

The Governance of Daily Life in Africa

Ethnographic Explorations of Public and Collective Services

Giorgio Blundo
Pierre-Yves Le Meur

(editors)

AFRICAN SOCIAL STUDIES SERIES



The Governance of Daily Life in Africa

African Social Studies Series

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By

Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Le Meur



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2009

Cover: Photograph by Giorgio Blundo.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The governance of daily life in Africa : ethnographic explorations of public and collective services / [edited] by Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Lemeur.

p. cm. — (African social studies series ; v. 19)

ISBN 978-90-04-17128-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Local government—Africa, Sub-Saharan. 2. Public-private sector cooperation—Africa, Sub-Saharan. 3. Local government—Africa, Sub-Saharan—Case studies. 4. Public-private sector cooperation—Africa, Sub-Saharan—Case studies. I. Blundo, Giorgio. II. Le Meur, Pierre-Yves, 1962—

JS7525.G673 2008

320.80967—dc22

2008029645

ISSN 1568-1203

ISBN 978 90 04 17128 2

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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PREFACE

Governance belongs to the category of ‘catch-all’ concepts regularly marketed or recycled by the developing world. The heuristic potential of the word is questionable and its normative load inescapable. However, viewed as an ‘emic’ category and discursive resource, it deserves closer scrutiny, as does the development apparatus at large. Clearly, everyday life is a more promising area of research from an ethnographic point of view. Our project leaned on the idea of linking the two terms in an exploration of how men and women deal with the governance of mundane issues in their daily lives—e.g. waste management, access to water, health care, land, etc.—and, moreover, in wide-ranging contexts, including refugee camps which tragically happen to represent a common situation in Africa (and elsewhere): in other words how they collectively and individually govern themselves in their daily lives.

The origins of the project can be traced back to a conference on “The governance of daily life in Africa: public and collective services and their users” jointly organised by the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD) and the *Africa-Studiecentrum* (ASC) and was held in Leiden on 22–25 May 2002. APAD is a network that promotes dialogue between African and European researchers in the social sciences and with development agents. Initially devoted to the empirical studies of interaction brought about by development, APAD’s approach has evolved into research on social change on the African continent in its broadest sense.¹ The 8th APAD Conference in Leiden² was a key event in that respect and we wholeheartedly thank both the organising committee and all of the contributors to the conference. Fifty-seven papers were selected from countries covering all of Sub-Saharan Africa.³

¹ The *APAD Bulletin* can be downloaded from www.revues.org.

² After Paris (1991), Montpellier (1992), Bamako (1994), Stuttgart (1996), Louvain-la-Neuve (1997), Cotonou (1998) and Saint-Louis (2000). Leiden was followed by Yaoundé (2005) and Tervuren (2007). Next stop: Ouagadougou (2009).

³ Thomas Bierschenk, Giorgio Blundo, Mirjam de Bruijn, Han van Dijk, Stephen Ellis and Pierre-Yves Le Meur were the members of the scientific committee in charge of the organisation of the Leiden conference.

One objective of this book was to bridge the gap between the English-speaking and French-speaking traditions in social anthropology: English-speaking here means ‘non French-speaking’ as the ‘Anglophone authors’ of this book are Swedish, Dutch, Ghanaian, German, British and American, and the French-speaking side includes authors from Italy, Niger, and even Brittany. This achievement was made possible by our two translators, Fadhila Idir Le Meur and Susan Cox. We would like to thank them most sincerely for their fine work in rendering the francophone contributions to this volume in fluent English and for their readiness to answer quickly and accurately the questions that arose in the process of revising the proofs.

Our gratitude for financial support for the translation and publication is also due to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

*Giorgio Blundo & Pierre-Yves Le Meur
Marseilles & Nouméa, August 2008*

INTRODUCTION

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EVERYDAY GOVERNANCE: COLLECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY AND SUBJECT-MAKING

Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Le Meur

The state in Africa has undergone dramatic change in recent decades. Weakened by structural adjustment policies, discredited by corruption and contested by the parallel bureaucracies created by the system of international co-operation, its administrative services lack motivated staff and the necessary resources to function and struggle to fulfil the tasks which are, in principle, central to the role of the state. The doctrine of 'good governance' may appear to be no more than a new condition attached to foreign aid, however it is becoming the sole point of reference, on which any critique of the state may be based. This normative concept—defined as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development” (World Bank 1992: 1)—refers to a political regime that respects human and civil rights and can rely on an effective, competent, responsible and incorrupt bureaucracy to implement its measures. It incorporates both a technical dimension (in the sense of improved public administration) and highly political elements. The latter, which take the form of the narrow link proposed between sustainable economic development and the establishment of the rule of law based on the model of the Western democracies, are the less explicit of the two. The very notion of governance as it is used in development parlance is paradoxical: it recommends a vigorous civil society to counter-balance and control a state which is always suspected of various shortcomings, but also leaves unspoken the specific role of social forces in this process, tending to concentrate on the production of technical rules for the efficient administration of public services.

Despite the existence of a vast literature on 'good governance', current debates remain strongly organised along dualistic lines. On the one hand, we find research produced by institutions closely connected to the World Bank, endowed with a rich statistical apparatus

and aiming to show that “governance matters” (Kaufmann, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton 1999; see Schacter 2000 too)—possibly to legitimate this new modality of aid conditionality. As opposed to these normative and instrumental conceptions of governance as “sound development management” (World Bank 1992: 1), radical and poststructuralist critics (for example Escobar 1995) stress the hegemonic nature of development narratives without analysing actual practices. As a result, deconstructivist approaches suffer from both ethnographic anaemia and historical amnesia (Moore 2000: 659). We also feel uncomfortable with excessively schematic theses which tend to either ‘euphemise’ or ‘pathologise’ the dysfunction of the states in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa (see, for example, Chabal & Daloz 1999 or Bayart et al. 1999).

This book proposes to go beyond the notion of ‘good governance’ to explore empirically the meanings behind the concept of governance when it is relieved of its normative elements. As we will see below, the concept of governance is neither recent, nor solely dedicated to legitimate exogenous reforms aimed at transforming dysfunctioning bureaucracies into providers of quality public services. Policy analysts in the North have used this term since the 1970s to highlight the emergence of actors who do not belong to the traditional governmental sphere, but still play a part in the control of the public affairs and establish complex (antagonistic, complementary or juxtapositional) relationships with the state. In other words, the notion of governance would apply to situations in which “ordering is neither restricted to the state, nor located in its ‘other’, that is in traditional or local/indigenous institutions” (Eckert, Dafinger & Behrends 2003: 19).

The contributions in this book describe and analyse in very concrete terms the institutional and political processes stemming from the provision of a number of public, collective and communal goods or services by individual actors and social groups, be they state, parastate, or private in nature. They deal with a range of topics such as health (*Gruénais, Okalla & Gawrit*), water supply (*Tidjani Alou*), sanitation and waste management (*Bouju, Obrist van Eeuwijk, van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh*), education (*Fresia*), security (*Hornberger*), humanitarian aid (*Fresia, Turner*), access to land (*Nauta*) and taxation and local government reform (*Becker*) and aim to address a number of questions concerning: 1) the identification of the actors involved in the constitution of, or exclusion from, these processes and the criteria of eligibility or legitimacy applied; 2) the ways in which the rules for such services are produced, debated, transformed and controlled; and 3) the ways in which the services

themselves are performed, i.e. the precise situations and the range of technical, economic and political factors involved.

These empirical questions are explored in a variety of contexts. The objective is not only to reach an understanding of how social actors administer or steer their affairs, but also to identify and examine the discourses they produce in connection with these practices and the representations and models of strategic behaviour they develop in relation to the other actors involved, be they associated with the state or not. The case studies are taken from a range of national settings in Francophone and Anglophone Africa: i.e. Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Malawi, Niger, Senegal (with reference to Mauritanian refugees in *Fresia*), South Africa and Tanzania (with reference to Burundian refugees in *Turner*). They deliberately bypass the rural-urban divide, which would appear to be largely irrelevant as far as governance and the delivery of state services are concerned. The rural-urban pairing should instead be conceived in terms of “connection” (Geschiere & Gugler 1998) and of the flows of individuals, norms, ideas and resources that contribute to the reshaping of the issue of collective and public services. The case studies also try to go beyond the traditional dichotomies between the centre and periphery and local and global levels: instead, they opt for a ‘meso’ point of view, observing at intermediary levels how the different logics (of the central state, international and national NGOs, local bureaucracies, grassroots associations, etc.) interact in the daily delivery of public services (see also Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003: 150).

