transfrontier Parks Destinations (TFPD). TFPD manages the logistical and operational aspects of the camps such as maintaining the company's website with information on the accommodation offerings and cultural activities at each camp. In addition, TPPD sources funding from international donors such as the European Union to refurbish facilities at the camps, which has included the provision of solar energy panels to provide electricity. This chapter focuses on my experiences as a researcher, highlighting some of the practical and ethical considerations of conducting research in the Global South.

Borrowing legitimacy and social capital during fieldwork

During the apartheid era (1948–1994), South Africans were categorised for administrative purposes as belonging to one of four racial categories. These classifications of being either Black, White, Indian or Coloured had an overarching impact on one's quality of life as it determined where one could live, what occupation one could pursue and where one could socialise, among other constraints. These racial boundaries were mutually exclusive and clearly demarcated (Tewolde, 2020). According to the racial classification categories of apartheid South Africa, I am an Indian South African. Like many

Indian South Africans,[2] I am a descendant of indentured labourers who were brought from India to South Africa between 1860 and 1911 to work on sugarcane plantations in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province (Desai, Vahed, 2019). In a country like South Africa where the histories of race and oppression are indelibly entwined, it is difficult to work through the complexities of the power dynamics between the different race groups. The very term "South African" is seen to be problematic and is not necessarily only dependent on one's claim to a particular nationality as there are questions as to whether certain race groups are more South African than others (Vice, 2010; Chipkin, 2007).

During an informal chat about inter-racial interactions, a guide from the Baleni Camp mentioned that the only other Indians that the community members had sustained interactions with were local Indian traders who, like many of their compatriots, had emigrated to South Africa post-1994 to set up small businesses in remote rural areas. The camp guide had also been taught accounting by an Indian man, presumably an Indian South African, in high school.[3] There were a few Indian families living in the Baleni community. The term Indian South Africans is used to differentiate Indians born in South Africa from Indian immigrants born in India. Neither Indian nationals, nor Indian South Africans are considered to have much prestige in South Africa. (Desai, Vahed, 2019).

I suspect that my racial identity may have affected my perceived legitimacy as a researcher by the interviewees. As such, I relied on the racially diverse research team to assist me during the fieldwork process in order to benefit from their perceived racial superiority by the community members. The research team comprised of white researchers from South Africa, Italy and the Netherlands, as well as two Indian South Africans, including myself. The white members of the team clearly lent a favourable impression to my presence at the camps. I borrowed research legitimacy from the team because residual apartheid perceptions still exist, which hold Caucasians in higher regard than other races. In contrast, Indian South Africans are not held in high regard by the other race groups. Being accompanied by white/European researchers in a rural space increased my own credibility as

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[2] Indian South Africans is a term used to describe South African citizens born from descendants of the immigration wave from 1860-1911, this differentiates them from so-called Indian nationals post-1994 immigrants to South Africa who hold citizenship in India (Desai, Vahed, 2019).

[3] Personia Makhongele, guide at the Baleni camp, personal communication 16 November 2017.

a researcher (Chipkin, 2007; Vice, 2010; Burt, 1998). I did not lead the research team as I was being mentored by the more senior academics. Student cohorts tend to perform better when they are in a supportive group setting and as such, I benefitted from having the support and advice of senior researchers while conducting my fieldwork (Goldman, 2012).

The camp staff knew that the research team was brought to the camps under the auspices of TFPD management as we were provided with complimentary accommodation[4] at the self-catering units at the camps for the duration of the fieldwork. We explained on the first evening's stay at each of the camps that we were conducting research about the cultural offerings provided for tourists at the camps and that I was a student from the University of Johannesburg. Moreover, one of my supervisors, Prof Keyan Tomaselli, has a structured research relationship with TFPD's CEO, Mr Glynn O'Leary.

I received contrived and formulaic answers which were politically-correct when probing the quality of the community and cultural camp relationships. In addition, tour guides who were members of the surrounding communities in Baleni and Fundudzi and employed by TFPD served as key informants and translators during my interviews with community members. My description as a researcher accompanied by a team of researchers could have invoked a sense of performativity from the respondents.

Gaining access to research sites is not simple and I had to borrow the social capital of Prof Tomaselli's structured relationship with Mr O'Leary to have access to the camps. Social capital is the ability to access resources from members of one's social network (Angervall, Gustafsson, Silfver, 2018). I did not possess the social networks, nor did I have a sufficiently good rapport with community members to enable access to the research sites on my own. Conducting research is often a collaborative effort although it is not often acknowledged as such. Had I not aligned myself to a research project which had research funding and a stipend from the National Research Foundation (NRF) attached, I would not have been able to afford to continue studying. My choice of research topic was thus largely based on financial considerations. I am one of only a handful of people from my community in the formerly "Indian" township of Phoenix in Durban to have obtained a postgraduate university degree, since the cost of funding tertiary studies are beyond the means of most residents (Desai, Vahed, 2019).

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[4] Only the accommodation was complimentary, as transportation and subsistence costs were paid from the respective PhD supervisors' research funds.

There are many definitions of the concept of agency, but for the purposes of this chapter, "agency is defined as the effect that individuals in social interactions exercise to influence their encounters" (Baron, 2010, p. 65). I implemented a survivalist agency by choosing a research topic that provided access to funding. My personal impressions and experiences as well as those of the research team on the fieldtrips were corroborated to bolster and add nuance to the veracity of the findings.

Agency and acquiescence in the Global South: Survivalist research practices

My positionality as a woman of colour who benefits from the research conducted on the lived experience of primarily other women of colour prompted me to interrogate my choices when researching and representing indigenous communities in South Africa. I enquired about the women's engagement in cultural tourism activities such as performing traditional dances, cooking traditional cuisine such as Mopani worms and termites, or selling culturally inspired jewellery, crafts or outfits. The following sections of the chapter elaborate on my positionality as an Indian South African woman. I am alternatively positioned as the researcher as well as the researched as I interrogate my own assumptions during the fieldwork (Berger, 2013).

My reflexivity and positionality as a researcher
Reflexivity is employed when the researcher interrogates their positionality in the research field. It is an awareness of how one's presence in the field impacts the research setting (Ryan, Walsh, 2018). Reflexivity and positionality are often discussed in tandem, as one's positionality – one's age, gender, race, socio-economic status and even personality – all affect the research process and outcomes by influencing how much information the respondents are willing to share (Berger, 2013). The researcher is a human with the accompanying thoughts, prejudices, desires and jealousies that are inseparable from themself. "Qualitative researchers commonly speak of the importance of the individual researcher's skills and aptitudes. The researcher – rather than the survey, the questionnaire, or the census tape – is the "instrument" (Richardson, St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960). As such, one cannot shed one's personality before entering the field as a researcher. The researcher's very presence in the field changes the nature of the research encounter. The context and reality of one's subject community is influenced by the researcher's

presence. However, there are ways to mitigate and to disclaim one's biases in the research. One way to do so is to employ self-reflexivity: "self-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing. Truth claims are less easily validated now; desires to speak "for" others are suspect (Richardson, St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964). It is important to note that even though I cannot separate myself from my ingrained values, beliefs and perceptions, self-reflexivity allows me to consciously interrogate and to bring to the fore how those perceptions influence the research.

Performances enacted for the research team

The camps had been closed for most of 2016 due to refurbishment, so the guides admitted that they were bored without having tourists to chat to and seemed quite curious about our presence at the camps and eager to address our queries. My access to the community depended on my affiliation with the TFPD guides. On the first night spent at the Modjadji, Baleni and Fundudzi camps in May 2016, the team stayed at the respective camps with the guides. Prof Tomaselli explained our presence at the camps and the research objectives. The guides regaled the team with saviour tales of the camps having been resurrected by TFPD when they took over the management of the camps in 2012. A guide at the Modjadji camp – Lazarus Mokoena explains his experience of events in 2012 as follows:

> Any new thing makes you nervous, you see, so like immediately when TFPD came in to do partnership [sic] with African Ivory Route we wanted to know exactly what was going to happen here because it affects our wellbeing … We can see that there is light … Yeah, change is something else, but if you are informed in the right way, you won't be nervous … Here we have been informed in advance, we were told that one, two, three will happen so we were not nervous with the new management. Even before they [TFPD] could operate, we sat down, they told us their plans, we told them our plans and we combined it (interview 16 May 2016).

Another guide at Modjadji, Adolph Makita, concurred that meaningful collaborative processes had taken place. He commented that: "TFPD asked us what plans we had for the camp, and they took note of our advice" (interview 16 May 2016). However, their unrestrained enthusiasm leads me to question the veracity of their responses.

Methodological choices and limitations

Both time and financial constraints curtailed the depth and scope of this undertaking. There was a limited amount of time spent conducting fieldwork (around 20 days in total). This is an admittedly short period from which to draw conclusions. However, it should be acknowledged that researchers from the Global South, conducting research in the Global South, face a myriad of challenges that are not necessarily faced by researchers with adequate financial resources. I was employed as an assistant lecturer on a fixed-term contract at the University of Johannesburg from 2016 until 2019 while completing my thesis. My teaching commitments did not allow me to spend extended periods in the field. Fieldwork was conducted in intermittent bursts, as time and funding allowed. I am an intermittent researcher (Barnabas, 2018). Most researchers in the Global South lack the time and resources to conduct ethnographic studies as it is understood in its classic sense. We have to make do with snippets of time spent in the field. To supplement the sparse fieldnotes and relatively limited number of interviews, I employed a reflexive ethnography, with my own reflections of the fieldwork and community. A "reflexive ethnography … is that ethnographic form that privileges the presence of the writer in the text" (Behar et al., 2002, p. 2). Fieldwork was conducted initially during May 2016 and then again during November 2017. A team of four researchers stayed at the Modjadji, Baleni and Fundudzi camps from 15 to 24 May, spending three nights at each camp. Professors Tomaselli and Frassinelli subsidised the fuel and grocery costs for the fieldtrips from their respective research accounts. In November 2017, the research team was joined by Dr Vanessa Wijngaarden, an anthropologist with vast experience in conducting fieldwork in indigenous communities. The 2017 fieldtrip was split only between the Fundudzi and the Baleni camps as these camps had been chosen as the focus of the case study. It would have been unfeasible in terms of the time and financial resources available to undertake research at all five cultural camps (Modjadji, Fundudzi, Baleni, Blouberg and Mafefe) on the AIR. The Fundudzi and the Baleni camps were chosen based on practical considerations – the distance of the camps from Johannesburg, and the distinctive cultural offerings of the respective Venda and Tsonga communities. The next section outlines my fieldwork experiences.

Quitting the cultural tourism track
This section begins with a definition of cultural tourism. It is:

a sub-category of tourism: it refers to the forms of art (culture) – [parentheses in original] in the urban and rural area of a region or country, and it is defined as the movement of people to cultural attractions far from their normal place of residence aimed at assimilating information and cultural experiences (Petroman et al., 2013, p. 385).

My research focused on cultural tourism, but I could not get rid of the feeling that my research served exploitative ends. I was anxious during the fieldwork. The anxiety gradually morphed into guilt as I felt like a fraud when speaking to older, visibly impoverished women in the houses surrounding the camps. I made eye-contact, smiled, and sat cross-legged on the floor opposite the interviewees but I felt horrible. I attempted to convince an old woman, who was understandably wary of signing an official form, to sign my informed consent form because the university's ethics review board required it. Eventually I discarded the form in a bid to secure an interview as I did not want to alarm her by insisting that she sign the form (fieldnotes, 23 November 2017). It is unlikely that the respondents suffered any ill-effects from my line of questioning about cultural tourism practices in the community, but it is not fair that they had to endure the mild annoyance of dealing with me when they clearly had domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning or childcare to attend to. On the other hand, I sometimes felt as though my appearance with the research team in tow added a sense of intrigue to an otherwise monotonous day.

Many challenges were encountered during the fieldwork. I did not understand the languages, and people were initially reluctant to speak to me. However, I chose to demystify the process of conducting fieldwork by unearthing the behind-the-scenes activities of conducting the research: "Rather than hiding the struggle, concealing the very human labour that creates the text, writing stories would reveal emotional, social, physical, and political bases of the labour" (Richardson, 1995, p. 191). The researcher's subjective positionality is deemed to add depth and a sense of veracity to the actual process of understanding (Maxwell, 2018). My positionality is melded in the knowledge production process. Epistemological constructivism works in tandem with critical realism in that it requires that the researcher be aware of the socially constructed nature of knowledge and to acknowledge how one's worldview influences the research endeavour (Maxwell, 2018). "Researchers themselves are an important part of the research process, either in terms of their own personal presence as researchers, or in terms of their experiences in the field" (Flick, 2018, p. 30). In light of this, I have provided substantial reflections on the is-

sues of reflexivity, subjectivity, and my own potential areas of bias in the undertaking. As noted previously in terms of epistemological constructivism being built on relationships, there would not have been any research site or set of relationships to study had access not been granted access to this site.

I engaged in participant-observation and recorded my observations as fieldnotes and conducted approximately twenty-four semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions during my fieldwork in May 2016 and November 2017. I was fortunate enough to have the research team join in on focus group discussions with the camp guides about the purpose of my research. Dr Wijngaarden joined the research team in 2017 so she was not a part of the focus group discussions held in 2016. The team contributed substantially to the discussions. Three focus group discussions were held at the Modjadji, Baleni and Fundudzi camps respectively, with the research team and two camp guides on the first evening that we stayed at each camp in 2016. Tomaselli initiated the discussion by recounting his previous fieldwork experiences when conducting research with Zuleika Sheik on the AIR (Sheik, 2013).

The array of data collection methods, participant observation, interviews, focus groups and self-reflexivity, provided a multi-faceted understanding of the cultural tourism strategies and perceptions at the two camps, as "a major part of qualitative research is based on text and writing – from field notes and transcripts to descriptions and interpretations and finally to the presentation of the findings and research as a whole" (Flick, 2018, p. 30). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with people whom I encountered while walking through the villages closest to the cultural camps. This was a convenience sampling method: "convenience sampling (also called ad hoc sampling or opportunistic sampling) … uses cases based on availability" (Schreier, 2018, p. 116). I was only in the field for short periods of time, and I did not get the opportunity to establish any meaningful sense of rapport with community members, so I had to make do with interviewing people who were available and willing to speak at that time. The interviews did not focus on accruing purely factual information.

Dr Wijngaarden, the anthropologist who joined the November 2017 fieldtrip, helped me to "break the ice" when approaching possible research participants. She acknowledged people at one house in the Venda village by lying prostrate on the ground and saying, "Aah" – a greeting that women are supposed to use in the Venda language. I am not sure whether it was the novelty of a white woman being respectful in this manner or whether it was just the curiosity of speaking to new people that made community members amenable to being interviewed.