We are, of course, aware of the heterogeneities between the chapters. We believe, however, that they contribute to the relevance of this collection as they provide complementary perspectives on governance and collective services. Furthermore, beyond the differences of approach—ranging approximately from methodological interactionism going back to Barth and Bailey to more Foucauldian perspectives—all of the texts focus on history and social processes and deal with specific technologies of governance that form a common ground for interventions and policies, which are otherwise driven by a variable combination of state, economic and third sector actors and instances. These technologies belong to the discursive and social field of participation (Callon et al. 2001, Mosse 2003, Ackerman 2004) which includes a wide array of negotiation forums, committees and associative forms. All these technologies of government are found in highly diverse contexts of public and collective service delivery via development projects, political

or administrative decentralisation, humanitarian intervention, private entrepreneurship or grassroots organisations. As well as that of political mechanisms of accountability and legitimacy, the role of participatory devices in governance and public service delivery will constitute major threads in the analysis presented in the chapters of this book.

In this introductory chapter, we begin by trying to clarify the semantic field revolving around the very elusive concept of governance and terms associated with it, such as participation, accountability, legitimacy and, of course, politics. As part of this discussion we will introduce Foucault's concept of governmentality to assess its potential in terms of an empirically grounded anthropology of governance. The second section will focus on the delivery of collective services as both an instantiation of everyday governance and a promising fieldwork approach for a renewed political anthropology. The following three parts of this chapter explore three topics that feature in all of the contributions, despite their differences in focus and approach. We begin with a presentation of what could be an ethnography of front-level or interface bureaucracies. We then explore the mutually constitutive interaction between collective services, public space and subject-making. In the final section of the chapter we focus on the forms of brokerage, mediation and translation that structure the interface between service providers and users and contribute to the production of both practical norms and collective services.

Governance and governmentality: genealogy and use

The concept of governance carries a heavy ideological load, particularly in its usual formulation of 'good governance'. Is it relevant or even possible to rid the noun of the adjective? In other words, can we use governance in a non-normative way for descriptive and analytical purposes? A brief excursion into the genealogy of the concept and its uses in the social and political sciences may help clear the way; among other things, it will show that the disembedding of governance from its normative straitjacket is no easy task.¹

¹ This section draws on Le Meur (2006c: 72–80).

Governance: concept, ideology or institutional apparatus?

In the introduction to an anthology on governance, political scientists Guy Hermet and Ali Kazancigil note that, its unstable and polemical nature notwithstanding, “governance does exist”. The definition they present faithfully reflects its “uncertain conceptual status, as a multiform phenomenon” (2005: 7–8). Drawing up a list of eight features that are simultaneously present in varying proportions in the uses of the term, they eventually define governance in normative and substantial terms, stressing its horizontal and negotiated nature which would abolish the private-public divide. Governance is defined along a line that is at once liberal (the market as a model of government) and neo-corporatist (according to a network-like and co-optation pattern), a definition that raises questions as far as participation and representation are concerned. One chapter in the book, which clearly reveals the authors’ concern, bears the title “Is governance the name for post-democracy?”. For Hermet, even when stripped of its normative qualification, governance offers a way to escape from “a too much pressing popular political expression” (2005: 23).

Hermet identifies five “heterogeneous and non cumulative” layers in the archaeology of the word, also stressing its early origin in the French and English Middle Ages (*ibid.*: 24–34). The first layer, which can be traced back as far as the 1930s, constitutes corporate governance which is linked to the discovery of transaction costs (Coase 1937) and the birth of the neo-institutional economics (North 1990, Coase 1998, Williamson 1998). A few decades later, the notion of urban governance emerges, stemming from diverging ideological backgrounds, neo-conservative on the one hand (the Thatcher’s era in Great Britain) and progressive on the other (originating in the social urban movements of the 1960s/70s). The third moment involves the rise of developmental “good governance” in the 1980s (see World Bank 1989 and above) and was quickly followed by the fourth topic of the ‘global governance’. However, in a way, the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and WB) were already the tools of a global and developmental governance, and, as Cooper (2000) reminds us in a fair critique of the term, globalisation is not that new. The fifth layer, in the early 21st century, sees governance entering European Union terminology as one of the first attempts to lend governance “the substance of a truly-built concept” (*ibid.*).

Two points arising from this brief outline of the recent history of governance are worthy of note in this context. The historical shift of

the concept from the business world to public affairs, whereby the origin of the term still influences the ideological background underlying its uses and representations, must be acknowledged. It is interesting to note that the term 'empowerment' underwent a similar semantic journey, a story which is all too often forgotten. The second point raises a question arising from the EU use of the term, which is closely linked with the construction of a specific institutional apparatus. At an initial glance, developmental 'good governance' would appear to be a mode of management or organisational toolbox rather than an institutional apparatus which, in fact, development is. Non normative approaches to development in the social sciences are based on the hypothesis of a defined social field comprising organisations, projects, ideas, discourses, resources and actors who claim to be part of it: "'Development' simply exists where the 'developers' are; where one of the groups that claims to be engaging in development organises an intervention measure on other social groups"² (Chauveau 1985: 164). This non-normative definition of development enables its description as a social situation without engaging in ideological debate around the nature of development (see Olivier de Sardan 2005). Could the same perspective be adopted in relation to governance? There is no straightforward answer to this question and our position is located in the domain of productive compromise; productive because it allows space for empirical exploration and generates heuristic gain.

This compromise involves three stages. First, we differentiate analytically between etic and emic definitions of governance. Second, we focus on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Finally, we consider, from this point of view, the possibility of an analogy between governance and development as an institutional configuration. The first step towards the formulation of an answer here lies in the clearly non-normative use of the concept: governance as a set of regulations emerging out of repeated interaction between actors and institutions.

For sociologists of governance [...], the object of investigation is understood as an emergent pattern or order of a social system, arising out of complex negotiations and exchanges between 'intermediate' social actors, groups, forces, organizations, public and semi-public institutions in which state organizations are only one—and not necessarily the most

² Authors' translation.

significant—amongst many others seeking to steer or manage these relations. (Rose 1999: 21)³

Governance is conceived as a set of interactions (conflict, negotiation, alliance, compromise, avoidance etc.) resulting in more or less stabilised regulations, producing order and/or disorder (the point is subject to diverging interpretations between stakeholders) and defining a social field, the boundaries and participants of which are not predefined. This etic definition—crafted by the external observer—is exploratory. As suggested by Bruno Latour (2006), the concept is made as “empty” and neutral as possible to allow social actors to fill it with their own (emic) theories and practices of governance.⁴ This includes their views of participation, accountability, public and service and of state, wealth, justice and politics. This exploratory attitude constitutes the starting-point for an ethnography of public service delivery that considers how—and to what extent—social actors articulate their views and uses of governance. When we consider powerful actors such as the World Bank, for example, we cannot but be struck by the fact that governance is presented as a commonsensical notion that requires no definition. For example, whereas it lists and discusses at length the “indicators of governance quality”, the chapter entitled “Strengthening governance, from local to global” in the draft of the forthcoming 2008 World Bank report on *Agriculture for Development* never defines governance, as though it goes without saying.⁵ In this case, governance acts as a cultural marker, a

³ See, in the same vein, Woodhouse et al. (2000: 22–23) on the local governance of natural resources, “understood in terms of the following elements: the structures and processes of power and authority, cooperation and conflict that govern decision-making and dispute resolution concerning resource access and use, through the interaction of local government and non-governmental, formal and non-formal, organisations and social institutions. This definition of ‘local governance’ recognises the importance of practices of informal institutions, which may parallel or interact with formally defined institutions, including those of the state (...). The exploration of moments of conflict and their outcomes is particularly useful for illuminating how power is exercised and by whom, through both formal and informal institutions and their interconnections.”

⁴ In Bruno Latour’s view, social scientists should refrain using substantive concepts (meta-languages) and resort to empty concepts (infra-language) to let actors develop their own and much richer meta-languages (2006: 45).

⁵ See the World Bank’s *Governance Matters*: “We define governance broadly as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes (1) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced, (2) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies, and (3) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them” (Kaufmann et al. 2000: 1). The authors add in a footnote: “There does not appear to be a single accepted definition of governance.

sign of mutual recognition among ‘developers’, as much as an analytical or descriptive concept. As Harrison shows in his exploration of World Bank theory of political action (2004), governance as discursive practice also relies on political thinking which remains largely implicit.

Governmentality: useful, though elusive

It is not enough, however, to differentiate between etic and emic views of governance. The first difficulty arises from the fact that the divide between the observer and the observed is not as clear-cut as one might think—a fact that has been highlighted by post-modern and, to some extent, modern anthropology.⁶ This gives rise to a second difficulty, namely that the neutral and empty concept Latour calls for will not remain clear of normative interferences. For this reason, some scholars believe it is impossible to strip governance of its normative load and thus prefer to abandon it. For example, Jean-François Bayart proposes substituting the “off-putting” concept of governmentality for “this ‘governance’ hackneyed by the liberals” (2004: 11). In a book on “the future of anthropological knowledge”, Henrietta Moore implicitly follows the same path: the section devoted to the “anthropology of governance” (1996: 10–14) only discusses the concept of governmentality and how it is used in anthropology.