The interview process depends on many inter-related factors for it to be successful. Seemingly inconsequential things such as one's race, level of friendliness, gender or even physical appearance could influence the outcome of the interview. The researcher's ethnicity is of importance in South Africa, and I benefited from the embodied cultural cache of having a white woman accompany me during the fieldwork. I did get a significantly more casual response when accompanied by Shanade Barnabas, a researcher of South Indian extraction like myself, and a more courteous response when accompanied by Vanessa. Theorising these observations forms part of my analysis. I highlight the difficulties encountered when conducting the research and reveal the compensatory measures used to counter the lack of a long-term immersion in the community to "own up" to the difficulties of conducting fieldwork under time and financial constraints. However, the use of alternative ethnographical methods illustrate that all modes of data generation can be used to support one's findings despite them being highly subjective and non-replicable. As the information was being filtered through my interpretation and worldview it is unlikely, if not impossible, that another researcher would be able to replicate my particular narratives or experiences. Even the focus group discussions held by this specifically constituted research team (comprised of Dr Barnabas, Prof. Tomaselli, Prof. Frassinelli and myself) could not be replicated: "When our ways of looking are incommensurable, we can look in the same places, at the same things, and see them differently" (Bochner, Ellis, 2016, p. 257). When I walked around the village with the TFPD tour guide from the Shawela village, we generally approached women who were sitting or working outside in their yards. We asked whether the women would be willing to speak to us about the camp and how they felt about it. I realise that this was problematic as I went to the village with a staff member from the camp who was in her TFPD uniform at the time. This would have influenced the answers that I received as the respondents would have been wary of any unsavoury comments expressed being conveyed to TFPD's management. The next section provides a detailed ethnographic description. Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description serves to set the scene for the fieldwork.

The interview setting: Sitting among chirping chicks and gurgling infants

The Shawela village, close to the Baleni camp, is rural and only has a few tarred roads. The rest of the pathways are sandy and dusty. The houses are

predominantly small, two-bedroom brick-and-concrete houses with an additional round thatched-roofed structure in the yard, used to store food items to ensure easy access when cooking outside on wood-fires. When my fellow researcher Shanade Barnabas and I walked through the village with the camp guide, Personia, our clothes got dusty, and we coughed when we were caught in the slipstream of dust swept up by one of the few cars passing by. The area had been experiencing a dry season during May 2016 and again in November 2017, so it was dusty when we were there. November should have been the rainy season, but there was less rain than usual in 2017 (field notes November 2017). Shanade and I are relatively dark-complexioned Indians descended from South Indian ancestors. We both got burned a few shades darker from walking around in the direct sunlight during the fieldwork. I mention this with reference to our researcher positionality, as well as to explain how this helped us to be treated with a sense of familiarity. A few younger members of the Shawela community in particular, had been welcoming as they had been taught by a dark-complexioned Indian accounting teacher and we were told that there were dark-complexioned Indian national shop owners in the community, so our physical appearance was not particularly exotic or interesting.

In fact, there seemed to be an assumed familiarity that almost negated the boundaries between being a researcher and being treated as a guest. As we were dark-skinned, there was no sense of reverence or special treatment due to us being researchers from a university. We were treated as friends that were paying a visit. I am able to draw this inference as I had also conducted research while accompanied by the white researcher, Vanessa, at a village in the Fundudzi area and there were marked differences in how we were perceived. I make mention of this to flag the importance of racialised and gendered identities and positionality when conducting research in South Africa (Hoogendoorn, Visser, 2012).

To return to the interviews at the Baleni camp, Shanade and I were treated as guests, we sat on overturned cool-drink crates, or on the floor on woven-grass mats or on plastic chairs when there were chairs available. The interviews were semi-structured, and conducted in a very conversational, meandering way. Women often stopped in the middle of the interview to tend to the cooking or to entertain restless babies who were usually playing alongside their mothers or sleeping swaddled in a blanket on their mother's backs. When we went into the yards of the houses, the women spoke to us while continuing with their domestic chores. These interactions felt less like a for-

mal interview, and more like a conversation. There were chickens running about in some of the yards. There was a sense of camaraderie fostered while Barnabas, the camp guide, and I sat with the women in their yards in the sunlight while they bathed their babies in plastic bathtubs, or cooked, or threaded beads on string to craft jewellery. I offer the thick description to convey the research participants' nonchalance in our presence. Moreover, some of the women were about the same age as us, and were tending to their babies while we spoke. They asked whether we had had our own babies and then why we did not have any children at our age. We both responded that we were still studying. The answer was met with amusement and a shaking of their heads. The women commiserated with us over bad hair days in the dry weather, and my frizzy, curly hair was commented upon with mirth. One of the younger women offered to plait my hair into cornrows to make it more manageable. This offer was made amid laughter and sympathy, not as a result of a skewed-power relations between the researcher and the researched. The offer to braid my hair was made by a woman that pitied my unruly hair. The atmosphere was that of friends sitting together and chatting. We were interrogated about our reason for being there and asked numerous questions about ourselves (fieldnotes, 20 November 2017). The next two sections provide a brief overview of the regions in which the respective Baleni and Fundudzi camps are located.

Stories around the Baleni Cultural Camp of the Tsonga community: Narratives of cultural pride

The Baleni Cultural Camp is located within the Greater Giyani local municipality in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The municipality – established in 1969 – was the centre of the Mopani district and was the former capital of Gazankulu, the previous homeland demarcation under the apartheid government (Stats SA, 2011). The Baleni camp, owned by members of the Tsonga community, is surrounded by four beneficiary villages. They are Shawela, Shikumba, Vuhehli and Bombela, respectively. I conducted most of the interviews at the Shawela village, as it was easiest to access this village from the camp. I did get a few interviews from Shikumba and Vuhehli, but Bombela was too far for me to travel to on foot. Personia, the Baleni camp guide, mentioned that the people from the Bombela village are usually brought to the camp to prepare the cultural cuisine of Mopani worms and termites for the tourists. The Baleni camp is 130 kilometres, or an almost three-hour drive, away from the Fundudzi camp.

The Fundudzi Cultural Camp of the Venda community

The Fundudzi Cultural Camp, owned by members of the Venda community who reside close to the camp, is located in Thohoyandou in the Vhembe Municipality. There are three beneficiary villages, Makwarani, Mukumbani and Tshidzivhe, respectively. I only conducted interviews at the Mukumbani village as the other two villages were further away from the camp and I did not have enough time to conduct interviews there. The first set of interviews was conducted in May 2016, and these were followed by the second set of interviews in November 2017. Most of the interview respondents were women who ranged in age from their mid-thirties to their late sixties. Women were interviewed due to most of the men being away from the villages during those months. I only had access to female research participants as the males in the village had moved to the cities of Johannesburg and Durban to find employment. The scarcity of employment opportunities in the region forced most of the younger, able-bodied men to travel to Johannesburg, a metropolitan area, to find jobs as security guards or as labourers in the building construction sector (Personia Makhongele, 18 May 2016, focus group discussion; field notes 2016; 2017).

Even though I interviewed women, our shared gender identity did not warrant a sense of trust. As an Indian South African, I did not possess enough legitimacy as a researcher in that community, as is illustrated by one of my interviewees who questioned my ability to change anything in her community, thus hinting at her opinion with respect to the usefulness of my line of questioning. An excerpt from the interview with the elderly woman, noted below, highlights those awkward conversations that can occur during interviews. The woman's bluntness served as a curt reminder that I was unable to assist anyone in any discernible manner with my research. This embarrassing scenario hints at the limits of what academic researchers are realistically able to achieve with their research. Nearing the conclusion of one of my interviews, I asked, as I always do as part of the research inquiry, what the respondent would like to have provided in the community. Usually, I got the answer of more tarred roads or a clinic. I did get the answer of a clinic in this instance, however, the elderly woman looked at me appraisingly and asked me a question in Tsonga, which was translated by the amused guide as:

> She wants to know why you are asking her what she wants. She has now said that she wants a clinic in the village. Are you going to do anything about it if you are concerned to ask? (Respondent T1, interview November 2017).

I was caught off-guard and so surprised by the question that I stuttered for a few seconds until I responded in an unconvincing manner that I would write this information down and then someone with the power to do so would hopefully read it and make the recommendation. The elderly woman's obvious scepticism of my ability to change anything led to my realisation that researchers probably visited her often, promised many things and then left without fulfilling any of those promises. The uncomfortable encounter led to my acknowledgement that, in all honesty, I could not change anything in the community (Tracy, 2014).

My fieldwork was not all gloom and self-recrimination, though, as there were instances of shared humour and fleeting moments of rapport shared with the research respondents. A woman in her mid-thirties from the Shawe-la village laughingly admitted that she wanted the male dance troupe to re-turn to her village and to re-introduce the practice of beating the traditional drums instead of using a radio to play music. I had automatically assumed that she had a culturally significant reason for her preference. However, when probed for the reason for her preference for live drumming instead of recorded music on the radio, she said that: "I enjoy the energy of the drum-ming. It feels more intense. It is also nice to watch the men drumming" (Re-spondent F1, interview, 13 November 2017). We made eye contact and we both laughed sheepishly at her frank admission.

Conclusion

Researchers like me, based in the Global South, may be members of relative-ly disadvantaged working-class communities. However, it is important to bear in mind that a researcher exercising their agency to continue with their studies should not infringe on the rights of research participants. Conducting research in South Africa is not a straightforward matter as there are a myriad of racial and financial implications to consider. Being mindful of the time and financial constraints of researchers in the Global South fosters a more welcoming environment for researchers from working-class communities that are making their initial foray into empirical research. Research in South Africa is still influenced by the class, race, and gender of the researcher, as the residual impact of apartheid's inequities are still present in society. This chapter highlights the fact that in rural Limpopo, in the current socio-political climate, the cultural cache and associated prestige of the white ra-cial classification still holds sway among the research participants. Consider-ing this, researchers of colour need to employ strategies to utilise this residu-

al preference of the apartheid era. While I acknowledge that this is not an ideal circumstance by any means, the astute navigation of complex cultural milieus and power dynamics seems to be a valid avenue for the researcher of colour to exercise their agency in contemporary South Africa.

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Interviews and participant observations were conducted from 15 to 24 May 2016 and again from 11 to 19 November 2017 in the communities surrounding the Modjadji, Fundudzi and Baleni cultural camps. I have identified the respondents by name when permission was granted for me to do so; otherwise, pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the research participants. My observations are referenced as "field notes". Focus group discussions were held at the Modjadji, Baleni and Fundudzi camps with the research team and the camp staff members on the first night that we stayed at each camp in 2016.

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Chapter 13
Feminist New Activism in the Age of Silence

Shereen Abouelnaga

Mapping enforced silence

Until very recently one could speak about precarious conditions in the Arab world as aberrations generated by counter revolutions. Judith Butler defines this as a "politically induced notion in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler, 2009, p. 4). Yet, it has become an invalid interpretation since precarity has become the normative factor that controls all – not only certain – populations. The rising authoritarian rule, supported by and springing from a military mentality and background, does not tolerate or allow any deviation from the imposed, or rather enforced, discourse. Enforcing silence is done through all classical measures of repression: illegal detention, fabricated fatal charges, physical torture, strict control of the media, whether state-run or private, censorship of all forms of art, and banning of any independent initiatives or activities that relate to civil society. All state apparatus is given voice while any opposing or different discourse is silenced brutally. Within this framework, precarity has become the norm. While this form of ruling is very much like the classical dictatorships that were widespread in the twentieth century, it is difficult to understand how it could re-surface in the twenty-first century after several revolutions and uprisings that have erupted to protest exactly against such authoritarian measures.

Two decades into the second millennium, and the most prevalent tenet of the age is enforced silence – albeit in different ways and to different degrees. Silence is projected and enforced in different modalities in different places in the Arab world. The term "silence" is used in this paper to refer to the limitations and constraints imposed by power on any collective action that aims at

implementing certain demands framed by the desire for equal distribution of wealth and justice. Silence, as a state and a position, means a myriad of things – the most important is the loss of the space of appearance in the sense used by Hannah Arendt in her 1958 book *The Human Condition*. She defines this space as a creation of action, and thus, highly fragile. It "comes into being wherever men [and women] are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm" (Arendt, 1958, p. 178). The peculiarity of the space of appearance, as Arendt says, is that,

> unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men – as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed – but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever (Arendt, 1958, p, 199).

For example, Egyptian women not only wanted to secure this space of appearance that was created in 2011 but were also working on recreating it in the liminal spaces of the personal and political. Yet, this goal was challenged by the lack of their power. Again, power does not mean strength, force, and violence (Arendt, 1958). It is the property of a plurality of actors in agreement on the same political purpose, and the result of collective engagement unified by persuasion and conviction. However, under the rule of enforced silence the power that is needed to actualise women's agency is absent, and in a best-case scenario, weak. The right-wing voices are much louder and are fiercely determined to keep women's agency mediated through the male designation, that is, the patriarchal discourse of the regime. At the crossroads of culture and politics, women (and men) have lost the "space of appearance". All actions that followed "the year of dreaming dangerously", to borrow from Slavoj Žižek (2012), have triggered punitive measures against all participants who tried to populate the spaces/squares of appearance. The abortion and co-opting of these spaces were followed by turning this political void – the lost spaces of appearance – into spaces of panoptical surveillance (à la Foucault).[1]

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[1] Between the two spaces, appearance and surveillance, Marquez does not exclude other spaces of power and visibility. He states that: "Other spaces where visibility and its absence

Despite the thick silence, any breaching of which is bound to have fatal consequences, women – perceived as cultural markers – are used to consolidate the hegemonic discourse in a society governed by a populist discourse, while they are abused if they exhibit the least sign of non-conformity. Although the regime never stops celebrating women, any form of activism is criminalised and taken as a threat to the "stability"[2] of the power paradigm. The situation is best explained through the term "gender paradox", which Nicola Pratt coined in 2013 to refer to the demise of women's rights in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. She has elaborated on the concept of the democratic paradox that Deniz Kandiyoti (2012) has used to describe the same situation.

Aware of this paradox, women have not given away the will to communicate a different epistemic discourse. The shift from precarity as an aberration to precarity as a norm, and from the space of appearance to the spaces of surveillance has inspired women to turn silence into a strategy of resistance. This is how silence becomes a position. Similar to Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*, the subjects under surveillance resort to "silence, exile and cunning". Dedalus' plan could overcome the sultry repressive mood:

> I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile, and cunning (Joyce, 2000, p. 112).

So Stephen declares in one of his courageous confessional moments, and so too revolting women have resorted to silence and granted power its wishes. Yet, they have also stopped serving what they no longer believe in. In other words, silence becomes a form of protest. This position materialises in

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help individuals constitute selves, form subjects, or generate power can be readily imagined" (Marquez, 2012, p. 7).

[2] The threat to stability has been, since 2011, the key charge levelled at all opponents to the regime. Sometimes it becomes a riddle. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the activist Loujain Al-Hathloul was arrested in 2018 on the pretext of her role in the women to drive movement and in opposing the Saudi male guardianship system. In 2019, the regime granted women these rights, but Al-Hathloul was kept in prison until February 2021. Due to severe pressure on the Saud regime, she was finally conditionally released. Power cannot deal with action that struggles for rights; power cannot function except as a giver.

certain actions that breach the established construct of femininity by declaring new forms of subjectivity. This obligatory silence has pushed women in the Arab world (think Egypt, Libya, Sudan, the Gulf, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the list is not exclusive) to seek and populate different, new spaces, virtual and intellectual.