Our view is less radical in this respect. We argue that the analytical and interpretive power of governmentality could be combined with the exploratory and descriptive use of governance. Both concepts share basic similarities. They pay more attention to social processes than social structures. They advocate a decentred approach to the state and

Our definition of governance is in part motivated by those suggested by the Institute for Governance, IDEA, and the IMF”. In fact, they are not really concerned about defining governance. A few years later, Kaufmann adopts the same definition in a draft discussion paper which aims to “Rethinking Governance. Empirical Lessons Challenge Authority.”

⁶ Anthropology also engages in the field of governance: “Governmentality involves techniques of knowledge and power which touch all individuals and collectivities, whether directly or indirectly. Health care, family planning programmes, irrigation schemes and education provision are all part of these disciplinary techniques, and they are all intermeshed with expert knowledges, including those of the social sciences. Many anthropologists all around the globe, whether or not they are working in anthropology departments, are involved in the techniques of government” (Moore 1996: 13). For a colonial genealogy of anthropologists’ engagement in governmentality, see also Pels (1997) and Le Meur (2007) on the (joking) relationships between anthropology and development.

do not impose a priori boundaries between private and public, state and society, knowledge and power (the latter issue being mainly tackled through the lens of governmentality). Nonetheless, the routinisation of the use of governmentality outside of a strict Foucauldian canvas and for the sake of the social anthropology of policy, for which we plead for in this book, is no easy task. First, the notion was introduced by Foucault in several papers and lectures without being systematised. Thus, scholars refer to different texts and definitions in their use of the term. Sally Engle Merry, who makes perceptive use of Foucault, rightly argues that “Foucault’s work on governmentality is both tantalising and frustrating. He never developed a full theory nor wrote a book on the subject, yet his concepts and approaches are suggestive and intriguing, if also often unclear and even contradictory” (2001: 27n). The second point is about possible inconsistencies in Foucault’s work. To be more precise, as far as governmentality is concerned, it is possible to observe an oscillation between substantive and exploratory definitions of the concept. The most frequently quoted definition is that proposed in the famous article on “governmentality”:

By this word I mean three things: 1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security. (Foucault 2002: 221)⁷

This definition cannot be separated from the notion of biopolitics, “that is the set of mechanisms by means of which, that which constitutes its fundamental biological features within the human race will be entitled to enter into a policy”⁸ (2004: 3; see also Lemke 2001). For Foucault, the issues of biopower and governmentality are historically rooted. They are intrinsically linked with the rise of Western modernity in the 16th and 17th centuries with governmentality being conceived as an emerging form of government along with sovereignty, which is exerted

⁷ This definition echoes the distinction made by Foucault between “governmentality of the policy-makers which will give us the police [and the] governmentality of the economists which, I believe, will introduce us to some of the fundamental thrusts of modern and contemporary governmentality” (2004: 356) Authors’ translation. On this, see also Wedel et al. (2005: 35–36).

⁸ Authors’ translation.

within a bounded territory, and discipline, focusing on bodies and individuals. When Foucault highlights the central role of population expressed by the rise of biopolitics in Europe from the 16th century on, he does not mean that the earlier forms of sovereignty and discipline fade away from the issue of government.⁹ Instead, he evokes an evolving triangle constituted by the three forms of government, namely sovereignty, discipline and governmentality (2004: 111; see also Rose et al. 2006, Li 2007: 12–17). The shape of this triangle is context-dependent and we may well ask whether substantive approaches that reduce governmentality to a set of institutional techniques based on uniform and standardised procedures are useful when applied to non-Western contexts. As Nuijten recalls in relation to Mexican bureaucracy, “we do not find standard procedures but a bewildering world of labyrinthine offices and infinite administrative measures” (Nuijten 2004: 226). This also applies to African bureaucracies.

In addition to the substantive definition of governmentality, an exploratory definition can also be found in Foucault’s texts: “I call ‘governmentality’ the encounter between techniques of domination exercised over others and the techniques of the self” (Foucault 2001: 1604).¹⁰ Rather than a use of the term that is closer to an instrumental evocation and aims to denounce the implacable character of the developmental machine working as an avatar of state bureaucratic domination,¹¹ it would appear far more interesting to focus on the link between government techniques and subject-making. Subject must be understood here in its double sense, i.e. both an object of domination and an active agent, in relation to forms of government that do not necessarily emanate from the apparatus of state. “It is not the impact of the state on society which is of interest, but the impact of governmentality on ways of living and on social institutions, including the state” (Moore 1996: 12). In the same passage she adds that “Foucault uses the notion of governmentality to indicate a certain mentality, a particular way of thinking about the sorts of problems which can and should be addressed by particular authorities and through particular

⁹ For a critique of Rose & Miller (1992), see Curtis (1995), according to whom the former over-estimate the productive side of power and internalised forms of “government at a distance” implied by the rise of governmentality and biopolitics, and downplay the forms of domination and hegemonic procedures of “disciplinarianisation” (cf. Miller & Rose 1995 for a reply).

¹⁰ Authors’ translation.

¹¹ James Ferguson (1994: 255 *et sq.*) represents this perspective.

strategies” (ibid.). Thus, governmentality focuses on a conception of governing as a problematising activity, as stressed by Rose:

The analytics of governmentality [...] distinguish between historically variable domains within which questions of government have been posed: the way in which certain aspects of the conduct of persons, individually or collectively, have come to be problematised at specific historical moments, the objects and concerns that appear here, and the forces, events or authorities that have rendered them problematic. (Rose 1999: 20–21)¹²

The heuristic strength of governmentality lies in its ability to weave domination and subjectivation into a common framework¹³ while paying attention to the knowledgeability and capability—the agency (Giddens 1984)—of all of the actors involved. When we speak of government as a problematising activity, we include the subjects of the policy as active co-producers of this policy, which can mean as “consumers” in the sense of de Certeau (1990).

It is our view that the combination of the heuristic and interpretive power of governmentality and the descriptive use of governance is useful for documenting and analysing policies and, more specifically, the social fields defined by the production and delivery of public and collective services. The final point that remains to be addressed is the analogy with development, and the question that arises here is whether we can identify a configuration or mechanism of governance in the way that we have observed it thus far in the case of development. As proposed above, it may be asserted that ‘development’ exists wherever there are ‘developers’, where people who claim to be ‘carrying development out’ organise and implement a specific apparatus intervening in targeted social groups. Governance appears to be rather situated at the rhetorical level of discursive practices. However, the case of the European Union shows the emergence of an institutional apparatus that claims to be aimed at the embodiment and implementation of

¹² The definition of governance given by Cris Shore and Susan Wright (1997: 5–6) in a text otherwise influenced by the Foucauldian perspective is an intermediary one located between the merely descriptive approaches and those that take the hypothesis underlying the notion of governmentality into account: “We use ‘governance’ to refer to the more complex processes by which policies not only impose conditions, as if from ‘outside’ or ‘above’, but influence people’s indigenous norms of conduct so that they themselves contribute, not necessarily consciously, to a government’s model of social order”.

¹³ A point which is absent from the sociology of governance and constitutes its “philosophical weakness” (Bayart 2004: 51).

governance (Shore & Wright 1997, Hermet et al. 2005). In developing countries, the pairing constituted by international development agencies and NGOs is key in the construction of what might be termed an apparatus of governance (Atlani-Duault 2005). Actually, NGOs, programmes and administrations increasingly claim that they ‘are’ instances of governance and ‘implement’ (good) governance. In doing this, they play a performative role, making governance happen as a set of organisations beyond the discursive level.

The chapters that compose this book all aim to identify the actors, institutions and resources involved in the organisation of collective and public service delivery. Herein lies the originality of our project. What happens at the interface between service provider and user is a matter of governance in the non-normative and descriptive sense of the concept as discussed above. A second issue concerns the actors and the extent to which they resort to governance as a discursive resource. Finally, the third point remains as to whether all of this can be analysed as participating in an apparatus of governance. Our specific point of entry—the description of the processes of public and collective service delivery—allows us to leave this question open as an empirical issue.

The next section will present the disciplinary background and the ethnographic project that underlie our way of handling the collective services/governance nexus.

An empirically-grounded anthropology of collective service delivery

Throughout the 1990s, the ‘projects’, in the sense of arenas in which strategic groups equipped with their own logics and action strategies confront each other, constituted the main terrain of the European anthropology of development (mainly structured around the APAD network, the Wageningen school and the EIDOS network).¹⁴ However, it progressively extended its research objects by appropriating other topics such as the “areas in which development operations and policies straddle current local political, economic and administrative practices in Africa” (Olivier de Sardan 2004b: 37), i.e. the forms of local anchorage of the

¹⁴ APAD: Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development; EIDOS: European Inter-University Development Opportunities Study-group. See Elwert and Bierschenk 1988, Olivier de Sardan 1995, Long 1989, 2001, the EIDOS series published by Routledge and the APAD series published by Karthala (in French) and Lit Verlag (in English).

state and recomposition of local political arenas,¹⁵ the politics of access to land and natural resources,¹⁶ the local and transnational dynamics of intermediation and brokerage within the field of development and in association with policy production¹⁷ and, finally, corruption and public service (dys)function.¹⁸

In other words, the anthropology of development changed in the process of the extension of its objects (closely associated with the historical change experienced by the societies affected by 'development'), into the "socio-anthropology of public spaces" (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 488). Thus, its perspective was extended to the forms of delivery of services and public and collective goods and to the social and political processes that underpin them.