In this chapter I argue that although women have abided by the rule of silence, they have explored and carved out new spaces that have always been overlooked by authoritarian power. The concern of this chapter is the new forms of activism that counter and challenge the monolithic voice of the patriarchal narrative. Producing counter-narratives is facilitated through the process of knowledge production which could be practiced in spaces other than the traditional town and city squares and through new forms that are different from the traditional forms of activism, like demonstrations, marches, and protests. Since the form of a movement proper is prohibited under the ruling institution of silence, women have resorted to non-movements and co-opted spaces perceived marginal and unimportant by the ruling regimes. Before engaging with the new forms of activism and/or knowledge the nature of these non-movements needs further elaboration.

The rise of the new women

The new women are part of the silenced masses. Although they are very different, they share the same views and epistemology in relation to gender politics and rights. What unites these different subjects is the feeling of flagrant injustice, especially with the unprecedented level of sexual violence perpetrated by informal entities – in both the public and private spheres – and formal institutions. In a spontaneous and unplanned move, these women meet in the new spaces to end up forming informal transversal alliances. One cannot specify their location as they do not aspire to join any traditional organisational body of traditional activism. The latter refers to all forms of collective action that flourished in the '90s of the twentieth century and lasted up till 2013. These include marches, demonstrations, sits-in, and hunger strikes. They are not united by similarity, but rather quite transversal in the sense of Guattari and Foucault. The term "transversality" was first developed by Félix Guattari in 1964 as a result of his experience at La Borde clinic in France. According to him, "Transversality is a dimension that strives to overcome two impasses … [and] tends to be realised when maximum communication is brought about between different levels and above all in terms of different directions" (Guattari, 2015, p. 80). The idea was elaborated fur-

ther by Foucault who suggested that these forms of transversal connection shatter the alienation that power has worked so hard to insinuate. They conquer – by accumulation – the totalisation of the regime and the individualisation imposed on its subjects; Foucault explains that such struggles "assert the right to be different" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

I define these informal transversal collectives in light of Asef Bayat's (2013) explanation of how ordinary people can effect transformation through the discovery and creation of new social spaces within which their voices can be heard. These alliances are non-movements, made up of "non-collective actors" engaged in "collective action" directed at advancing the interests of the marginalised and subordinated. The actors embody the "shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people" and engage in social activism to bring about social and political change through their "fragmented but similar activities" (Bayat, 2013, p. 15). They are characterised as "non-movements," moreover, because they lack formal leadership and organisational structures. The mindset of these collectives is characterised by being post-ideology, post-religion, post-nationalism, post-Western revolutionary principles, and post-theory. This trend is noticeably on the rise, particularly in Egypt and Lebanon. This is how ordinary people can breach the silence without being annexed to any formal institution.

I argue that the new collectives (the new underdogs) who are adamantly reject any engagement with or involvement in any institutionalised form of politics belonging to the middle class, are what Goran Therborn terms the "new masses". "Precisely because of the social indeterminacy of the middle classes, their weight may be thrown in different, indeed opposite directions" (Therborn, 2014, p. 11). In this context he refers to the masses of the recent uprisings all over the world including Egypt and Tunisia. Within those masses the rising collectives of women cannot go unnoticed. Although fathoming an existential crisis, Audre Lorde's words best describe the catalyst behind the formation of these new collectives:

> In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live (Lorde, 1984, p. 42).

Visibility, in this context, does not mean the state of being able to see or be seen. I take it to mean existence as opposed to enforced silence. The existence of the new visions, ideas, concepts, actions, discursive practices of

the new women have brought upon them naming and defaming, on the pretext that they do not conform to the expected pattern of conduct, nor do they subscribe to the prevalent societal gendered discourse. As hard as it is, this defaming has not stopped women from trying to explore and populate new spaces that could provide a platform for new forms of activism.

New activism

The new women collectives head towards spaces where they can weave a new discourse that stands in stark contrast to the accepted and acknowledged gendered discursive practices propagated and supported by the regime; it is a discourse that subverts the hegemonic narrative. It must be mentioned that the term "spaces" in this context is void of any material spatiality, i.e., a space can be virtual or intellectual or discursive, which is different from a square or a street or a syndicate, for example. In light of this, the space of knowledge production is my pivotal concern in this argument since the act of production stands for agency that thinks in and enunciates a language totally different from the language of power. That becomes more translatable considering Audre Lorde's statement: "If I didn't define myself for myself, I'll be crunched into other people's fantasies and eaten alive" (Lorde, 1984, p. 137). While a form of agency, self-definition has to seek new spaces completely severed and divorced from all other traditional activism. That is why and how I label knowledge production as the new activism. Enforced silence has generated myriad forms of novelty: new collectives, new language, new spaces, and new forms of activism.

Dominant practices of knowledge eradicate the complex relations between neo-liberalism (especially the market) and global economy, and the micro-politics of women's daily lives. In a postmodern market-based world everything goes; in an age of post "-isms" (post-colonialism, postmodernism, post-socialism, post-religion, post-structuralism, and of course post-feminism) radical knowledge disappears. Any direct and upfront engagement with either local or global powers is denied. Everything becomes personal and the political fades as démodé.

The new form of activism is motivated by the flawed models of knowledge produced by power. That is, power that becomes the monitor, gazer, and knower. In such a panoptical patronising context, self-knowledge comes at a high risk. It is very likely that the gendered subject will assimilate the discourse of power; and it is definite that society accepts all flawed images (fixed and unchangeable) about women. When gender constructs are

under siege, self-knowledge and knowledge production stand as the last re-sort to salvage a dying agency. And since the collectives of the middle class are deprived of all public spaces, knowledge production, as a form of new activism, turns out to be an in-between space where the subjects become actors engaged in a process of reclaiming voice and epistemic authority.

Most of the projects of gendered knowledge production – discussed be-low – are aware of the fact that the dominant knowledge practices exercised by the regime and its executive tools harm gender by glossing over many sides of subjectivity and promoting one fixed model. Their point of depar-ture is the acute awareness that the dominant, all-arching patriarchal knowledge system disadvantages women by:

> (1) excluding them from inquiry, (2) denying them epistemic authority, (3) denigrating "feminine" cognitive styles, (4) producing theories of women that represent them as inferior, or significant only in the ways they serve male interests, (5) producing theories of social phenomena that render women's activities and interests, or gendered power relations, invisible, and (6) producing knowledge that is not useful for people in subordinate posi-tions, or that reinforces gender and other social hierarchies (Anderson, 2020).

To side-line any form of radical thinking or even rethinking of gender, power brings to the fore women's sexuality as a "thing" that requires maxi-mum control. It is not then surprising to hear the Egyptian General Prosecu-tor calling for the necessity of adhering to "the values of the Egyptian fami-ly".[3] Such manoeuvres aim at consolidating a monolithic form of gender that reflects the mind of an authoritarian, repressive power that perceives differ-ence as opposition and a challenge to its being. To consolidate such classical hierarchies, power resorts to the use of the toxic mix of culture and religion where the latter has always been an important executive tool that sustains the working of power. With the conspicuous flourishing of the social media in the Arab world, and the intermittent eruption of non-conforming gender sub-jectivities, women with different epistemic discourse are abandoned as *homo sacer*, to quote Agamben (1998). The force of the law is there but always suspended, and so ineffective.

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[3] Haneen Hossam, the internet personality, was recently convicted of "violating family values" under Article 25 of the 2018 cybercrime law. She got a verdict of a two-year prison sentence, and had to pay a fine of 300 000 L.E. She was finally released with a damaged repu-tation. In June 2021, the ruling was cancelled and again the court sentenced her in absentia to ten years in prison over human trafficking-related charges.

Arab feminists are quite aware now of the fact that knowledge production could help in salvaging the whole field of gender studies and scholarship from oblivion and silence. Feminism in the Arab world has always been under attack on the pretext that it is imported from the West. Kumari Jayawardena's seminal book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* has detailed the entanglement of both concepts in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The book's importance stems from the fact that it debunks the idea that feminism was an idea imported from the West. Unfortunately, the success of the book has not crossed the limits of research and academia. The prevailing belief is still that feminism is a Western construct that has no place or rationale within the parameters of Arab societies.[4]

Jayawardena's book also reveals the fact that feminism emerged with the national struggles to build the modern nation. That is, feminism has always been contoured and controlled by the ebbs and flows of political struggles and trajectories. Hence, the limitations of nationalism. For example, the "woman question" in Egypt was born with the 1919 Revolution. Ever since that time, women's rights have been entangled with the competing discourses of the state, Islamists, and nationalists. Another stark example could be detected in Palestine where any feminist demand cannot be severed from the national struggle for liberation; consequently, the micro-politics of women's daily lives are not only marginalised but also delegitimised and silenced.

Against this backdrop I am reading and fathoming the emerging novel forms of gendered agency exercised in an age of silence. Knowledge production stands not only as a form of agency but also as a form of new activism. Gender issues provide a fertile space where a discursive transversal alliance can easily be formed. The path is paved by the fact that the mind of the state neither recognises nor acknowledges the political stance of gender power relations. And from this loophole new alliances are formed. Like Stephen Dedalus, the agents or actors have stopped serving what they no longer believe in through a subtle "silent" denunciation of all dominant discursive practices, epistemic paradigms, and monolithic narratives. Most of these actors who belong to the disappointed masses of the middle class have lost their faith in all institutional political bodies and realised that the elitist discourse has wasted their energies and potentials. Therefore, the new collectives are weaving their discourse from scratch, from disappointment, disillusionment, and anger. This

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[4] "Islam has granted women all their rights" is a famous statement used by Islamists and other social actors to counter any feminist demand for rights or reclaim of subjectivity. It is (or is not) surprising that all patriarchal political conflicting ideologies meet at the point of denouncing feminism.

explains their adoption of radical theory where "the personal is political" without any compromise. In other words, in their projects they revive and centralise the political. Despite the enforced silence and the well-knit regime's narrative, these collectives have been able to carve out a space for new scholarship and readership. They have managed to build "constituencies" capable of interfering in abandoned spaces and exercising politics of interpretation that "demands a dialectical response from a critical consciousness" (Said, 1982, p. 24). Knowledge production, a new form of activism, is characterised by systemic and intersectional frames of analysis that have been overlooked by the dominant discourse which implements frames of analysis that obscure the real paradigm of power relations. The toxic mix of neoliberalism and enforced silence could gloss over all systems of oppression and repression.

The importance of such new forms of agency is that they respond through their new activism to neo-liberal epistemic values. The new activism is an attempt to combat taming the feminist and political. Gender scholarship is catering for a market governed by neoliberal postmodern values that promote difference and diversity whose very existence should not disturb the matrix of power, be it state control or a dominant image of academia. In her critique of neoliberalism, Chandra T. Mohanty confirms,

> Questions of oppression and exploitation as collective, systematic processes and institutions of rule that are gendered and raced have difficulty being heard when neoliberal narratives disallow the salience of collective experience or redefine this experience as a commodity to be consumed. If all experience is merely individual, and the social is always collapsed into the personal, feminist critique and radical theory appear irrelevant – unless they confront these discursive shifts" (Mohanty, 2013, p. 971).

In response to personalising GBV, the new collectives bring the radical political elements to the fore of research and knowledge. Revisiting all forms of patriarchy has opened a new horizon for feminist epistemic discourse and knowledge. Silence is breached and the unsaid is declared, yet in a different space.

Knowledge production as new activism

Now that the motivations of and the context within which knowledge production becomes a form of new activism, we need to explore the kind of knowledge produced. The actors in this process are knowers situated in particular relation to what is known and consolidated by the regime apparatus of

media and fear, and to other knowers who internalise the propagated knowledge and sometimes even reproduce it, as what happens in vilifying victims of sexual harassment. To produce counter-knowledge requires then a counter-specific situation that functions as a catalyst to subvert existing perspectives. Therefore, most of the projects of gendered knowledge production can be described as "situated knowledges", a term introduced in 1988 by Donna Haraway. Haraway suggests that all knowledge is local and limited, denying the possibility of impartiality that has often been associated with the perspective of objective knowledge (claimed by power). What Haraway suggests instead is a centralisation of the material locations. If any form of knowledge is perspectival, then we should at least opt for forms of knowledge that are objective in the sense that they are translatable across subjective locations.

With the political position and background of the actors contextualised, specific examples of knowledge production will highlight the core of the new activism. Since most of these projects are still in process, i.e., operating and producing, I will focus on the theoretical vision that has shaped them and the framework within which they work.

According to Haraway (1988), ensuring a minimum level of objectivity in the knowledge produced cannot be achieved except through building political solidarities and engaging in communication across different positionings, a position that echoes Arendt's explanation of the importance of persuasion and conviction. However, any consensus or agreement should not erase differences in perspectives. The *Ikhtyar* collective, established in 2012 in Cairo, is built on this principle. It is an open space for people interested in discussing gender issues, and in documenting and developing a gender knowledge base in Arabic. On the collective's website,[5] it is stated that knowledge is power and "the production of knowledge is a form of activism". Notably, the team is aware of the limitations of language; hence, the decision to engage with the challenge. Like *Kohl*, a collective and journal in Lebanon, *Ikhtyar* seeks a non-binary approach that could subvert hegemonic patriarchal language and models. The aim is "to radicalize language and socio-political discourses in order to reclaim knowledge as a feminist cause and radical act." Despite their differences the team decided to work together. Hence, the name *Ikhtyar*, an Arabic word that means choice. In a quasi-manifesto, the collective states: "We want to produce knowledge in Arabic, tailored to our own needs and purposes. We want to produce our own gender knowledge in

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[5] Available at: https://www.ikhtyar.org/about-us-2/?lang=en (15/12/2021).

Arabic by creating non-academic and academic writings through calls for writers". They summarise their vision: "We believe Feminism exceeds the limiting connotation of seeking rights for women but that it's all-inclusive in addressing all forms of oppression through diverse analytical tools, for our lives constantly intersect on multiple levels with different forms of oppression."

The articles, translations, and newsletters of *Ikhtyar* (online) have great potential to empower the gendered social actors who consider themselves to be in subaltern positionalities of global networks of power and local enforced silence. Hence, this is knowledge production with effect. They are bent on politicising feelings: a contemporary resurrection of the personal is political. One of the spaces they have created is about bad feelings and negative emotions. In ten workshops, they read *Feminist Killjoys* by Sara Ahmed, and managed to politicise feelings and emotions. Part of the project of politicising feelings is inspired by Ahmed's vision:

> Our activist archives are thus unhappy archives. Just think of the labor of critique that is behind us: feminist critiques of the figure of "the happy housewife;" Black critiques of the myth of "the happy slave"; queer critiques of the sentimentalisation of heterosexuality as "domestic bliss." The struggle over happiness provides the horizon in which political claims are made. We inherit this horizon (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2).