The provision of collective services can be studied from different perspectives. First, it can be seen from a technical point of view (in a broad sense, including institutional technology and engineering). For example, access to water depends on a water supply system, the concession or sub-contracting of the work to a private company or contractor, the choice between charging for water use and selling water, and accountability procedures. Second, services differ in terms of their nature. Warranting security or justice is not subject to the same technical constraints as "getting out of the shit" (*van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh*) or bringing classrooms to refugees (*Fresia*). The particular nature of the 'object' classified under the broad category of 'collective services' will strongly influence the solutions developed to provide or supply it. Moreover, the provision of collective services is necessarily linked to the issue of exclusion and inclusion, at once in terms of access and control (Ribot & Peluso 2003). In this respect, it is a matter of access to the rights of a citizen. This central issue can be framed in a problematic of government, one which goes beyond the limits of a state-centred approach (Rose & Miller 1992, Mitchell 1991) and resorts to the heuristic power of the concept of governmentality. Of major interest for us is the way in which women and men define and regulate the affairs

¹⁵ Bako Arifari and Laurent 1998, Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1998, Blundo 1998 and 2001b, Blundo and Mongbo 1998, Kassibo 1998, Laurent 1995, Nuijten 2003, Lund 2006.

¹⁶ Chauveau, Jacob & Le Meur 2004, Le Meur & Lund 2003, Lund 1998, Chauveau et al. 2006, Jacob 2007.

¹⁷ Arce 1993, Blundo 1995, Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan 2000, Bako-Arifari and Le Meur 2001, Mosse 2005, Lewis and Mosse 2006, Le Meur 2006b.

¹⁸ Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006, Jaffré and Olivier de Sardan 2003.

they consider public or, in other words, how they govern themselves. Of course, people do not govern themselves in isolation and we will observe various combinations of state, associative, individual, entrepreneurial and exogenous aid-driven organisational forms in the case studies on the production of collective services presented in this book.

In fact, public is not synonymous with state. Beyond the classical points of observation of the relations between public services and their users, it is essential to examine the new spaces in which public services are produced. The originality of the research presented here lies in the fact that it is not limited to the production of public services by state administrations but takes an interest in complex configurations in which the African state is no longer the only actor of economic and social change and sole provider of public and collective services. Multiform institutions of a non-state nature (associations of producers, neighbourhood groups, national and international NGOs) and private actors (notables, investors, large traders) contribute to the production of goods and services which were formerly provided by state administrations. Thus the description and analysis of 'everyday governance' enables to take into account the transformations of traditional centres of power, on the one hand, and the emergence of original configurations which render obsolete and inoperative—if they ever were relevant in the first place—the distinctions between state and civil society or the public and private sphere, on the other.

Thus, apart from the 'traditional' sites and actors involved in the interaction between state services and the citizen-users of the administration, such as customs services or the justice system (see *Olivier de Sardan*), the police (as studied by *Hornberger*), territorial administration and decentralised government (see *Gruénais, Okalla & Grawit*), the studies presented here identify and describe new spaces for the production and management of public affairs and services: these include water management committees (*Tidjani Alou*), rural associations (*Nauta*), refugee camps (*Fresia* and *Turner*), the management of private and public sanitation systems (*Van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh*), the processing of urban waste (*Bouju*) and the institutional mechanisms and gender relations organising environmental health (*Obrist van Eeuwijk*).

Other sites and actors from a wide variety of areas can be enrolled in the management of public affairs, including national political arenas, whose involvement in local matters varies considerably from one country to another, religious institutions, which contribute in an often unexpected manner to the redefinition of the public sphere, and non-

government assistance, whose development is often formed through extraversion and complex logic behind the rhetoric of participation and the ideology of disinterested service (see *Fresia* on Mauritanian refugees in Senegal). These are all features of the public affairs landscape. Finally, the sites in which public services are produced can be highly informal and syncretic (for example, *Anders* identifies interstitial spaces in which the resources associated with the occupation of a position in the higher echelons of the Malawian administration are socialised and redistributed) or barely bureaucratised (even in the case of the police as paradoxically shown by *Hornberger* in South Africa).

These different 'terrains' reveal the multiplicity of actors involved and contribute to the rupture of some of the categories traditionally used in the analysis of African societies. In the described situations, there can be no monolithic state involved in the control or domination of a 'civil society' in turn involved in resisting the former or turning in on itself (see also Bayart et al. 1992). Entry through a public or collective service opens the way to the compilation of ethnographies which demonstrate that there is no longer any public service in Africa whose deliverance does not include the greater or lesser involvement of the four following instances: the state administrative services, the development administrations (NGOs and international agencies), the 'community-type' organisations (from associations to the municipal council) and private operators.

Thus, *Fresia* shows that the management of health centres and schools in refugee camps in Senegal is the product of negotiation and cooperation between the refugees, their representatives, the national and international NGOs, UNHCR and the administrative services of the Senegalese state, whereby the latter play an ambiguous role somewhere between a 'wait-and-see' approach and retrieval. Even simple committees for the management of water infrastructure (as described by *Tidjani Alou*) are becoming new centres of power which are superposing themselves over the local chieftaincy and decentralised technical services and, as a result, compete with them.

Several of the book's contributions demonstrate the difficulty in contemplating the separation of public and private. Their boundaries remain extremely blurred: as demonstrated by *Van der Geest and Obirih-Opareh* in relation to the responses to the public problems posed by the personal and private activity of defecation, private actors and interests may trigger initiatives that target the general interest. In the face of a lack of initiative on the part of decision-makers and service users,

even private service providers (latrine makers, septic tank emptiers etc.) appear to open up to governance, defined in pragmatic terms by the authors as the successful management of community affairs through a mixture of public, private and associative actors with the aim of contributing to the individual common good.

Fresia reaches similar conclusions in her article on the humanitarian space. Services of a general interest (in this instance health and education) initially promoted through the convergence of private interests (embodied by refugees and their non-state partners) subsequently become the object of an attempt at retrieval on the part of the state which has the paradoxical effect of eliminating the assets that made them successful in the first place: i.e. less expensive healthcare and high quality education. In the described case, the officials from the state services who were in competition with the humanitarian apparatus demonstrated a corporative reflex: therefore the state authority is able to produce forms of public action which ultimately do not serve the general good.

The issue here also concerns the making of the subjects involved in the very process of producing boundaries between the public and domestic spheres. This process lies at the heart of the demarcation of actors' life worlds and public services domains of intervention. The problem is raised and described very well by *Hornberger* in relation to the question of police intervention in cases of domestic violence in South Africa. The boundary is defined differently by the two interacting actors, entailing different strategies of intervention (for the police) and calls for assistance (on the side of women submitted to conjugal violence). The way of constructing and using the public and the domestic is inherent in the self-definition of a subject (Rose 1987) and in his/her conception of belonging to a political and moral community (*Bouju*).

The ethnography of front-level bureaucracies

While the state in Africa may no longer be the sole provider of services or the sole locus of exercise of public authority, it nonetheless remains a central actor of post-colonial governance.¹⁹ As Hibou suggested

¹⁹ Even in certain situations of extreme political and institutional crisis, of informalisation of administrative apparatuses or criminalisation of the economy, the state does not disappear completely. Reno (1995) showed that, in Sierra Leone, the decline in the

(1999), rather than the decline of its structures, the apparent retreat of the state under the privatisation policies may mean its redeployment in other forms. According to this hypothesis, the state would retain a certain level of control over society, relying on private intermediaries, as indirect colonial rule had done.²⁰ More than a mere withdrawal of the state, what is involved is the reorganisation of governmental techniques, the transfer of previous competencies in the area of official regulation to non-official, individual or collective actors, to whom the qualities of accountability and rationality are also granted.