Ikhtiyar has similarly engaged in a struggle over happiness to situate the political, and issued online a booklet titled "Women's Killjoys" where the link between patriarchy, authoritarianism and feelings is very clear. They revived the slogan of "the personal is political", or rather, "the personal because of the political". Their epistemological vision departs from situated knowledge that renders all silenced complexities of gendered violence unheard.

A big part of *Ikhtyar*'s work depends on translating into Arabic certain texts that express and echo their epistemology. In addition to translating *Feminist Killjoy*, they have translated Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", if only to prove the necessity of feminist intersectional analysis.

The position of the body vis à vis power in its different manifestations has recently been the preoccupation of gender discourse and scholarship in the Arab world. The fixed model and function of the gendered body promot-

ed by the controlling knower have seemed compelling to male philosophers and intellectuals because it conforms to a masculine worldview (Bordo, 1987; Young, 1990). The rising scholarship in sexuality, queer theory, and LGBT rights in the past decade cannot go unnoticed. This scholarship weaves in silence a new space where the dominant paradigms of knowledge related to the body and new genders are nuanced and countered. The online publication *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*[6] is a case in point.

Kohl was launched in Lebanon in 2015. It is ironic that such a progressive radical feminist journal was launched in what comes close to a failed state. Put differently, *Kohl* came out in a void only to spark a new spirit that could populate many silenced public spaces related to the gendered body. *Kohl* defines itself as "a progressive, feminist journal on gender and sexuality in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and North Africa regions." The journal's vision and rationale emanate from the awareness of the team that mainstream knowledge on gender in the region "is burdened with Orientalist misconceptions, shallow investigations, and a paradoxical mixture of over and under-researching." The name – *Kohl* – is not without its significance. It is the black powder of *Ithmid* (galena stone), labelled as "eye liner" in modern times.

The team has managed so far to produce more than twelve thematic issues. While the themes engage with the material conditions of gendered subjectivities and sexualities in the Arab world, the focus of the first issue that came out in the summer of 2015 endows the journal with a specific identity and highlights the line of thought adopted in later issues. "Rethinking Intersections" engages "mainstream narratives, be they local, international, academic, or even civil society's narratives" (Sayegh, 2015, p. 2). In the editorial, Ghiwa Sayegh, the editor in chief, explains:

> Many of the discourses around gender and sexuality in the region create a sense of exceptionalism when dealing with local feminists, queer women, and LGBT identities, especially when they intersect with other "marginalized" identities. We are automatically perceived as challenging or transgressing the status quo. While this might or might not always be the case, a plain reading of what local communities do or should do reflects a very narrow vision of the tropes of gender and sexuality in our countries. Ultimately, we watch ourselves being written off as the extras in our own

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[6] Available at: https://kohljournal.press/about (15/12/2021).

stories, and our struggles hastily dissected to illustrate a ready-made argument. However, knowledge proper to our contexts or sensitive enough to account for our intersecting struggles is not too far from reach (Sayegh, 2015, p. 2).

The Geographies of Body and Borders (2016), *Gendering Migration* (2017), *Sex, Desire and Intimacy* (2017), *On Incarceration, Surveillance and Policing* (2018), *Decolonizing Knowledges around Gender and Sexuality* (2019), *Organizing Against the Tide: Alternative Economies and Gendered Labour* (2019), and *Tensions in Movement Building* (2020) are topics that have breached the silence and dealt with the unsaid from an intersectional perspective.

In Palestine, in another context of imposed silence and purposeful indifference, another movement has erupted, or to be literal emerged. It is called *Tal'at.*[7] "There is no free homeland without free women" was the cry that reverberated across Palestinian communities in September 2019 when thousands of Palestinian women took to the streets in twelve villages, and in cities across the world, to declare the launch of *Tal'at*, a Palestinian transnational feminist movement. *Tal'at* means "stepping out" in Arabic.

The demonstrators were chanting against gender-based violence in all its manifestations: femicide, domestic violence, embedded sexism, and exploitation. They also asserted that true liberation must embody the emancipation of all Palestinians, including women. "Return, Freedom, Feminist Revolution" was one of the main slogans of the marches.

This was the first time in recent history that Palestinian women have acted under an explicitly political and feminist banner. The murder of Israa Gharib, the 21-year-old make-up artist, by her family as an honour killing, triggered the immediate formation of this movement. With the rise of honour killings, 28 women in 2018 and 35 women in 2019, this movement decided to breach the silence imposed on women's rights and engage with the problematic of viewing women and their bodies as the repositories of cultural and social purity. While the marches and demonstrations belong to the category of traditional activism, it is the vision and philosophy of the movement's demands that make it a new form of activism.

Colonisation is a major problematic in the Palestinian context. On one hand, it has dismantled any collective Palestinian agency, and on the other hand, it has reinforced patriarchal kin unit structures. Moreover, a benefi-

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[7] The movement has only a page on Facebook.

ciary relationship is developed between the government of colonisation and heads of Palestinian extended families. The state grants these men the authority to handle in private what is considered as intra-community matters. This shameful deal facilitates a systemic oppression of women coupled with a complete absence of accountability, part of which is the honour killings.

The movement challenges the paradigm of priorities. In colonised contexts, where liberation becomes the top priority, feminist demands, and women's position are usually relegated to a secondary level. In short, nationalism is superior to feminism (Abouelnaga, 2016). While marching and demonstrating negate silence, this movement challenges the priority of the national over the feminist; and more important, the movement subverts the classical binding rule that decrees that the feminist must gain legitimacy from the national, or at least be annexed to it. Jayawardena has explained that all feminist movements in the Arab world emerged from the cloak of nationalism. Even if independence movements have nuanced this rule, Palestine remains the place where the national struggle for liberation is the priority next to which no other demands could have any significance. Yet, the movement of *Tal'at* managed to mobilise Palestinians and other nationalities to go against sexism, racism, misogyny, fundamentalism, and patriarchy.[8]

The politicising of feelings and emotions is not strange to feminist epistemology; yet feelings – as a personal sub-category – have always been a side-lined issue since the general and collective are preferred to the particular and personal in revolutionary contexts. At the same time, in the binary of reason/emotions, there is an undeniable inferiority discerned in emotions. Since 2011, the peak of the uprisings in the Arab world, most symposia and scholarship have centralised the notion of women's empowerment. The equation has been clear-cut – revolutions empower women. We might bracket the validity of this equation to think of the opposite. Revolutions can also drain women, with a particular focus on the personal rather than the explicitly political. Recently, feminists (who used to be activists before the dawn of silence) started to pay attention to the issue of emotions, especially after Sara Ahmed released her *Feminist Killjoy and Other Wilful Subjects* in 2010. Like situated knowledge, situated emotions and emotional responses can be a valid source of knowledge, especially if they oppose the dominant story of happiness.

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[8] To watch the September 2019 march in Jerusalem, follow this link: https://www.facebook.com/hus.abudiab/videos/2524021407843887/?t=53.

Because feminist theory is committed to generating ideas that women can use to improve their lives, the problems of self-knowledge are pressing for all feminists. This entails that woman be able to recognise their lives in feminist narratives and testimonies. Feminist epistemology is therefore concerned with exploring the conditions of feminist self-understanding and the social and cultural settings in which it may arise (MacKinnon, 1989). This also entails paying tribute to the personal and re-entangle it with the political. Hence, the politicisation of feelings.

Yara Sallam is a human rights lawyer who was imprisoned for fifteen months in 2014 for taking part in a demonstration. After her release, and while recuperating from the experience she started to think of the journey of recovering from her work on human rights and realised that this is exactly what she wanted to explore further, i.e., her emotions and daily concerns. She interviewed ten women from Egypt and eleven from Tunisia, and the questions were designed to address the most pressing personal issues and emotions that came as a consequence of engaging with the public sphere. In short, Sallam decided to focus on "mental health, general exhaustion, lack of financial security, as well as aging as neglected intersections, despite how important they are in the context of documenting the struggle of women in the public space" (Sallam, 2020, p. 7). The point of departure of the resultant book, *Even the Finest of Warriors* is that "our struggle in the public space is not dissociated from our struggle in the private one, and that our lives and our personal struggles with our surrounding circumstances are worthy of documentation, as are protests and public actions" (Sallam, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, the book offers a space where the personal can be expressed and where the idea of exhaustion is acknowledged as an outcome of meddling with the political in the Arab region. Yet, Sallam reiterates that admitting the reality of exhaustion does not stand in contrast to the concept of activism because even the finest of warriors need to rest.

In her endeavour to understand her position and personal feelings through the stories of other women, Sallam gives credit to all similar attempts. In 2017, the *Ikhtyar* collective published an issue about "bad feelings", where again the influence (and even presence) of Sara Ahmed is conspicuous.[9]

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[9] "The Alphabet of Feeling Bad" (February 2017), Ikhtyar Feminist Collective (in Arabic), available at: https://www.ikhtyar.org/?page_id=20965 (15/12/2021) and "Feminist Killjoys" (February 2017) Ikhtyar Feminist Collective (in Arabic), available at: https://www.ikhtyar.org/?page_id=20946 (15/12/2021).

Despite this despairing silence that leads to draining energy, there remains hope in necropolitics. As women take up more burdens and multiple tasks during the Covid-19 lockdown, the mood in Egypt has become deeply distressing. News about the universal rise of domestic violence against women has spread. When it is coupled with austerity measures imposed by the government, the situation becomes explosive.[10]

With such tight budgets, unfair division of gender roles, psychological distress in the private sphere and the rapid spread of coronavirus in the public sphere, several women decided to pay tribute to their bodies. The rigid physical lockdown generated its own safety valve. Social media, especially Facebook, became a haven that could accommodate all conflicting visions and opinions. While the lockdown has led to the disappearance of Arendt's "public space", women have decided to reshape space – and certainly culture – through their interaction and engagement with any conservative opinion that vilifies women and relegates their places to the private sphere. Price and Marty (2020) note that in the last few years research has focused how individuals in the Arab world have employed social media as a way to organise, especially in "repressive or high-risk environments". They add that:

> Online organizing has not only facilitated movements in authoritarian societies where such activities are prohibited or highly regulated by the government but has also increased women's ability to mobilize in patriarchal environments, where their physical presence in public spaces is restricted (Price, Marty, 2020, p. 194).

Women's activities on the social media do really express a new standpoint for the voice that breaches the silence. One of the most contested issues on Facebook is women's sexuality, and consequently, the politics of the body.

On 13th June 2020, Facebook followers received the news of Sara Hegazi's death. Aged 30, she had committed suicide. An LGBTQI activist and IT expert, Hegazi was arrested back in 2017 after waving the rainbow flag at a musical concert, imprisoned and tortured. Released from prison in 2018, Hegazi sought asylum in Canada for fear of more prosecution. Unable to deal with her post-traumatic stress disorder, caused by physical torture and social vilification, Hegazi committed suicide. She left a short, handwritten note in

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[10] To reduce the repercussions of Covid-19, Egypt's parliament passed a bill cutting one percent from employees' salaries – which are already borderline – for twelve months, starting July 1, 2020.

which she admitted her inability to stick to her guns. How this news was received is the crux of the matter when it comes to the treatment of different opinions, values, and sexual orientations. The incident trended on social media. The voices of women (and men) were loud and assertive enough to be heard. That was quite a victory when one recalls the nature and ideology of the opposing voices.

The latter were fierce, ruthless, and violent. They resorted to the classical use of a religious-threatening discourse. Sara was portrayed as a culprit, a sinful person, suffering from a severe disease, or an "abnormal" person whose "homosexuality" was the expected consequence of her secular liberalism. For all this, she does not deserve God's mercy. Sometimes she was called an infidel, other times an atheist. The underlying feeling was *schadenfreude*.

On the other hand, the voices of Sara's supporters were even louder. Immediately after her death was announced, they changed their profile picture to the rainbow flag. They declared their position in the most direct phrasing. While celebrating Sara as an icon, they made a point of reclaiming the autonomy of the body and personal freedoms. Hence, gay rights.

The confrontation was tough because the struggle triggered a cruel recall of all previous incidents of sexual violence. Sara's death initiated a retaliatory path instead of a reconciliatory one. Her death sparked a strong aggressive struggle where one camp was trying to find a link between immorality and homosexuality, while the other camp was promoting social equality of all bodies since the virus itself does not discriminate between bodies.

It must be said that the tone of the opponents' discourse was accusatory and judgemental. It derived its strength from intimidating and inhibiting Sara's supporters by employing the lethal weapon: religion. On the other hand, the tone of the supportive camp had a speculative element that tried to initiate a dialectic that might lead to an investigation of the meaning of corporeal autonomy and social equality. Put differently, Sara's body became a discursive arena upon which several discourses (conservative right-wing as opposed to egalitarian liberal) were played out.

What is at stake here is that the regime, accompanied by systemic dynamics and strategies that help it maintain its power, turned Sara into a *homo sacer* – one who may not be sacrificed, yet may be murdered with impunity. The defence pursued by Sara's supporters salvaged the (queer) female body from the toxic mix of social sadism and religious discourse. In short, the conflict was noticeably fiery, and the supporters were adamant to take it to the end. The situation became so acutely polarised to the extent that two days after Sara's suicide, Al Azhar, an institution known for its conserva-

tism, had to interfere and issue a *fatwa* that absolved Sara from the sin of infidelity; yet it reiterated that it should be dealt with "as a mental illness that can be treated through specialists".[11]

As I see it, supporters, whether men or women, were not only defending Sara or grieving over her death. They were also protecting their own bodies from any possible violation or the state of precariousness that is likely to happen due to any sign of non-conformity. Sara's death triggered a new form of agency over a subject completely tabooed in the Arab world.

Other spaces until further notice

For the time being, the field of knowledge production remains one of the most important and populated intellectual and virtual spaces. What I have dealt with above is just a few examples, and surely there are more. Revisiting the archives and critiquing White Western Feminist theory are other spaces where the agents meet to define themselves. We keep reminding ourselves of Sara Ahmed's (2010) words: "Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places".

Non-hierarchical, loose and transversal networks have helped women to breach the silence through populating new spaces that are neither controlled by authoritarian power nor fall into the interest of any repressive regime. Elham Gheytanchi and Valentine M. Moghadam state:

> The model of loose networks that are decentralized and relatively leaderless has permeated the women's movement and has been characteristic also of the mass social movements in the region, such as the Green Protests and the Arab Spring protests. Women's activism has thus shifted into loose social networks of advocates of women's equality, participation, and rights in their respective countries (Gheytanchi, Moghadam, 2020, pp. 215–216).

The need to bypass the regime in an authoritarian context has inspired women to carve out new spaces that enable them to produce a counter-narrative that subverts the enforced silence. This counter-narrative materialises in new forms of activism that target knowledge production. Yet, as Gheytanchi and Moghadam note:

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[11] See for example: https://www.copts-united.com/Article.php?I=4122&A=576980 (15/12/2021).

It remains to be seen, however, if the domestic links and coalitions within which women activists participate are able to undermine existing patriarchal structures and bring about the more open, democratic, and egalitarian societies to which the region's feminists have long aspired (Gheytanchi, Moghadam, 2020, p. 232).

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Chapter 14
In the Belly of the Beast: Collective Agency
to Combat Sexual Harassment at Cairo University

Maha El Said

Introduction

Sexual harassment on campus is not a new phenomenon nor is it confined to one region or university. As early as the 1970s, Mary Row of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) managed to discuss sexual harassment at the university and in fact managed to have MIT develop an anti-sexual harassment policy, after which other universities followed suit (El Said, 2020). However, the problem persists, and as Nancy Chi Cantalupo has noted in her article "Burying our Heads in the Sand", "Over thirty years of research demonstrates that campus sexual violence is a shockingly common phenomenon that is surrounded by a general lack of knowledge of the problem as a whole" (Cantalupo, 2011, p. 223). It is, therefore, important to note that sexual harassment on campus, like sexual harassment in general, has its roots in the institutionalisation of violence against women. It lies within the "invisible power" of culture as expressed in Steven Luke's "third face of power", which is "a form of agency and domination" – power held and wielded by those who have it over those who don't, albeit within norms that uphold this conduct (Luke, 2005, p. 133). Or as John Gaventa puts it, "a third form of power, in which conflict is more invisible, through internalisation of powerlessness, or through dominating ideologies, values and forms of behaviour, yet shaping perceptions and employment of agency" (Gaventa, 2006, p. 29). It is in this sense that this study will show how agency can be exerted from within institutions, challenging dominant norms and cultural values and bringing about institutional change in hierarchical contexts based on complex power relations, such as universities.

Power has mostly been viewed from a negative perspective where all levels of power, whether visible, hidden, or invisible, are all expressions of

domination (Luke, 2005), but when it comes to agency it is a different ball-game. Agency that challenges power and claims spaces is not a negative force but rather a "positive force for individual and collective capacity to act for change" (VeneKlasen, Miller, 2007, p. 55).

In *A New Weave of Power*, Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller (2007, p. 45) describe four "expressions of power": power over, power with, power to, and power within. Power over is the common understanding of power, that is the negative power to control. Other forms of power expression, however, are all positive forms of power as they are the power of agency. Power with is shared power where mutual support, collaboration, and solidarity are the basis, leading to "collective action and the ability to act together." Power to is the power of the individual or group to take action, the power to make a difference, the power of agency. Power within is the individual's "sense of self-worth and self-knowledge". Hence, power within is the sense of empowerment and believe they can make a difference.

The relation between agency and power is an integral one. Agency is, in a sense the shift of power. That is, it is the shift of a subject's position from being the subject of "power over", whether that be of a system, structure or person, to the position of "power to". Agency is the "power to" incur changes in social structures and oppose discrimination; that is, speaking up to power. This chapter looks at the Anti-Harassment Unit at Cairo University in Egypt, and discusses it as a case study, showing its grassroot nature and how it managed to cross established organisational boundaries. It is worth noting that the Anti-Harassment Unit developed when a single woman spoke up against sexual harassment – that is by exercising individual agency, which consequently led to collective agency when a group of academics came together and took action, hence leading to the transformation of the institution from one that denied the presence of sexual harassment, to an institution that has zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Furthermore, by engaging in frameworks of feminist agency and power structures, this chapter will show the transformation from individual agency to what Judy Marshall calls "communion agency" (Marshall, 2001), which is in its own right a "transformative agency", as by working from the bottom up and vice versa, it attends to the boundedness of peoples, histories, cultures, and contexts (Chavez, Griffin, 2009). Within the framework of power and agency, the chapter will start by defining institutional violence against women and placing sexual harassment on the pyramid of violence. With a focus on academic institutions, the chapter will show the challenges of agen-

cy in a complex power structure and how agency becomes mandatory for combating sexual harassment on campuses. That is how agency can be effective even if trapped in "the belly of the beast".

Institutional violence against women

Sexual harassment cannot be looked at in isolation from the whole domain of Violence Against Women (VAW). When put on the pyramid of violence (Figure 1) it becomes obvious that it springs from sexist cultural attitudes, at the base of the pyramid, and develops to more serious expressions of violence, reaching femicide at the top. Sexual harassment resides between these two extremes.
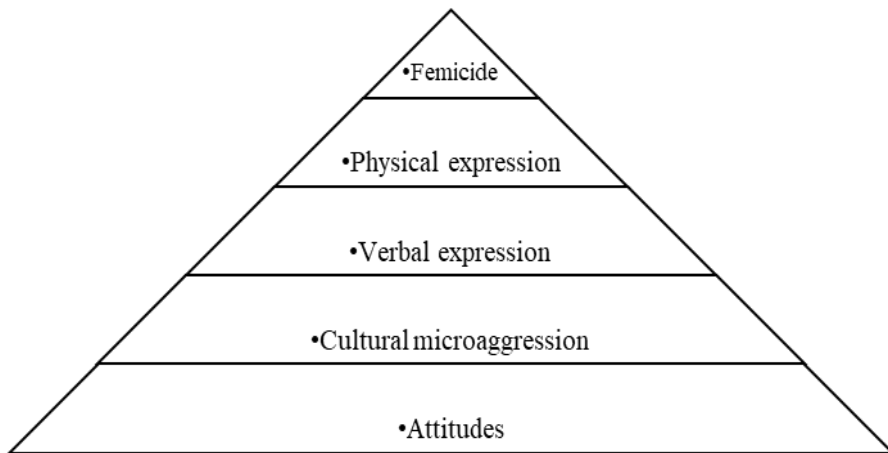

Figure 1: The pyramid of violence.
Source: http://ccasayourworld.com/get_the_facts/violence_pyramid/

Violence against women starts with what has been called "microaggressions", which, as Derald Wing Sue has noted, are "commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes" (Sue, 2010, p. xvi). That is to say, these are all the sexist comments women get about their looks, or the sexist jokes that women are supposed to find funny, which are all forms of "daily indignities" experienced by women all over the world. While these microaggressions are a form of sexual harassment, the fact that these incidents are not even recognised as violence paves the way to

more aggressive sexual harassment and sexual assault. Rachel E. Gartner and Paul R. Sterzing assert that "microaggression" is indeed the "gateway to sexual harassment and sexual assault". They state:

> The exclusion of gender microaggressions from the current conceptuali-sation of youth sexual violence (a) creates a false impression that chron-ic, "low-severity" forms of violence are less harmful than infrequent, "high-severity" forms; (b) fosters environments that ignore or condone gender microaggressions inadvertently normalising sexual violence against girls; and (c) hinders the identification of upstream prevention strategies targeting gender microaggressions as acts of youth sexual vio-lence before they escalate into legally actionable offenses (Gartner, Ster-zing, 2016, p. 492).

This acceptance and normalisation of violence against women is further in-tensified by its invisibility, or rather the silence around it. Patrizia Romito in her book *A Deafening Silence* (2008) explains that there is an insistence on sustaining violence against women and keeping it invisible by either legitimis-ing or denying violence. She goes further by investigating the several tactics used to institutionalise violence against women. The first tactic she mentions is "euphemising", that is imprecise and misleading language "to obscure the seriousness or responsibility of whoever has committed it" (Romito, 2008, p. 54). "Dehumanising" and "blaming" are tactics used to diminish compassion for the victim, as she is described as "not like you", or "she asked for it", hence legitimatising the violence. "Psychologising" and "naturalising" on the other hand are tactics of denial, where violence is justified and tolerated be-cause of the perpetrator's attributes. Finally, "separating", is the most com-monly used tactic as it presents acts of violence as "one-offs", that is hiding the intensity and covering up for the society, safeguarding denial. These tactics have been used so well, and so often, that violence against women has become normalised, and women have become trapped in this "deafening silence".

Sexual harassment and power

Sexual harassment, and violence against women in general, has its roots in the imbalance of power. Power relations are at the core of patriarchal socie-ties, where girls and women are devalued, and culture is used to justify gen-der inequality and violence against women. Patriarchy sets notions of power and control into social ideology and values, making it a structural force that influences power relations, whether or not they are abusive (Suliman, 2019).

It is therefore important to note that sexual harassment is a direct manifestation of the power imbalance between men and women, since power sets the agenda for the patriarchal system, Sylvia Walby has defined patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (Walby, 1989, p. 214). Power, as the root of sexual harassment, has been researched extensively; however, it has been noted that there are several levels of "power over", that need to be considered. Exploring how power leads to sexual harassment, Jeanette N. Cleveland and Melinda E. Kerst have divided power into "societal power", "organizational power" and "interpersonal power". Societal power is defined as "societal norms [that] lead both the powerful and the powerless to expect and accept the exercise of power" (Cleveland, Kerst, 1993, p. 50). As mentioned above, microaggressions have become the norm enforcing the tolerance of violence against women. Furthermore, the concept of masculinity in a patriarchal society is directly related to the advantaged subject of power, hence "interpersonal power". Therefore, when a young boy sexually harasses an older woman, as seen frequently on Egyptian streets, accompanying adults, usually the mother, would not feel shame or apologetic, but would rather feel flattered, commenting that her baby boy is now a man! In an attempt to trace the relation between sexual harassment and masculinity, Beth A. Quinn, suggests that mild forms of sexual harassment such as "girl watching" is "a form of play and as a potentially powerful site of gendered social action. Its social significance lies in its power to form identities and relationships based on these common practices … a means by which men assert a masculine identity" (Quinn, 2002, p. 392).

Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that, basically, men harass women because they feel they can. Interpretations of sexual harassment as biologically driven and connected to the lack of self-restraint are demeaning to men and have been proven false. Sexual harassment happens because of men's feeling of entitlement and superiority to women. It is not an act of lust but rather an act of exercising power as proof of masculinity.

Speaking up and power

Self-imposed silence has been named as one of the main reasons sexual harassment is perpetuated. Speaking up or reporting sexual abuse or harassment has never been easy and entails a lot of courage: the courage to claim power. The shift from "power over" to "power to" is a road filed with hurdles. First and foremost, in the analysis of power and power structures, it has been not-

ed that "domination can induce and sustain internal constraints upon self-determination", leading to a distortion of confidence and self-worth (Lukes, 2005, p. 131). Women are trapped in cultural discrimination that has been naturalised and have fallen prey to institutionalised violence. The internalisation of "social power" causes victims of sexual harassment to abide by institutional tactics of denial by blaming themselves rather than the perpetrator. Even in cases of obvious assault, women hesitate to report it because of shame, social stigma, and fear.

Shame has been reported as a natural consequence of sexual harassment. In his book *Shame: The Power of Caring*, Gershen Kaufman (1992, p. viii) explains that "shame is a natural reaction to being violated or abused". Hence, shame springs from the acceptance by powerless subjects of their vulnerability. Self blaming and feeling responsible for the harm incurred upon them is in line with societal norms that cherishes conformists. Furthermore, social stigma adds to this shame, as it is common for women who have been sexually abused to feel socially stigmatised; a condition which is even more intense in conservative societies where, "good girls" do not challenge their position and are trained to accept male tutelage.

Women being in the weaker position makes it easier or even normal to blame them for any transgression they have been exposed to. As James Scott has explained, power relations are manifested in dominant values and dominant discourses that are based "exclusively on the public transcript", which ascribes to women subordination, masking it with naturalisation, so that when women are harassed it is more "likely to conclude that subordinate groups [women] endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination" (Scott, 1990, p. 4). Consequently, the attitude of "she must have asked for it" prevails, resulting in self-stigma, which is an impediment to speaking up. Fear is another important reason for not reporting sexual harassment; it is not only fear of stigma that hinders women from speaking up, but also the real fear of the consequences of reporting and the risks entailed in confronting power. As stated earlier, sexual harassment is rooted in power and the fear of the repercussions of exposing it are real fears that women have to deal with when speaking up.

Sexual harassment in Egypt

The situation in Egypt and at Cairo University has developed into a social phenomenon that is not very different from the situation worldwide. Recent reports have shown that at least 66% of Egyptian women between the age of

18 and 66 years have been exposed to sexual harassment (UNFPA, 2015). Until very recently, sexual harassment in Egypt was not spoken of: as part of their daily experience being in public spaces, women had to put up with comments and looks that are not welcomed. Even when sexual harassment got more aggressive, with group harassers touching and groping women, it was still considered a taboo issue, and victims of harassment hesitated to report such incidents for fear of being stigmatised or blamed. The Egyptian scene has witnessed a major change in that respect. After the 25 January 2011 revolution in Egypt, the silence around harassment as a social problem was broken and sexual harassment became the subject of wide debate. Accordingly, a growing public awareness of the problem of sexual harassment gave rise to many initiatives to combat it. That is not to say that before the revolution there was no violence or no efforts to combat it, but the issue of sexual harassment became a pressing problem needing the efforts of both NGOs and citizen groups on the one hand and a legal framework on the other to eliminate it. Since 2011, a surge of research and initiatives started to mushroom addressing and documenting sexual harassment. In early 2014, and in response to NGOs working on combating sexual harassment in society, the government issued a law that criminalised sexual harassment. and amendments to the penal code were made to include the term "sexual harassment" for the first time in Egyptian law.[1]

Nonetheless, in Egypt, there are culturally specific tactics that are used to deny sexual harassment and enforce the silence around it. First there is the use of a religious discourse used to cover up sexual harassment. Commonly used statements such as "we are a naturally religious society" or this does not happen in our culture make denial the norm. Therefore, in cases that become public, the tactic of blaming is used with a religious twist, employing the discourse of "virtuous" women as opposed to "loose" women. Another added tactic that enforces denial is what I call *alienation.* That is, framing sexual harassment as a foreign concept, another western concept that is used to attack our cultural norms and impose colonial values that are alien to our culture, thus inhibiting women even further and enforcing the tolerance of sexual harassment. Finally, when these two tactics do not work, the

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[1] In June 2014, a new legislation was enacted to combat sexual harassment, amending two articles of the Penal Code to define and criminalise such violence. Under the amended legislation, Article 306 (bis A) of the Penal Code criminalises the act of "accosting" of "others in a private or public or frequented place implying sexual or obscene gestures, whether by verbal or non-verbal means or through actions, in any manner including modern means of communication".

usual tactics that are used to institutionalise violence against women are reverted to.

Sexual harassment at Cairo University

Regardless of the effectiveness of the law that was issued to criminalise sexual harassment (which is beyond the scope of this chapter),[2] when it comes to educational institutions, Cairo University included, it requires a different approach. While laws applied to harassers on the streets are important, the nature of educational institutions with their own particularity and hierarchy does not necessarily mean that this law will stop sexual harassment on campus. Addressing sexual harassment on campuses needs to be addressed within the institutions' own policies, laws and culture. Although universities can be considered as a microcosm of society, the "intensely hierarchical structure of relationships" based on status at universities complicates matters further (Whitley, Page, 2015, p. 39). Universities have been described as "a model patriarchy", where there is a "striking exaggeration of roles – roles created and legitimised by an institutional design that fosters power and status inequities ripe for exploitation" (Zalk, 1996, p. 83). This sense of power, or as Michele Paludi calls it the "ivory power", has indeed led to various types of abuse including sexual abuse (Whitley, Page, 2015). According to a UN Woman report, "experts believe that most incidents go unreported, while research evidence is compelling and alarming." (UN Women, 2018). Factors leading to silencing victims, i.e., power and fear, are intensified when it comes to disclosure of sexual harassment cases at a university (Dzeich, Weiner, 1990).