Following Nuijten, who herself leans on Abrams (1988), it is possible to identify three—profoundly interconnected—dimensions in the study of the state: “the idea of the state, the state machine and the culture of the state” (Nuijten 2004: 210–11). The first dimension refers to “the belief in the existence of a coherent state system”, an ideological frame which reproduces itself independently of the actual functioning of bureaucracies. The second concerns “governmental institutions, made up of diverse sets of practices linked to the political system”. Finally, the third dimension relates to “the practices of representation and interpretation which characterise the relation between people and the state bureaucracy and through which the idea of the state is constructed” (ibid.). In Nuijten’s terms, the notion of “culture of the state” does not refer to a particular culture pertaining to state institutions: for her, it “is the way in which this ‘mighty actor’ or ‘neutral arbiter’ is imagined through administrative procedures, stamps, maps, theories about power and the belief in the ‘right connection’” (Nuijten 2004: 228). It is worth noting that the idea of the state powerfully pervades local political arenas, even in contexts in which governmental institutions are absent or weak. As Lund argues, we observe in contemporary Africa “certain forms of institutionalisation and formalisation of the exercise of authority alluding to state, law and bureaucracy, encoded in

formal institutions of the state went hand in hand with the construction of parallel forms of political authority which was exercised *de facto* by business men and politicians who controlled the resources produced by the illegal diamond industry. In this context the state was both a ‘shadow’ and a ‘real’ state. It was not merely a pale imitation or distortion of the Weberian state but represented something radically different.

²⁰ We may, however, note, together with Olivier de Sardan (2000: 221), that Hibou’s lack of a definition of the state risks subjecting elements as diverse as the privatisation of public companies, the drugs economy, corruption and the warlords to the same label (indirect government) and, above all, of attributing to the state the private activities of its functionaries. On colonial intermediaries and brokers, see Spittler (1981), Lawrence et al. (2006), and of course Ba (1973).

official language and often exercised with the paraphernalia of modern statehood” (Lund 2006: 5).

It may be noted that the anthropological investigations of the state placed the emphasis in particular on the third element of Nujiten’s typology: the modes of embeddedness of the idea of the state into local societies and the expectations, representations and fantasies associated with it (Gupta 1995, Hansen & Stepputat 2001, Masquelier 2001). At the same time, the machine of state remains a kind of black box. The African state appears as a “state without civil servants” (Copans 2001), a state grasped more in terms of its desired or perceived essence, than through the reality of its routine functioning.

Nevertheless, the decline in the economic position of state employees, the strong influence of political networks, which are often able to short-circuit administrative action, the growing impotence of the state in the provision of even the most basic services and the spread of illicit transactions, varying from racketeering and active or passive corruption to favouritism of all sorts, all contribute to the general discrediting of public power, which becomes the scapegoat of economic crisis. At the same time, the non-state sector is seen as the source of all virtue in development circles. This raises an entire series of questions: i.e. how is the public function considered at a time when the state is being privatised, as much by its own agents as by users? What career prospects exist both within and outside of government service? Is economic success linked in popular perception to the tenure of a position in the public administration? What place—if any—do civil servants, as the “chameleons bureaucrats” described by *Anders*, assume in the definition of the contemporary “figures of success” (Banégas & Warnier 2001) in Africa? And, ultimately, who are the civil servants of today, how do they perceive their functions and within which professional cultures do they move?

The colonial heritage

The functioning of the bureaucracy, the social position of bureaucrats, the representations associated with their behaviour and itineraries: it is impossible to understand these issues if they are not contextualised within their historical trajectory. This trajectory is of course that of the colonial and postcolonial state in sub-Saharan Africa (Bayart 1989). More specifically, historical processes have given African state bureaucracies a specific shape, in particular with regard to their relations with

users and the delivery of public goods and services. For *Olivier de Sardan*, the local modes of governance in Africa have undergone a two-fold rupture: the colonial rupture (transformation of the pre-colonial forms of power) and the bureaucratic rupture which introduced a formal opposition between public and private spaces. The main consequence of this process is the conjunction of a “social construction of indifference” (a concept borrowed from Herzfeld 1992) and a “colonial and postcolonial construction of contempt and privilege”. The main characteristics of the colonial administration—despotism, privilegism and role of intermediaries—are referred to in this analysis to demonstrate the continuity with the postcolonial period, during which phenomena like clientelism, the absence of sanctions, impunity and unproductivity of civil servants were exacerbated.

The topic of continuity between the colonial and contemporary periods also lies at the heart of *Becker's* contribution. While she shares the same historical perspective, the field of observation shifts from Sahelian societies, some of which had centralised powers at the time of the arrival of the colonialists, to the acephalous societies of south-east Tanzania. Becker shows that the narratives of corruption and the complementary rhetoric of ‘good governance’ have a long history in rural Tanzania. In this case, the British colonial administration adopted a pragmatic and opportunistic approach to dealing with practices of ‘bad governance’. Having adopted a benevolent attitude vis-à-vis the *wakulungwa* (i.e. the local chiefs), from 1936 the district officers described these political intermediaries as corrupt and incompetent. This shift in opinion was intended to conceal from—or justify to—central government the poor results achieved by the colonial agents and their collaborators in the area of tax collection. *Becker* shows that, throughout the colonial period, the rhetoric of ‘bad governance’ became an instrument used for the purpose of explaining the constant difference between the formal ideal of the functioning of local political institutions and the way they functioned in reality.

In addition to new administrative norms, colonialism exported to Africa a different conception of inhabited space as well as new standards of public salubrity and health. The popular memory of these colonial public policies still echoes in contemporary local debates concerning urban governance: according to *Bouju*, the urban dwellers of Bobo Dioulasso contrast the current failure of the municipal authorities to keep public spaces clean with the practices of the colonial period which

they associate with the authoritative enforcement of domestic hygiene measures and effective technical services in the area of sanitation.

However, the analysis of the historical production of bureaucracies must not be restricted to state bureaucracies. Processes of bureaucratisation have also been highlighted in the case of the customary chieftaincy, and the specific state-making processes, in which it participates (Le Meur 2006a). Furthermore, as shown by *Turner* and *Fresia's* studies on the governance of refugee camps, the development aid and humanitarian system have been playing an increasing role in the genesis of new parallel bureaucracies and in creating overpaid and functional bureaucratic 'enclaves' within the state administration. As a result, absenteeism, moonlighting and bribery become widespread among the civil servants who are excluded from the development 'manna' (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006).

The daily negotiation of bureaucratic powers

State agencies grant, control and sanction. In order to exercise these three functions, administrative services have a stock of norms which are sometimes inadequate (for example in relation to the administration of land law in certain countries) and sometimes excessive (for example in customs administration). Between over and under-regulation, the actual application of laws and rules is often dependent on widespread arbitrary powers: fraud may be overlooked if the sum involved is small. Alternatively, offenders may be sanctioned, but the size of the fine is open to negotiation. In contexts in which the public is rarely familiar with administrative laws and rules, the monopoly of technical-bureaucratic knowledge combined with a low degree of accountability enables the daily negotiation of the powers of the administration. As well as being a factor in the emergence of various forms of corruption, as demonstrated by *Olivier de Sardan's* historical analysis of the (dys)function of West African bureaucracies, the general opacity in this regard combined with a selective application of the rules often gives rise to the adoption of evasion and anticipation strategies by the service users.

In their relations with unpredictable and arbitrary bureaucracies, users have to undergo a real process of initiation in order to understand how the system really works. This apprenticeship in informal codes presupposes the development of a detailed local knowledge of both corruption and the building of trust. The acquisition of such knowledge of local bureaucracies, be they state or non-state, is often facilitated

by individuals offering administrative services, such as messengers, secretaries, clerks, volunteer workers and interpreters, whose personal trajectories and range of influence are worthy of study in themselves (see Blundo 2006a). In this respect, an ethnography of “bureaucratic itineraries” constitutes a good point for obtaining simultaneous access to the informal codes, strategies and representations embedded in the interaction between the providers and beneficiaries of public services. One of the most accomplished examples of the study of “bureaucratic itineraries” is that carried out by Gupta (1995). In one of the case studies presented, he follows the paths of two young farmers in a district of Northern India who go to the office of a minor official—Sharmaji, who is responsible for issues concerning land ownership—in order “to add a name to the title of their plot” (Gupta 1995: 379). Accompanied by two collaborators, Sharmaji managed several transactions at the same time and took financial advantage of the prerogatives associated with his work, particularly that of adjudicating in land disputes. Through the dynamic description of ‘a botched bribe’, Gupta succeeds in demonstrating that the ignorance of the social world of Indian bureaucracy (particularly the role of brokers in channelling bribes to officials) is the main cause of the peasants’ failure in accessing land rights:

The ‘practice’ of bribe giving was not (...) simply an economic transaction but a cultural practice that required a great degree of performative competence. When villagers complained about the corruption of state officials, therefore, they were not just voicing their exclusion from government services because they were costly (...). More important, they were expressing frustration because they lacked the cultural capital required to negotiate deftly for those services. (Gupta 1995: 381)

Bako Arifari’s study (2001) on the port authorities of Cotonou provides another fine example of this approach. Based on an inquiry combining loose and systematic observations, documentary research and non-directive interviews with a wide variety of actors (customs officers, formal and informal agents, shopkeepers, importers, policemen etc.), this author offers an ideal-typical description of the steps necessary to “get a merchandise out of the port”. This itinerary consists of nineteen steps, each of which involves different sites and actors and necessitates recourse to corruption to ensure that the file required for customs payment moves to the next stage. However, Gupta’s and Bako-Arifari’s observations focus mainly on the ‘front-office’: their gaze is more that of the user who meets the representatives of the local state directly or through intermediaries. The ‘back-office’, i.e. the social world of civil

servants, remains more opaque. The ideal would be to approach the state agent in his specific social universe.