At Cairo University, like other universities, sexual harassment is just a reflection of an ingrained cultural discrimination. Since "microaggression" has never been criticised culturally and as stated above becomes a normal social practice, students come with their own cultural baggage and values. Young men come to the university with the conception that it is okay to harass their female colleagues, especially since most of these students come from male-only high schools and have barely been exposed to women as colleagues. Coupled with their inflated concept of masculinity, sexual harassment seems natural to them. Furthermore, not only do they not know the harm they are instigating, but they also have a total misunderstanding

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[2] The effectiveness of the law is discussed in a forthcoming paper "Crossing the Border of Silence" by Amal Hamada and Maha El Said.

of what constitutes sexual harassment. Their female colleagues, on the other hand, come from the same sexual harassment-tolerant culture, and just keep silent about it.

Research done by the Cairo University Anti-Harassment Unit has shown that around 67% of 346 students surveyed believe there is sexual harassment on campus and that 31% of these incidents are committed by professors. However, when asked about reporting, only 8% have reported harassment. Striking as these statistics are, it is important to note that the situation of sexual violence in Egyptian universities is much milder in comparison to universities in the USA and Europe. Research that has analysed sexual violence at universities in the USA and Britain noted that the structure of fraternities and widespread use of alcohol by students are the main catalysts for creating what has been called a "rape culture" at those institutions. In Egypt, on the other hand, where most students remain at home, except the few who live in highly regulated student housing, there are no wild after-school parties that can induce such violence. The concept and structure of fraternities does not exist, and alcohol remains a taboo in Egypt. While this mildness is a blessing, the prevalence of sexual harassment on campuses has become an issue that needs more attention, especially since ignoring it enforces the idea of sexual harassment as a "nonviolent act", allowing the university to overlook and claim the limpidness of the ivory tower.

Agency to combat sexual harassment at Cairo University

Combating sexual harassment at Cairo University, and I dare say at other Egyptian universities, started with a single woman speaking up. While going to an evening class she was verbally harassed by a group of students lingering on campus. Although she had been exposed to similar harassment in her daily life, being sexually harassed on campus was shocking to her. It was a space she believed was safe and different from the world outside its walls. Her shock was amplified when she reported this incident to her professor, who belittled the situation after finding out it was "just verbal" harassment. Yet unlike most other female students, she did not stop there; in fact, she decided to pursue the matter further and inquire about the university's policy on sexual harassment. This single act of agency led to the realisation that further action needed to be taken.

Whereas agency has been defined by Giddens (1984) as individual action that breaks with norms, or establishes them for that matter, agency in feminist thought has developed from the transformation of passive female as op-

posed to active male from the sense of "embodied experience" to under-
standing agency in relation to power and ideology. Accordingly, the mere
fact that this woman had the courage to speak out and question the institution
is an important form of agency that cannot be overlooked. She was able to
realise the "power within", that is "the capacity to imagine and have hope"
which "affirms the common human search for dignity and fulfilment."
(VeneKlasen, Miller, 2007, p. 45). This individual agency of speaking out
and refusing the passive acceptance of a culture tolerant of sexual harass-
ment was the first catalyst to the creation of an anti-harassment policy as re-
sult of group agency.

Collective/communion agency

Graeme Simpson (2015, p. 524) contends that "challenging unjust policies
and practices" is an ethical duty. With this in mind, a group of academics
came together and drafted an anti-sexual harassment policy for Cairo Uni-
versity through collective agency. Feminist theory has developed sophisti-
cated theoretical frameworks that include multiple kinds of agency. The
move from individual to collective agency, to borrow Lois McNay words,
"necessarily relies on a certain type of political agency which, given that its
existence is not assured, must be created in individuals". In order to create
collective agency "attention to embodied experience should form part of a
'relational phenomenology' whose aim is to develop a practical and inten-
tional account of aspects of subjectivity and agency" (McNay, 2010, p. 518).
Martin Hewson defines collective agency as follows:

> Collective agency is when individuals collaborate to create collective enti-
> ties; insofar as such entities engage in effectual activity, they become col-
> lective agencies (Hewson, 2010, p. 12).

We see this definition of collective agency in the light of "phenomenologi-
cal relationship", which Finlay explains as follows: "The relational approach
to phenomenology … involves attending to four interlinked dimensions: open
presence, embodied intersubjectivity, dialogic co-creation and entangled
selves" (Finlay, 2009, p. 1). This adds complexity to collective agency, as this
phenomenological relation is not only a relation to existence and one's place
in the context and power relation, but rather it is the sum of each and every
group member with the context and with each other. Creating collective agen-
cy is based on "the mobilization of political consciousness and the fostering of
a willingness to engage in counter-hegemonic action" in each member of the

group (McNay, 2010, p. 3). That is, the transformation from individual agency to what Judy Marshall calls communion agency, where:

> Agency is an expression of independence through self-protection, self-assertion and control of the environment. Communion is the sense of being "at one" with other organisms or the context, its basis is integration, interdependence, receptivity (Marshall, 2001, p. 438).

Although women's agency has long been perceived as disruptive to hegemony and in particular to patriarchal systems, this group's agency was not merely impervious to norms, but rather, in making use of strategic tactics and capitalising on the socio-political context of that specific historical moment, they appeared to a great extent to be compliant to the context. These agents can be referred to as what Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, call "tempered radicals" (1995, p. 589). They are "outsiders within" having access to the "knowledge and insight of the insider with the critical attitude of the outsider" (Stonequist, 1937, p. 155, cited in Meyerson, Scully, 1995, p. 589).

Considering Jane Mansbridge's view of agency, where "the most effective way of inducing individuals into wider, deliberative political debate is, at the outset, to engage individuals and groups through a direct appeal to their own experiences and narrower concerns of recognition and interest" (Mansbridge, 1994, p. 57), we see that this was indeed the path to creating collective agency. Collective agency was formed by recognising the injustice, identifying systemic tolerance of sexual harassment, identifying common interests, devising strategies for action, and finally feeling able to act.

It is important here to speak about the individuals that formed this collective agency. The initial group advocating for an anti-sexual harassment policy were all accomplished academics; that is, they can really be called franchised agents. However, in the context of the university's hierarchy, none of them were part of the university's higher-level administration, and although they had access to decision makers, they themselves were not in the position to make decisions about the university. They were mostly women, already engaged in feminist activism. Finally, and most importantly they all shared the vision of a safe university. They did act: The group got together and drafted a policy to combat sexual harassment on campus. The policy was tailored to the context of the university and the Egyptian legal system and was presented making use of a "tempered radical" technique of "holding those in power to their own rhetoric and standards of fair play" (Meyerson, Scully, 1995, p. 596). Highlighting how the institutional culture was at odds with its

official mandate, which is to render Cairo University a safe space for all students, the policy was endorsed.

Whereas the endorsement of this policy on 22 June 2014, made Cairo University (a governmental body) the first national university to endorse an anti-harassment policy that commits to raising awareness about the problem and enforces disciplinary measures against offenders, it does not guarantee that the policy will be operationalised.

Transformative agency

When speaking of transformative agency here, is not really to speak about individual transformation or empowerment of women and girls on campus, but rather about institutional transformation. It is transformation from a system that allows and denies sexual harassment, to an institution that has zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Alissa Bierria's definition of transformative agency as "action intended to fundamentally overturn conditions of systematic oppression, especially through collective action," seems to be the most relevant, especially as this collective agency became transformational agency because it challenged "the structural and hermeneutic conditions that facilitate the displacement of some agents and the distortion of their actions." (Bierria, 2014, p. 139). Jaakko Virkkunen explains that transformative agency crosses established organisational boundaries since "Traditionally… agency in transforming work activities is ascribed to management and specialists, while grass-roots level practitioners are expected to focus on their tasks within the given frame of action rather than involving themselves in changing the structure of the activity system as a whole" (Virkkunen, 2006).

In conceptualising transformative agency, Monisha Bajaj (2018) presents a four-dimensional framework for agency to be transformative, naming them: sustained agency, relational agency, coalitional agency and strategic agency. If the Cairo University Antiharassment Unit is measured against this framework it becomes obvious that this collective agency has indeed affected change and became transformative agency. By analogy then, this group of professors were not expected to challenge administration nor propose policy, but rather focus on their academic research and teaching. However, introducing a policy that challenges inherent power structures and an institutional culture that denies the existence of sexual harassment cannot but be seen as effective transformational agency. Sustained agency is agency that is sustained across contexts and time, and that continues to grow and expand to include more agents. The antiharassment unit can fulfil this condition. The

endorsement of the policy, together with the establishment of the unit, cultivated agency even further. Awareness campaigns and the mobilisation of students and staff expanded the small nucleus of agents that started off the initiative to include "actors with varying and dynamic capacities for voluntary and willed action", fulfilling the description of "thick agency" (Klocker, 2007, p. 85). As for durability, the unique position of the unit as both part of the institution and yet the result of collective agency against the institution makes it a durable model. This dual state makes this model different from other initiatives as it has the consistency and authority of governmental bodies while it also has the skill and influence of internal champions. The autonomy of the university was another major factor for the success of this model as it gave the freedom and space to work with different partners away from any governmental restrictions.

Moving to relational agency, that is relational and enacted with others, we note that internal and external partnerships were formed to create more allies and solicit support. Each partnership not only increased the scope of agency, but it also supported its sustainability. While partnerships with donors, UN agencies and international organisations gave the unit credibility and financial support, partnership with other universities, created what Mansbridge (1994, p. 57) calls "deliberate enclaves". These "deliberate enclaves" both within the university and outside of it mobilised students and dispersed gender/women units, thus creating the third condition: coalitional agency. This is agency that attends to the boundedness of peoples, histories, cultures, and contexts (Chavez, Griffin, 2009). Bajaj (2018) defines "coalitional agency" as representing collective identity and a connection to a larger community. Therefore, the creation of a network with other universities in Egypt to now have 20 universities having anti-sexual harassment units replicating that of Cairo University and affecting the higher education system as a whole cannot but be seen as transformative. Creating joint students' camps that host students from different universities, for example, is not only connecting the "deliberate enclaves" but really is expressing a collective identity of students from across the country fighting sexual harassment on campuses.

Finally, these developments can be considered as strategic agency, that is strategic with regards to analyses of power, long-term consequences, and appropriate forms of action. As stated earlier, the whole initiative was based on strategic tactics. Not only was the policy presented as an opportunity for the university but also as contextually appropriate. One of the very first concerns the founding group had was to come up with a policy that is contextually relevant and that is comprehensive in addressing the entire university

community, whether teaching staff, students or administrative staff, bearing in mind the power structure of the university. However, it is important to note that there is no set menu for transformative agency. We need to understand that there are constantly shifting fields of power and fields of action that need new strategies and new tactics to confront discrimination and violence against women.

Conclusion

It is true, as Asef Bayat has indicated, that "effective movements need political opportunities to grow and operate" (Bayat, 2013, p. 2). That is, agency needs a context that is supportive. In the post-revolutionary times, the time was ripe to embark on such an important initiative, not only transforming Cairo University but impacting all of the higher education institutes in Egypt. The antiharassment unit at Cairo University made a bang. Being the first of its kind in the Middle East, it attracted a lot of attention. The support of the university administration and the association of the unit with the president of the university gave it power and authority. However, when this agency became formalised following internal regulations and was absorbed into the system, it lost many of its driving elements. This brings to mind Bourdieu's words when he says: "even the most subversive symbolic actions, if they are not to condemn themselves to failure, must reckon with dispositions, and with the limitations these impose on innovative imagination and action" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 234).

Looking at the formalised units and their effectiveness, it becomes obvious that, whether it is individual or collective, agency is the most important ingredient for their success. In several attempts to support the different university units, it has become clear that cultural change, especially in organisational cultures, is not achieved by decree but rather through passion and belief of the value of the cause. Trapped in the bureaucracy of the institutions and its several layers of power, most of the units have been diluted to a number of activities that claim media attention with no real impact on the elimination of sexual harassment on campuses. Regardless, of what may come of these antiharassment units, the Cairo University Unit remains a viable example of successful agency – an agency that empowered women to speak out and held universities accountable to them. It is an agency that challenges the power dynamics integral to universities, creating a safe campus for all – a transformative agency that sprang from *the belly of the beast*.

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Chapter 15
Between the Feminised Other and Black Women's Power

Tumi Mampane

Introduction

Between 2018 and 2020 I conducted a study of the constructions of femininity by African Pentecostal Charismatic churches. My interest was specifically in the women who attend these churches, as they are largely populated by women. Scholarship on Pentecostal women has identified the subjugation of the feminine (Ellece, 2011; KaNdlondlo, 2011; Mwaura, Parsitau, 2012; Pearce, 2012; Quiroz, 2016) but, in South Africa especially, it has not applied a Black feminist framework that gives the voice back to the women under study. Hence my employing and discussing the mostly Black theory that historicises, contextualises, and links Black feminist discourses to practice. This chapter is a reading of the theory that I bring to the flesh of Black women in my study of the constructions of femininity in Pentecostal churches in Alexandra township.

Previous research in Africa and Latin America has attributed the attractiveness of Charismatic Pentecostalism for women to the modernising of the Global South and to the "coping mechanisms" it offers (James, 2019; Martin, 2003). The Charismatic movement has been seen as a modernising instrument for women adapting to the "fast and furious economic, social, and cultural changes imposed on them by forces not of their own making" (Martin, 2003, p. 54). To other scholars, Charismatic Christianity is a haven for women as they grapple with what it means to be modern and to learn middle-class behaviour (Frahm-Arp, 2010; Sjørup, 2002). Pentecostalism is described by John Burdick (1990) as a space for women to articulate their domestic issues, and by Elizabeth Brusco (1986; 2010) and David Stoll (1990) as a women's movement that aims to domesticate men. To Andrew Chesnut (1997), the Charismatic movement's focus on healing is what attracts women, as the main caretakers of family and home. All of these reasons speak to women's relation to God, society and the self – and cannot be separated

from their womanhood. Yet I am inclined to take Annelin Eriksen's (2014) suggestion to analyse the Pentecostal space as one of "gendered values" that pushes our focus beyond the roles that women (and men) play in church and how much these translate into an egalitarianism. The literature cited above asks the questions: "why are women so numerically dominant in these churches, and why do men still hold on to leadership positions?" (Eriksen, 2014, p. 1). Such a focus limits the question of gendered values, as it assumes rather than questions what it means to be a woman, to occupy the spaces of femininity, and realise a gendered identity.

I step out of such assumptions in a number of ways. Firstly, I enter this research space as a subjective and embodied voice within the Charismatic Christian movement. Mine is a situated reading of the discourses that aim to fashion us as women coming into and also having grown up in the Charismatic practice. I also enter this space as an African feminist and womanist, interested in the complex, the nuanced and the historicised ways that intersect to create and influence gendered discourses. I use the plural for discourses because I argue that Charismatic Christianity is a contested space that does not neatly fit the binaries of a masculine versus feminine identity. Further, the multiple, sometimes paradoxical ways in which the women who participated in my project interact with these discourses and create their own, contradict the rigid assumptions of many Pentecostal scholars about feminine identities. This multiplicity should come as no surprise to anyone who has an interest in gender studies and to any woman who has lived, breathed and become. Nonetheless, I state this position as an entry into my centring of Black women and their experiences within and outside their Charismatic churches. Not only does this chapter discuss the complexities of taking on gendered identities but insists on recognising and finding the voice of these Black women in a way that does not other and objectify them. For it is another responsibility of Black feminist scholarship to find a voice in women that was always within them (Collins, 2000). I enter this space of research as a means to counteract the discussion of femininity as one that solely lies along the lines of agency as structure and power. I suggest, instead, that the feminine be seen as a multiplicity of relations, performativity, will and "flesh".

Beyond the feminised other

This multiplicity is further ignored when literature on Pentecostal Charismatic churches in Africa only gives light to a pattern of gendered religious discourse that feminises the subjugated other (Maluleke, Nadar, 2002; Nadar, 2005;

Frahm-Arp, 2015; Sande, 2019; Tuckey, Kretzchmar, 2002). Theologians also call into question the role of Christianity in constructing an inferior identity for African women. Elijah M. Baloyi (2008a; 2008b; 2010) writes extensively about the hindrances that biblical interpretations pose to African women's rights by giving men undue control over their bodies. Women, and Black women in particular, are amongst the poorest of the world's population and most subjected to violence, even from childhood. So, Ikenga Oraegbunam (2006) links the attitudes and beliefs that lead to the unfair biases against women to all of the major religions and cultural practices around the world, including Christianity. Women's identification with an inferior "other" has also been attributed to the patriarchal imagery of God as subjugating male ruler, justifying men's "natural" domination over women. Both men and women are seen as viewing and making sense of all structures of society through this understanding (Daly, 1985; Johnson, 1984; Shooter, 2014). But these and other studies that highlight women's and especially Black women's subjugation present just one view of femininity.

The feminine embodiment of culture, power relations and ideology can go beyond binary arguments for victim or victrix. When we investigate power networks and women's resistance to them, we must realise that "this relationship is far more complex than a simple model of permanent oppressors and perpetual victims" (Collins, 2000, p. 274). Having said this, I do not propose to completely abandon the issues of pain and internalised inferiority which have become so much part of Black women's constructed identity and of conversations about it. But I rather want to nuance the Black female experience and her modes of embodiment within the religious community in which she chooses to congregate.

That there can be an alternative to the Black African feminine identity of inferiority and subjugated other brings us to the discussion of what gender identities are. This I do firstly by investigating the relations between religion, discourse, power and the law in order to historicise and map the creation of Black African women's gendered identities and how they are justified. These links also bring us to an understanding of how Black African women may have a hand in the embrace of oppressive power systems as they try to gain status and recognition. Embodiments bring us to understanding performativity as creating, sustaining but also revealing the very fragility of respectable gender.

It is in this discussion of the strategic performances of gender that I bring in Judith Butler, as the only theorist in this chapter who is not a Blackwoman – I use the term Blackwomen as a collective of womanist, Black feminist

and African feminist thought. I am aware that the oft-cited *Gender Trouble* by Butler (1990) was criticised by Paula M. L. Moya (1997) as having appropriated Cherrie Moraga with the sole purpose of pushing a postmodernist agenda. Moya sees Butler's reading of Moraga as dismissive of "the necessity of theorizing the connections between (and not simply ranking) the different kinds of oppression that people suffer" (Moya, 1997, p. 134). Moya critiques postmodernity and Butler on the grounds that concluding the identity of the feminine subject as "unstable, shifting and contradictory" makes it difficult to account for experience and "make[s] it difficult to figure out who is … the 'oppressed' and who is the 'oppressor'" (Moya, 1997, p. 134).

I still choose to engage with Butler's theorising of gender as contradictory, unstable and shifting, in conversation with Danai Mupotsa's reading of the re/production of African women's gender in white weddings, as a necessary way of seeing and understanding Black African femininity in its incompleteness. Where this may seem paradoxical, there comes our responsibility as Blackwomen researchers to read the personal as political within the whispers of the subaltern. This close reading of paradoxes is one I deem vital to my attending to the fullness of African women's experiences.

African gender discourses: Religion, culture and the law

Sylvia Tamale relates Christian, Judaic and Islamic texts (which she groups as "Messianic religious") to the current laws and policies in several African countries. Since in Africa there is a "tendency … to adopt an institutionalised and organic union between religion and the state" (Tamale, 2011, p. 157), Tamale asserts a link between the three realms of the law, religion and culture, which she sees as working together to control African bodies. The control of bodies tends to weigh more heavily on women, as they are a means to the growth and sustenance of patriarchal capitalism. Men, who are often the heads of households, tend to have economic power and control over women and children; and women free men to be active in industry and politics through the unpaid domestic labour of taking care of home and children. Keeping the domestic and public power bases this way means keeping women's sexuality under surveillance and creating laws with double standards for women and men. The laws on adultery are one such way of controlling African women and their bodies – ensuring the monogamy of women means that the paternity and legitimacy of children who are to inherit the wealth of a successful patriarch are not in question. And of course, ensuring that it is male children who stand to inherit wealth also keeps this cycle going.

Tamale uses the broader term "sexuality" as:

> A wide array of complex elements, including sexual knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours, as well as procreation, sexual orientation, and personal/interpersonal sexual relations. It touches a wide range of other issues, including pleasure, the human body, dress, self-esteem, gender identity, power and violence. It is an all-encompassing phenomenon that involves the human psyche, emotions, physical sensations, communication, creativity and ethics (Tamale, 2011, p. 151).

And so, she maintains that how and with whom we "do" sexuality as Africans is largely influenced by religion, culture and the law. Tamale (2011) also argues that the workings of these domains to uphold the political and economic status quo make their link a political one. Hence, she names the two largest religions in Africa – Islam and Christianity – "political religions" and notes that they often set aside their differences in doctrine to come together in defence of conservative "truths" on respectable sexuality.

Evangelical movements are a great influence on this perspective on sexuality, together with other Christian and Islamic movements and traditions. Marrying this conservative religious discourse to African culture and the law is how many Africans embody hegemonic discourses on sexual behaviour. It is also how Black African women (and men) who have "failed" to uphold this set of moralistic discourses on sexuality are pushed to the periphery of society. Tamale uses former South African President Zuma's rape case as one example of how the embodiment of the Messianic "punishment for adultery" influenced the inclusion of the victim's sexual history in the evidence, even though this inclusion was an infringement of her Constitutional rights. Other countries in Africa have also embraced and integrated conservative religious discourse on sexuality within their laws as a means of enforcing what "conservative religious fundamentalists" (Tamale, 2011, p. 156) refer to as defending morality. Cited in Tamale's argument are Uganda's law against homosexuality, and the erosion of the right of women to have safe abortions in Nigeria.

Sexuality, as Jessica Horn points out, is and has been a point of definition, control and violation of African women's bodies, where first a colonising and later a modernising agenda has been enforced. African women, consequently, have to live a respectability based on domesticity that "reinforce[s] the idea that the 'proper' or 'real' African woman is a woman who is heterosexual, married, bears children, and more often than not, pleases her husband sexually" (Horn, 2006, p. 9). Horn also sees this narrative as furthered by Vatican and Pentecostal arguments of what is "biblically correct"

being taken up for support of what is "culturally correct" according to the African leaders who decide on legislation. Horn writes about the need for the sexual rights of women to be recognised and uplifted.

In *African Sexualities*, Tamale (2011) echoes this "rights" discourse. She also expresses a need for attending to the nuances of African sexuality in research. Foregrounding the so-called exotically African body is as vicious as keeping research on African sexualities within the safe boundaries of health and violence. Sexualities are to be discussed as African stories told by Africans in their own terms: stories of pleasure, rights, desires, agency and so forth. They are to be stories told responsibly and ethically by moving away from the stereotypes promoted by centuries of colonial and Western thought of what Africa is and what Africans represent. Our stories are also to represent a plurality of sexualities without shying away from the intricate and vital links between sexuality and gender. These links continue to inform, after all, the power relations and dynamics within our continent.

The relationship between sexuality and gender affects the choices of those who conform to the laws of respectability and has consequences for those who choose to defy and challenge these laws. As Chipo Hungwe (2006) outlines, these laws are never static but change over time and with circumstances. Hungwe reviews the transition of the binary "respectable" versus "unrespectable" definitions of femininity from colonial times in Southern Africa through to the present. At each historical point, the changes to what is respectable have been made to serve patriarchal agendas and result in the gaining and loss of respectability by certain women. A respectable woman is given a certain level of "honour" whereas the unrespectable woman is seen as a deviant and labelled a "prostitute" by society – be it in urban or rural settings, and in politics, academia and the home. In my own research on Pentecostal women in Alexandra Township, discussions of respectable dress codes show how, as in Hungwe's study, they reiterate such dominant constructions of respectability. Their use of the term "prostitute" is often a signifier of "othered" women who are underserving of a respectable status.

Tamale questions the laws of a respectable sexuality/womanhood in an article on the Ugandan "miniskirt law" by speaking of the eroticising of the female body through the control of dress:

> Ironically, the law that was passed ostensibly to protect women from violence was fuelling it. It emboldened Ugandans to abuse women's rights. The already appropriated feminine body was turned into a site for further socio-political contestation (Tamale, 2011, pp. 86–87).

Evelyn Lutwama-Rukundo contends that it is fear that fuels and justifies these moral codes. Male and female moralists fear that "skimpy clothes will unleash female sexuality and free the female body from the tight clutches of patriarchy" (Lutwama-Rukundo, 2016, p. 55). Yet, even within the crippling confines of a closely guarded morality, African women such as Sheeba Karungi – the subject of Lutwana-Rukondo's article – continue to dress in "skimpy attire" as a means of asserting their agency. Sheeba is a Ugandan musician and performer whose performances and public appearances are highly sexualised and eroticised. Lutwama-Rukundo associates Sheeba's sexual confidence with her agency as a woman and argues that Sheeba's style of music and dress is an engagement in "explicit sexual advocacy" (Lutwama-Rukundo, 2016, p. 58).

Whether African women are conforming to or resisting the moralistic codes placed on their beauty and fashion, their bodies are always a site of cultural, religious, and legal contention. African women's sexual choices and their bodiness are highly socialised and conditioned (Dosekun, 2016). How women see themselves is always in relation to how others may see them. Beauty, respectability, and fashion are fitted into discourses that always call women's agency into question, and that keep women's bodies as the colony of gendered discourses. Freeing African women's bodies from this gendered colonisation requires what Pumla Dineo Gqola (2007) calls a "historicized feminist undoing".

Colonisation and apartheid sowed violence into the fabric of South African society, and the patriarchal structure of both Black and white communities had this violence and militarisation playing out along gendered lines. These are problems that continue to haunt us. Gqola notes the dangers of power relations reproduced by gendered discourse, which "in the South African public sphere are very conservative in the main: they speak of 'women's empowerment' in ways that are not transformative, and as a consequence, they exist very comfortably alongside overwhelming evidence that South African women are not empowered" (Gqola, 2007, p. 115). These discourses force Black South African women into a "cult of femininity" (Gqola, 2007, p. 116) that ensures that even the select few chosen for positions of economic and political power adapt to the current structural systems rather than transform them. The "cult of femininity" also keeps South Africa's violent culture and structure of power in place to silence abused women; it keeps women in compliance with a patriarchal and homophobic system; and has women limit their movements in an attempt to protect themselves from gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence has been elevated to a culture. It is being repeated to a state of normality and has been backgrounded to build and (re)produce the "female fear factory" (Gqola, 2015, p. 76). This constant and repeated action ensures that fear is manufactured in mass form, rendering all – women who will be or are already victims, and all those who wish to interrupt this cycle of violence – vulnerable to its dangers. The "female fear factory" presents itself as rape, the shaming of sexuality and fashion choices, and all forms of policing women and vulnerable others.

It is through this control – physical and cultural – that we can bring in a discussion of embodiments and their fleshing out by recontextualising Hortense J. Spillers. So, considering the "factory" as one of ownership and the "female" as the occupied – Spillers' "captive" – then the body "focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join" (Spillers, 1987, p. 67). But Spillers goes on to argue that this convergence is disturbed by outside forces that lead the captive into degrees of reduction: from being a thing for the captor; to a physical other; and finally, an embodiment of powerlessness "that slides into a more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning" (*Ibidem*). The convergence and its disturbances lead Spillers to distinguishing between body and flesh, as a means to see the difference between the captive and the free. Spillers defines the very act of capture, the torture and pain that is enacted in the capturing as one that is done to the flesh of the Black body, extended to mean the flesh of the Black woman.

Let me use another illustration of the flesh and the body of Black women. In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, Sister Emmanuel calls Tambu and her African dormitory mates in to reassure them that the government quotas will not affect them. She says, "whatever memoranda they send us, we aren't going to chop anyone in half, nor in any other portion" (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 73) and the words are recognised as a crude joke to which the girls "giggle". But Tambu is also angered by these words and wonders how and why Sister Emmanuel sees it fit to "[talk] to us like that, making jokes about our flesh and how some people thought it was divisible. Or else it was all lumped as one: your flesh fractioned or piled together!" (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 74). The flesh of the girls in this illustration is a site of dismembering. Physically dismembered from themselves (when cut in half or other portions) and from their group classification (when all are lumped as one) but also socially dismembered from their bodies (if we consider the body in Spillers' sense of liberation).

When the Black woman's flesh is considered a site for and of the captor, then the violence that is enacted on it is violence justified. The flesh can be torn apart by rape, torture, shaming and policing. The flesh can also be lumped into one Black woman form and is so when anthropology ignores the interior lives of Black women. This form can be portioned into whatever parts the captor then sees fit. This form includes the universalising of Black women's pain.

Women's power then, where the Black female form is concerned, becomes an attempt to re-member the flesh into a liberated body.

Gender as performativity

Judith Butler speaks of "performativity" to describe the acts and actions that inform and maintain gender identities. She argues that on one level is the awaiting of an authority to prescribe what it is to be, and the building up of that very prescription in the anticipation of it. We create the phenomenon of gender as though it were external, when in fact every action we take in anticipation of a gender prescription is the very production of gender. On the next level is our repeated practice, our "doing" and ritualising of gender that gives it a "naturalised" state through our embodiments (Butler, 1990). This performativity does not only happen within and for ourselves but through an existing frame which we know and see through the discourses and actions of those before and amongst us. We perform for ourselves, and we perform out of a desire to receive recognition. We see ourselves to have achieved "being human", and properly so, when our performance allows us its socially recognisable normality. Gender performativity, according to Butler, is a field of struggles.