This is why we also need a fine-grained ethnography of bureaucratic behaviours and their social embeddedness, as produced by *Anders* on Malawi administration. In his contribution, *Anders* shows how civil servants juggle three sets of deeply intertwined norms on a daily basis: i.e. the official rules, the social norms and the informal codes of conduct governing the administrative realm. The latter are conceived by *Anders* as a 'parallel order', based on two central characteristics of social relations within bureaucracy: asymmetrical power relations and indebtedness vis-à-vis superiors. The everyday actions of the representatives of the state and their behaviour within the services are dictated by 'situational' adjustments between these three normative systems. This analysis updates current policies of 'good governance' which are fixated on the sole improvement of official norms using projects, training and workshops without taking into account the environment of normative pluralism within which African civil servants evolve. Moreover, while the fight against political-administrative corruption and the promotion of citizens' participation in governance are among the main themes of current development policies, the aid organisations appear to ignore, or are reluctant to acknowledge, that their projects are pervaded by, or indirectly encourage, the phenomena of 'bad governance' and corruption, as suggested by recent empirical studies (Bähre 2005; Mathieu 2007; Smith 2003).

Corruption as a part of the governance 'for real'

Anthropology also 'ignored' the phenomenon of corruption for a long time, albeit for very different reasons (cf. Blundo 2006b). As evidenced by various recent publications, this trend has now been reversed (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006; Nuijten & Anders 2007; Shore & Haller 2005; Smith 2006). What is involved here is not, however, a belated reconversion to the principles and rhetoric of 'good governance'. Anthropology does not conceptualise corruption in normative terms as the opposite of good governance. Instead, it considers it as a particular mode of political and administrative management, in other words one mode of governance among others. In this book, corrupt practices are treated in the same way as other ethnographic material. They emerge empirically through the popular terminology and expressions used to describe them (cf. *Anders* and his analysis of the ambiguous meaning associated

with the word *katangale* in Chichewa) or in governmental discourses (cf. *Becker* who traces the long historical course of the rhetoric of good governance in Tanzania), in the strategies of Mauritanian refugees in pursuit of identity papers (*Fresia*), in the sometimes embarrassed and sometimes cynical remarks of state officials (*Olivier de Sardan*), in political rumour (*Turner*), in the new rules implemented by the committees for the management of hydraulic infrastructure in Niger to limit the risk of embezzlement associated with the management of a collective resource (*Tidjani Alou*) and even, indirectly, through the voluntary dirtying of urban public spaces in support of popular demand for the clean-up of public practices (*Bouju*).

It must be acknowledged that the field of corrupt practices is strewn with conceptual and methodological pitfalls (Blundo et Olivier de Sardan 2000; Blundo 2007). However, in agreement with *Olivier de Sardan*, we believe that it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of pathologisation (Afro-pessimism) without succumbing to the temptation to euphemise (Afro-optimism) the scope of political and administrative practices which constitute both a factor in access to and exclusion from public resources and, as a result, are dependent on ambiguous—both benevolent and stigmatising—local perceptions. As confirmed across several chapters of this book, describing and analysing the failings and dysfunction in the production of public services does not, moreover, involve welcoming the reformist paradigm of the Bretton Woods institutions but confirming the gap between the functioning of these services and the expectations of users and analysing it in the light of the historical trajectories of colonial and postcolonial governmentality.

Moreover, these observations are not restricted to the relationships entered into by users with state administrations. As demonstrated by the studies of *Bouju* and *Tidjani Alou*, the decentralised and participative management instances (local associations, municipalities) do not constitute a barrier against corrupt practices, mismanagement or incompetence.

It is, therefore, less helpful to interpret corruption in functional terms (i.e. as a help or hindrance, oil or sand in the machinery of government) or as a simple deviation from the legal norms of bureaucratic organisations, than to consider it as part and parcel of ‘real’ governance. Such an approach provides an opportunity to reconsider the boundaries between public and private functions, institutions and resources (see Gupta 1995), which are fluid and shifting, even in Western societies. From the heuristic point of view, corruption can thus function as a

descriptive indicator in the analysis of concrete instantiations of public space (Le Meur 1999, Sivaramakrishnan 2000), the professional ethics of civil servants (*Anders*) and the relations between bureaucracies and people (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006).

*The politics of collective services:
normative pluralism, public space and subject-making*

Donor-oriented good governance policies try to impose an institutional toolbox (decentralisation, participation and administrative efficiency) which is supposed to be merely technical in nature and politically neutral. In this respect, as argued respectively by Hermet et al. (2005) and Ferguson (1994), good governance and development policy share a common tendency towards de-politicisation. However, several chapters in this book unveil another picture. The apparently atypical case of refugee camps is significant in this respect. As *Turner* and *Fresia* show for Burundian and Mauritanian refugees, the technical apparatus of humanitarian aid is promptly pervaded by political strategies and power struggles that develop not alongside, but within the very work of delivering services to displaced populations.

The chapters of this book highlight three major areas of struggle for resources and meaning. The first is linked to the institutional and normative pluralism that pervades the negotiation of public and collective services. The plurality of instances and normative orders works as both a resource and constraint and, thus, a frame for action for all actors. However, those who are best endowed with different forms of capital can make the best use of pluralism for pursuing their interests, for example in leadership struggles. A second dimension lies in the definition of the public-private (or domestic) boundary, which, as feminist studies have long shown, is the subject-matter of contest and negotiation rather than a given. Drawing a domestic issue towards the political field is a matter of making it visible (O'Barr 1975). It is both a research and a policy question. The third field of political process and contest is related to the previous one. It concerns the interaction between subject-making and state-making that arises in the course of collective service delivery and appropriation and gives both processes their specific shape. This brings us back to the issues of accountability and governmentality.

Pluralism

Policy production (in terms of service delivery) is therefore inherently a political process that is both influenced by and influences power relations and institutional pluralism (Shore & Wright 1997, Winter 2001, Wedel et al. 2005). *Anders* uses the notions of legal pluralism and normative plurality in his analysis of bureaucracy in Malawi. He describes bureaucrats as chameleons who adopt the colour of the current environment and are, therefore, social actors who strategically exploit the different sets of rules or normative orders at their disposal on the basis of the situation and people they must deal with in their everyday lives. Speaking of normative plurality avoids giving pre-eminence to one or other set of rules, be it the state normative order; this does not imply that we deny any specific consistency to state instances (see Griffiths 1986, Moore 2000). However, state instances themselves generate different layers of rules, norms and enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, legal and normative pluralism is also inherent in state functioning. Since the state is challenged by other institutions in the delivery of public goods and services, these everyday forms of governance imply a shift in power distribution and resource control. As *Becker* shows in the case of colonial Tanzania, this is in no way a new phenomenon.²¹

We observe the emergence of new elites and new forms of leadership which enjoy relative autonomy, claim to stand for development, represent associational life and make use of discourses from the worlds of enterprise, religion and tradition, combining extraversion with a strong local grounding (see *Turner's* and *Fresia's* emerging leaders in Burundian refugees camps in Tanzania and in Mauritanian refugees camps in Senegal). In this respect, the norms of public ethics tend to evolve towards autonomy in the face of the state and its supposed centrality, and public authorities tend to lose legitimacy in the public arena, as highlighted by *Bouju* in the case of waste management policy in Burkina Faso. Conversely, other cases present processes of the strengthening of the state as an unintended effect of administrative reform. For example, *Gruénais, Okalla & Gaurit* show how health sector reform supported by bilateral and multilateral development agencies in Cameroon has contributed to the reinforcing of the central state hegemonic project. The new medical map focusing on health districts composed of health

²¹ See Pels (1997), Sivaramakrishnan (1999) and Agrawal (2005) on colonial governmentality.

areas aimed to grant greater autonomy and power to the local (district) level. In fact, due to under-management and the lack of political will, decentralisation—which, in this case, tends to constitute a form of administrative deconcentration—opened up new canals for downward patron-client ties and allowed the state to continue to define the rules of the game. Such forms of “recentralising while decentralising” (Ribot et al. 2006) have been observed in the case of forest policy in Africa and elsewhere. Ribot et al. stress political processes limiting downward accountability and empowerment of local bodies as explanatory factors behind the shortcomings of decentralisation policies.

Boundaries

As in microbiology, the more you approach the object under study, the more complex and intricate seemingly linear boundaries prove to be. And, like cell boundaries, social interfaces are constructed and reshaped through interaction, flows and exchanges. In other words, collective services-centred interfaces are social fields in which subjects, localities and institutions are mutually constituted. By the same token, the delivery of collective goods and services contributes in contrasting ways to the creation of the public-domestic boundary and relations. The political nature of the public service issue lies, at least partly, in the definition of this boundary.

For service suppliers, the issue concerns the extent of their legitimate sphere of intervention. For their part, the users may be tempted to stretch or restrict the domain of intervention and interaction with public administrations and authorities. The issue is related to institutional and normative pluralism. *Anders* argues that rules should not merely be seen as a “normative system of defined rights and obligations”. Instead, they constitute a “cluster of basic principles, which order the sphere of personal relationships. Instead of speaking of rights and duties it seems more appropriate to talk about expectations and feelings of obligation.” This view of normative pluralism is directly related to how actors deal with the drawing of the limits between the public and the private, and the political and the domestic.

Hornberger’s detailed description of community policing and domestic violence in Sophiatown, South Africa, highlights the strategic importance of the “boundary work” carried out by both participants in the interaction: i.e. the women who are victims of domestic violence and the policemen who are called on (or not) to intervene in a domain

they do not spontaneously regard as belonging to their field of action. The interpretation women give to policemen's intervention and the strategic use they make of it reveals an interesting ambiguity. People's interpretation of public-private boundaries and relations stands at the centre of the analysis. More specifically, the text highlights a kind of paradoxical privatisation: not of the police itself as a public service, but of the meaning of police intervention.

The analysis of sectors like sanitation (*Bouju, van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh*) also deals with the public-private boundary. They show how a personal domestic matter is constructed as a public problem (of health, environment) and thus as an object of government. The "politics of neglect" detected by *van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh* in Ghanaian sanitation policy expresses at once discriminatory behaviour on the politicians' side and a way of getting rid the question, if not its contents, on the users' side and leaving it to private entrepreneurs. If the governance of sanitation is "mainly a matter of not thinking about it", this raises questions about how people define themselves as members (citizens or subjects) of a political and moral community and also about state-making.²² The idea of the "politics of neglect", of governance as a matter of thinking or not thinking about an issue, is a key idea for understanding the politics of policy. It is an aspect of it.

State-making and subject-making: the accountability issue

More broadly, policy can be conceived as a kind of distorting lens, making 'things'—i.e. people, problems, knowledge, interests, institutions etc.—more or less legible (Scott 1998, Li 2005), but also visible or invisible (van der Ploeg 1993, Le Meur 2008). Governing is also a matter of spatial and mapping practices: "To govern, it is necessary to render visible the space over which government is to be exercised" (Rose 1999: 36). This echoes the empirical evidence presented by *Bouju* in his analysis of sanitation and waste management in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. People's everyday practices around dirt and their perception of cleanness express the way they negotiate their participation in, and belonging to, a political and moral community. The observations

²² We follow here Sivaramakrishnan when he defines state-making as "the ways in which institutions of government and ideas of governance are negotiated in specific contexts by local actors and agents of central design or bearers of official ideologies" (2000: 433).

made may be summarised as follows: public space belongs to everyone and thus no-one and it does not appear to be structured by a mechanism of accountability. This case demonstrates in a radical way how important the link between public space and accountability is. The very existence of a public is linked to procedures of accountability and is inherently a political issue. John Lonsdale stresses the ambiguity of accountability as a dual notion encompassing both ideas of being 'responsible for (something or somebody) and to (someone)': "Rulers claim to be responsible to their people; people try to hold them to account (...) Accountability is then, quite simply, the problem of power. [...] without its public exercise power cannot exist" (Lonsdale 1986: 127–128). Peoples' responses in *Bouju's* chapter are meaningful in this respect. The individuals he describes conflate the spatial and moral dimensions of the public by denying any moral value to areas located outside the domestic sphere. By so doing, they contribute 'from below' to the spatialisation of governmentality, whereas spatial governmentality is often seen (in a literature generally dealing with developed countries) as expressing a neoliberal turn in the welfare state, a shift from 'correcting' to 'zoning': "The expansion of spatial governmentality diminishes the scope of collective responsibility for producing social order characteristic of governance in the modern state" (Merry 2001: 17). As a renewed expression of biopolitics, focusing on populations as a whole and not on individuals like disciplinary mechanisms, spatial governmentality is produced in *Bouju's* case by the potential subjects of sanitation policy who do not endeavour to correct the state "politics of neglect", preferring to draw a line between an accountable domestic sphere and a public zone outside of any accountability structure.

The pairing formed by accountability and responsibility is, of course, related to the anchoring of state and formation of subjects. State-making is intertwined with the making of subjects, a process combining, as already noted (section I), the making of political subjects and the subjects of governmental devices. As Agrawal puts it in the case of environmental subjects, the making of subjects and subjectivity is about "when and for what reason...socially situated actors come to care for, act, and think of their actions in relation to something they define as the environment?" (2005: 164). *Obrist van Eeuwijk's* approach to sanitation practices focusing on the concept of "task-centred interactions" is also about people's practices and representations of a specific domain of their daily life. This is actually a "problematic of government" (Rose & Miller 1992), a matter of governing the self in relation

to other peoples, which contributes to the production of subjects, goods and services through the definition of representational boundaries and practical fields of action.

Brokerage, translation, mediation

One central aim of this book is to identify circuits for the production and allocation of resources designated for public use and to examine the processes in which conversions take place between private, individual, collective and public resources. However, being interested in the locations in which services of public interest are produced (or not) does not mean that the perspective is fixed on the local. On the contrary, the reduction of the focus of observation enables the empirical identification of the links between the local, national and international.

The cases presented in this book highlight hybrid processes involving state and non-state actors interacting in different arenas (at local and supra-local levels). Various forms of brokerage and mediation contribute to the shaping of everyday governance by bridging (and controlling) normative and social gaps between actors.²³

The historical importance of administrative and power brokers is stressed by *Becker* for Tanzania and *Olivier de Sardan* for West Africa. The latter shows how brokerage logics contribute to the blurring of state-society boundaries and to the dualistic and “schizophrenic” functioning of public administration, which evolves on a daily bases and ranges between formal procedures and actual informal arrangements. For its part, the ethnography proposed by *Anders* records the fact that policies of good governance and modernisation of the administration do not upset the patronage networks within the public service. On the contrary, the civil servants see their legitimacy as administrative brokers as being reinforced by the negative effects of the economic crisis on Malawian households.

However, the recent evolution of development policies towards state withdrawal and the decentralisation of aid has furthered the emergence of new forms of intermediation. The traditional functions of the political or administrative broker—i.e. facilitating the access of the

²³ See Blundo (1995), Bierschenk et al. (2000) and Lewis & Mosse (2006) on development brokerage; Nuijten (2003: 14–15) on brokerage and the idea of the state; Le Meur (2006b) on brokerage and translation in the field of land policy.

population to the administration's decisions and resources, acting as the transmission belt of a state that lacks a hold on its territory—are today joined by new competencies mobilised by individual or collective actors for the purpose of channelling locally—economic, cognitive and symbolic—resources based on development aid (Bierschenk, Chauveau & Olivier de Sardan 2000: 7).

In the case described by *Nauta*, a local NGO established itself as an intermediary between the South African Department of Land Affairs and a community of ex-farmers with no land. The author, who draws on the seminal study by Cohen & Comaroff (1976) on brokerage as a strategy for the “management of meaning”, identifies three forms of “strategic translation” used by the association to convince the public authorities of the validity of the transfer of land to “its” local community: the investment in forms of applied research, the organisation of workshops with the beneficiaries and the production of reports. *Nauta*'s study highlights the political dimension of the mediation processes at the heart of governance situations: behind these seemingly neutral modes of translating knowledge and information, combining a scientific approach and participative discourses, it is possible to glimpse techniques of power which aim to reinforce the legitimacy or even “indispensability” of the intermediary vis-à-vis the groups being brought together. “There is no equivalence, there are only translations” (Latour 2001: 248): The forms of “strategic translation” highlighted by *Nauta* are all about the transformation of reality and the construction of alliances, thus close to Latour's notion of translation as a political process, in the sense of transforming the world we live in and involving shifting constructions of groupings and interests (see also Callon & Law 1982, Callon 1986).

Fresia analyses the intermediary role played by two categories of actors who have emerged in the humanitarian space created around Mauritanian refugees in Senegal: the representatives of the refugees and a Senegalese NGO. These “humanitarian brokers” have gradually acquired real legitimacy in the eyes of both the refugees and the heads of UNHCR. According to *Fresia* this legitimacy has established them as de facto public authorities. The refugees' spokespersons ensure the resolution of problems in the camps and assistance in obtaining finance. The Senegalese NGO was assigned all of the tasks involved in the coordination and control of programmes targeting the refugees by the international aid agency. Contrary to the traditional interpretations which tend to confine the brokerage functions to the subtle and

manipulative art of linking people and information with the view to making a gain (Boissevain 1974: 148), *Fresia* suggests that the pursuit of individual or private interests is not incompatible with the production of a public utility service (i.e. health and education in the case presented). The action of these brokers also contributed to the redefinition of both matters of general interest—and which in this case evaded the administrative authorities—and of a new identity associated with refugee status which displays greater awareness of the latter's rights and its importance as a political actor.