To be a woman "is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman", to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialise oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler 1988, p. 522; emphasis in original). This material-self manifests itself in differing ways. The construction of femininity is never complete because it "becomes a productive, embodied constituting of the self" (Mupotsa, 2015b, p. 191). Butler uses the word "strategy" to account for the pressures under which performing gender takes place. I will use Danai Mupotsa's study of "white weddings" in Southern Africa as an example of strategy where marriage rites are one way in which femininity can be strategically re/produced (Mupotsa, 2014; 2015a; 2015b).

The Black bride presents herself through wedding rituals, dress, and photography in a personhood opposing the popular discourse of gendered and racialised other. The white wedding is a way of controlling her body by prescribing whiteness as the racial norm or ideal. Whiteness also controls sexuality because it represents purity. Mupotsa contends that the achievement of femininity requires heterosexuality and work towards beauty. Comparing heterosexuality to drag, Butler (1993) suggests that they are similar in their imitation of gender. Where drag is an obvious, or even exaggerated form of imitation, it is no different from heterosexuality, which constantly imitates and reproduces itself to maintain the status of originality and respectability. Drag (like the white weddings Mupotsa studies) is not an idealisation of the original in heterosexual gender forms because heterosexuality correspondingly aims to imitate an idealisation of itself. Like drag and the wedding, heterosexuality needs constant repetition to reach a completeness it can never attain in its efforts to claim originality and respectability. Yet, unlike the white wedding, drag exposes the anxieties of the heterosexual claim to normality by foregrounding what the respectable gender tries to exclude. But heterosexual and white normalities expose themselves through the white wedding as the not quite stable, never complete desire for the proper, to which Mupotsa draws our attention. In her conclusion, Mupotsa (2014) calls out the failures of this strategy of the proper human as "not simply failure" but a critique that exposes and makes fragile that which respectability tries to exclude.

I examine this materialisation of Christian women as they enter the Pentecostal space in obedience, or a negotiation thereof. Their femininities are in process and a project which may be of their choosing, but the choices are given by the discourses and practices of the churches in which they congregate: what do Charismatic women foreground in their performance and re/production of a respectable femininity and what do they exclude are two of the questions I tried to answer in my study of Pentecostal women in Alexandra Township. I observed and conversed with Charismatic Christian women to come to an understanding of their performativity, desire and interaction with the discourses of their respective churches. I also examine the roles, attitudes and stereotypes within Charismatic discourses that aim to build the gender identities of these women congregants. Yet part of finding the answers to the questions of femininity and of the fragility of heterosexuality is not only dependant on knowing the existence of gender performativity but also requires bringing to the fore women's voices even when they whisper.

The responses I received from the women in my study problematise the strict binaries presented by the studies on African Pentecostal women and

gender ideologies within the Pentecostal church. I do not have the space here to offer a full summary of my research in this chapter, which focuses on its theoretical framework and implications. One example I can provide is these women's relation to the biblical messages that tell them to submit to men. One of my participants, Magauta says and believes that the headship of men is in the Bible, and she is reluctant to contradict what she calls the "Word of God", but she does not see herself as inferior or fit to play a subservient role. Where men have been given headship, Magauta sees that women are given wisdom – the wisdom she believes is used by women to have men do what the women want. Sibongile also thinks that women are equal to men. Her response shows that she believes that she contributes as much as her husband to their household and that she expects him to assist her in roles traditionally assigned to women, like washing the dishes. But she does not tell her husband that they are equal. The problem is in saying "50/50"[1] out loud.

Where Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse (2015) and Sarojini Nadar and Cheryl Potgieter (2010) find Pentecostal hermeneutics to be uncritical of the context in which the Bible was written and that sermons by preachers apply the patriarchal context of the Bible to the lives of twenty-first-century women, the words of the women with whom I speak add nuance to these arguments. It may be true that some pastors are literal in their interpretation of the Bible, but the women to whom these sermons are directed do contextualise the text in their own twenty-first-century, personal ways. Theirs is not a literal application of literal interpretations of biblical texts, but a negotiation of the text to suit their daily needs, all the while avoiding conflict with men and the discourses of their churches. As reluctant as they are to outwardly use words that contradict biblical texts, they believe in and practice what they consider equality within their homes. I agree to some extent with Nadar and Potgieter (2010) that the women's reluctance to be critical of the texts which oppress them is a form of "patriarchal bargaining". But this is not done in the cut and dried way suggested by these scholars, where women offer servitude in exchange for care from their husbands. Instead, the women are willing to call their husbands the "heads" in exchange for what they consider equality in the way that household roles are undertaken and decisions are made.

The issue of male headship and female subordination is further problematised with stories such as that of another one of my participants, Lucy, a 45-year-old mother of one who has been married for ten years. Her husband is not Pentecostal. In fact, when they first got married, they both participated in

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[1] 50/50 is a colloquial term used popularly to signify gender equality.

indigenous religious practices, including consulting *sangomas* and communicating with and making sacrifices for their ancestors. Lucy converted to Pentecostalism without him.

Lucy:

Go bile uncomfortable for yena kabane re kopane re sa kene kereke. It was difficult for yena even le for nna because o-believela ko madlozing. It was difficult but now I feel like I've conquered something nyana. I had to speak to my husband and explain to him that now I'm born again so I don't do this, and I don't do those madlozi things[2] … like that. That's why kere it was difficult at first because hape I was not working. He told me he will stop giving me money since I want to be a mzalwane, and I said it's fine, God will provide. And I don't know what happened but here we are – I have a job, and when things are happening with their family, they don't invite me coz they know I won't eat food prepared for ancestors. Ngwana otsamaya lenna kerekeng and she also doesn't get involved in ancestral worship. Now he understands where I stand. I believe hore one day watla mo. I know he will also one day be born again; I pray to God for that. My duty as a wife is to pray, not force him, and Modimo will do the rest.

[It was uncomfortable for him because when we met, we both didn't go to church. It was difficult for us both because he believes in ancestral worship. It was difficult, but now I feel like I've achieved a small victory. I had to speak to my husband and explain to him that now I'm born again so I don't do this, and I don't practise ancestral worship. That's why I say it was difficult at first because I also was not working. He told me he will stop giving me money since I want to be a born again, and I said it's fine God will provide. And I don't know what happened but here we are – I have a job, and when things are happening with their family, they don't invite me because they know I won't eat food prepared for ancestors. Our child attends church with me and she also doesn't get involved in family traditions. Now he understands where I stand. I believe that one day he will come here – to church. I know he will also one day be born again; I pray to God for that. My duty as a wife is to pray, not force him, and God will do the rest.]

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[2] Conversion to Pentecostalism, being a monolithic religion, is considered a rejection of indigenous African practices. Pentecostals are mostly warned against worshiping or communicating with ancestors as it is a practice believed to contradict the omnipresent power of God.

Taking biblical texts literally or panel-beating Pentecostalism to African traditional concepts would mean Lucy leaving the church to follow her husband's beliefs as the head. Or at least allowing her child to take part in the family's ancestral rituals. Instead, Lucy celebrates a small victory which she sees as God's own doing – her husband now accepts her conversion and she managed to get a job when he tried to use financial abuse to coerce her. Lucy's story is an example of how agency is exerted by these women when they truly believe in something, as she believed in her conversion. Agency is especially exerted even when Lucy knows that she stands to lose the favour of her husband's family – who no longer include her in important traditional rituals.

Lucy does believe in wifely duties, but not in the sense that an inferior place is taken up by her. She applies her role as wife in prayer, believing that her husband will one day follow her to Charismatic Christianity. Thus, how these women interpret and perform their Pentecostalism is close to Martin Lindhardt's (2015) assessment of Tanzanian Pentecostalism, where a negotiated gender construction allows for a reformed, harmonious private life balanced with power and respectability for men in public. Lindhart says that Tanzanian Pentecostal men give a public appearance of power and respectability but aim for a private life of harmony where decisions are taken between themselves and their wives in an equal manner. The married Pentecostal women of Alexandra who participated in this study negotiate their place through a public persona of submission, while their private lives are lived out in a more egalitarian manner. It is this interplay between submission and agency that brings about the need to further study the paradox of Pentecostal femininity. Do we call Pentecostal women oppressed by the discourse of their churches or liberated by their choosing how to interact with it? Or what if we did neither, instead meeting them as analysts and researchers at the very place of their "subaltern" voices. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (1988) writes about the need to know the voice and the speech acts of the subaltern – as opposed to fitting her, by the violent forces of epistemology, to either the romantic aspects of defending tradition and religion or the so-called liberating aspects of modernity and imperialism. Spivak challenges the woman intellectual to dig deeper into this "circumscribed task" and not "disown [it] with a flourish" (Spivak, 1988, p. 104).

Wilful whispers

Mupotsa speaks of the self-presentation of Black African women as brides, and Butler of the strategies to perform gender for gaining recognition. Both

bring to our attention a sense of agency and the pressures that expose but also attempt to disguise the instability of gender. To define femininities as both power and failure, as proper but incomplete, and as choice but also obedience, makes the situation of women a paradoxical one. If paradox is to be understood as lacking in logic, or the absurd, then all who are defined or identify as women become the illustration of absurdity.

Bhuvaneswari's suicide is the subject of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's (1988) interrogation of feminine absurdity in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Hers is the story of a tragedy that could have easily been written off as a failure of respectability but for the timing of her suicide – Bhuvaneswari took her own life while menstruating: proof that she was not pregnant and therefore not attempting to escape the shame of an illicit pregnancy. It was later found out that Bhuveneswari was a member of a group fighting for the independence of India, tasked to assassinate but choosing rather to die. Hence the absurdity of a young woman proving respectability by disrespecting the "privilege" of a *sati* suicide. This suicide was a sacrifice of widows, practised historically by Hindus in South Asia, where the widow was placed on her husband's funeral pyre. The act was considered one of heroic sacrifice by a devoted wife. How absurd to die by one's own hand – agentic and wilful – to escape a task, but also to be re-membered (by family and comrades) as loyal to the cause for independence, faithful to a husband she was yet to have, and respectful to her culture. Bhuvenaswari becomes a representation of absurdity. Hers is a story of an incomplete life: a young woman who fights to die in a body considered pure and kept for proper relations with a husband, but impure because she bleeds. Absurd that a woman's cycle is both impure and proof of purity. Absurd that a woman who makes such a bold statement is voiceless.

In (re)writing the story of Bhuveneswari's suicide, Spivak invites us to listen closely to her wilful whisper. I see this story, and the question "can the subaltern speak?" as a necessary reminder for us to listen rather than take part in the epistemological quest to colonise the subaltern body. For between our necessary feminist pursuits to question the institutions that define gender in the name of patriarchy are the whispers of those we stand and fight for. These whispers are a negotiation of resistance and recognition. If we listen closely, we can avoid the mistake of celebrating the subaltern whisper as fully agentic. But if we listen closely, we can also avoid the mistake of naming the Black feminine body as hopelessly oppressed.

Reading the question of desire closely also means listening to the cultural politics of emotion. I borrow from Sara Ahmed (2014a) here to read bodies

as being shaped by contact with others and to connect agency with will: will "as a condition of possibility for human freedom" as well as a "moral faculty" (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 60). It is in reading will as a pursuit of good that I hear and observe my Charismatic participants' voices and their attempts at bending even the wills and the desires they consider to be out of *their* bounds of morality. I read their wilful desires for freedom, and happiness, within the cracks of complying to hegemony and asserting difference.

If we consider that "not only does the will exist, but the existence of the will is required for a subject to be good, or to live in accordance with God's will" (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 60), is Bhuveneswari wilful then? Are the Pentecostal women with whom I interact wilful too? All seem to be caught within the patriarchal discourses of their communities that render them suicidal in their individuality and wilfulness. Theirs is a voice that whispers loudly between the calls to end patriarchy and their commitment to "the moral teachings about obedience, love, and humility that have usually buttressed presuppositions about living the Christian life" (Williams, 2006, p. 122).

The voice of the subaltern whispers through the colonised body of femininity. The coloniser of the feminine body is the discourse which asserts men as powerful and as "heads". The feminine body is taught the morals of obedience, love and humility. To exist within the colonised space is to co-exist at least in part with the discourse that renders the feminine speechless. The women do not speak against the interpretations of the biblical text that call them inferior and other. But they do not accept them in practice either. Theirs is a silent resistance that allows them the claim to a performativity of materialising into acceptable women (Butler, 1988).

Listening closely can redefine the paradox of Black African femininity as not absurd but rather conflicted in the yearning for freedom.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by problematising not only how pain is used to universalise the Black feminised other but also the tendency to employ pain as the only Black African feminine experience. Exposing how religion, culture and the law employ gendered discourses to sustain constraining patriarchal systems is important as it uncovers the roots of this pain. But it is equally important to do also what Sylvia Tamale asks of Blackwomen researchers: to nuance Black women's sexuality beyond health, oppression, and pain. This nuance brings us into conversation with the identities women create for themselves to resist or conform to the laws of sexuality. Nuancing experi-

ences also requires our digging into the histories that build these experiences so that we can enter an analysis of the Black African feminine body as a colonial site and in an attempt at re-memberance.

Behaviour and choices then are more than just what Black women do and have. They are an unstable place, a struggle for recognition, and a strategy of self-constituting. The performative is both production and seeking. Hence, Mupotsa's contention that femininities are never complete. I draw a paradox from this reading of incompleteness within recognition. Theories of performativity and becoming open questions about African women that are more nuanced than the conclusions of most studies of African women by white scholars: "African women are … [fill in the gap]". My knowledge of Black African women as incomplete, struggling, wilful, obedient, silent, resistant, all at the same time, is the starting point of my finding their voices, even when they crack, and even when they whisper.

So, in this chapter I have sought to use Blackwomen theory to redefine Black women's voices and power – not because giving voice back to the women with whom I converse is solely in my and other Blackwomen theorists' hands, but because I am ever more convinced of the importance of Blackwomen theoretical frameworks as a necessity for the foregrounding of Black women's experiences. It is out of this necessity that I enter the cracks between the Black feminised other and Black women's power.

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The first part of the volume collects nine chapters based on nine empirical studies in the field of social and political sciences with very diverse spheres of enquiry such as migration and urban studies, religious practices, informal labour, elites, and analysis of public policies. The second part consists of six chapters focusing on media, cultural and gender studies, and analysing the culturally mediated versions of agency, revealed in specific practices and sites, as well as in activist, theoretical and (auto)ethnographic interventions.

The book is the product of the collaboration between the University of Naples L'Orientale (UNIOR) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and was edited by Antonio Pezzano and Daniela Pioppi from the CeSAC at the Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies, at UNIOR, and Varona Sathiyah and Pier Paolo Frassinelli, from the Department of Communication and Media at UJ.