Anders and, perhaps more strikingly, *Fresia* highlight “the work of generating and translating interests, creating context by tying in supporters and so sustaining interpretations” (Mosse & Lewis 2006: 13). Brokerage is not only about monopolising information for strategic purposes, it is also a device for making ‘real’ development interventions, thus contributing to the “production and protection of unified fields of development” (ibid.: 14). Brokers are not only strategic users (in an interactionist sense) or cunning consumers (in the sense of de Certeau 1990; see also Laurent 1998) of development, they also produce it. They participate in the construction of ‘target groups’ or ‘communities’, making them visible to developers, and contribute to the inclusion of development in localised landscapes (Mosse 2005, Le Meur 2008). Administrative and legal brokers act similarly with respect to the state (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006), making, if not the ‘idea of the state’ at least a certain instantiation of it emerge as a practical domain characterised by blurred boundaries and uncertain rules. Social interaction and brokerage that structure the negotiation of public services are thus integrated into an extended conception of intermediation which corresponds to the notion of the mediator proposed by Latour, i.e. a category encompassing entities (actors, objects, ideas) that “transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to convey” (2006: 58). In our view, this is a key point in terms of the exploration of how public services are generated, delivered, negotiated, interpreted, used and consumed, not only as expressing individual and collective logics, but also as producing and reshaping the representation and domain of the state and of the public, thus enacting the political work of composing a common (although contested) world (Latour 2002).

Ten years ago, Shore and Wright pleaded for the inclusion of policy in the field of anthropology: “The book sets out to chart a new domain of anthropological enquiry, the anthropology of policy” (Shore & Wright

1997: 3). This notwithstanding, three years later, a review of this topic published in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Okongwu & Mencher 2000) appeared to be more concerned with anthropologists' involvement in policy than in exploring the empirical and theoretical dimensions of this field of inquiry. "Applying anthropological methods and categories to a non-traditional ethnographic object" (Le Meur 1997: 309–310): our book takes its inspiration from this mundane idea, and the chapters that compose it contribute to making governance and policy everyday objects of investigation for anthropologists.

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STATE BUREAUCRACY AND GOVERNANCE IN FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA: AN EMPIRICAL DIAGNOSIS AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan¹

The African state: essayism vs. fieldwork

The gap between the abundant literature on “the state in Africa” and the very small number of empirical studies devoted to its “actual” daily functioning is startling. It is easy to get the feeling that, for decades, journalists, politicians and many researchers, both Africans and Africanists, have been engaged in a relentless search for the “essence” of the African state while neglecting to carry out a concrete analysis of the administrations, public services, bureaucratic system and relations between civil servants and the users of state services. In a sense, attention has been focused on the state as an “entity” and not as a complex social process—hence the myriad titles which associate the African state with every conceivable adjective: according to the authors, the African state is clientelistic,² predatory,³ sorcerous,⁴ patrimonial,⁵ neo-patrimonial,⁶ criminal,⁷ imported,⁸ kleptocratic⁹ and so on. Thus, people have always been very quick to characterise the African state, generally without any means of apprehending its concrete reality as experienced on a daily basis by its civil servants and citizens.

This qualificative profusion has more to do with essayism than investigation and is based more on second-hand work, “armchair” reflections and unconstrained impressionism, than empirical observation

¹ Research Director, EHESS and CNRS, LASDEL, BP 12901, Niamey (Niger) sardan@ird.ne. This text is a revised version of a paper initially written for the CODESRIA colloquium in Dakar in December 2003.

² Médard (1981).

³ Darbon (1990).

⁴ Hours (1985).

⁵ Médard (1990, 1998).

⁶ Médard (1991).

⁷ Bayart (1997).

⁸ Badie (1992).

⁹ Bayart, Ellis & Hibou (1997).

and investigative data collected in accordance with rigorous procedures. Indeed, this “essayism” does not necessarily emanate from professional researchers and sometimes takes provocative¹⁰ and exasperating¹¹ forms. Yet, it also exists in erudite forms, particularly in the political sciences insofar as, despite the existence of some stimulating and already well known¹² Africanist works, this discipline is mainly, if not exclusively based—apart from some rare exceptions (more common on other continents than in Africa)—on documentary analyses, statistical data (in itself questionable given that it relates to Africa),¹³ short investigations, brief field trips, and not on long stays in the field and intensive empirical data. Such in-depth qualitative methods, which are essential to the understanding of the daily functioning of the administrative and public services, are actually the remit of socio-anthropology,¹⁴ but, unfortunately for the latter, due to the theoretical and ideological past of Africanist ethnology, it has shown very little interest in the modern African state hitherto. Thus, in my view, the combination of *political science topics and socio-anthropological methods would appear to offer the “winning formula.”*¹⁵

In other words, in the worlds of publishing and research much more is spoken about the African State than is really investigated about its common, usual, routine functioning. Thus, the state as presented in conference papers and on bookshelves rarely reflects what could be described as the state as it exists “for real,”¹⁶ the everyday state, the

¹⁰ See Kabou (1991).

¹¹ Smith (2003).

¹² See Médard (1991); Bayart (1989); Mbembé (2000).

¹³ See Sivaramakrishnan (2000).

¹⁴ Because the tradition of qualitative empirical research (based on field studies, participative observation, open interviews, case studies) is common to both anthropology (the heir of ethnology) and what is referred to as “qualitative” sociology (originating from the Chicago school), we prefer to use the term “socio-anthropology.”

¹⁵ Various earlier versions of such a combination can be found, from Balandier (1992) to Abélès (1990) and Dozon (2003), which, however, are based on different perspectives and methods than ours. However, prior to our research, this combination had never been used to conduct systematic comparative studies on concrete sectors of the contemporary African states. I would, however, like to mention the pioneering work of Price (1975) on recently independent Ghana. At a workshop held at the EHES, R. Fardon suggested—in a clearly unmerited manner, which, however, reflected our objective—that our endeavour is reminiscent of the approach and methods adopted by Evans-Pritchard in his study of Zande witchcraft (Evans Pritchard 1972) that we tried to apply to corruption or the analysis of administrative services.

¹⁶ The expression used by Jaffré (1999).

concrete state,¹⁷ and the local state.¹⁸ That is why we have for a few years undertaken with the LASDEL (in Niamey, and now in Parakou) a number of in-depth collective, “socio-anthropological” investigations, led by a network of African and European researchers, on several West African countries (Niger and Benin of course, but also Senegal, Guinea, Mali and Ivory Coast) in order to eliminate this deficit in empirical knowledge. An astonishing convergence as regards the contemporary “governance” forms emerges from these field investigations, in countries with extremely varied economic contexts, and very different pre-colonial and post-colonial histories. It is important to explain the meaning of the term “governance” as I understand it. First and foremost, I do not use the term in the moralist and normative sense, in which it is used in the glossary of the World Bank where it is associated with strategies that the Bank intends to promote on the level of public policy. My interpretation of the term extends to include far more than governments and high-ranking civil servants. It also incorporates the operating modes of the public service, the professional culture of civil servants, the forms of administrative management and the relations between government officials and service users or citizens. Therefore it concerns neither “good policy” nor “policy at the top,” but the *entire processes of public goods and services delivery, particularly by the official apparatuses of the state, but also by other operators, such as development institutions and the world of associations, which sometimes complement the state, sometimes replace it and sometimes support it through sectoral “drip-feeding”*¹⁹

Various administrative services (e.g. health, justice, customs, municipalities) have been investigated along with forms of delivery of public

¹⁷ Title of a book by Padioleau (1982).

¹⁸ Current research programme at LASDEL.

¹⁹ See some recent publications, for example, Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (1998); Blundo & Olivier de Sardan (2001); Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan (2003). See also the series “Études et Travaux du LASDEL” and the book in progress on “*Les pouvoirs locaux au Niger*” (J.-P. Olivier de Sardan & M. Tidjani Alou, eds). My analysis here is based on the empirical findings presented in these publications. It owes a lot to my close and long-term collaboration with the my co-authors, thus in addition to the research fellows at LASDEL, in particular Mahaman Tidjani Alou and Nassirou Bako Arifari, I would like to thank G. Elwert, D. Fassin, J.-F. Lantéri, P. Lavigne Delville, P.-Y. Le Meur, C. Lentz, M. Niang and T. Bierschenk for their comments on the first version of this text.

goods or services that are not directly state-related (e.g. development projects, NGOs, chieftaincies).²⁰

I will begin by summarising the main results of these studies in the form of a series of common characteristics of daily governance. Following this empirical diagnosis, I will then present an historical perspective, focusing on the colonial emergence of modern bureaucracy in Africa as one factor, among others, that could explain the present situation.

Diagnosis: one and the same everyday governance

Beyond the public speeches and official organisational charts and despite their very different post-colonial political histories, the same type of “governance” was implemented *de facto* in all of the countries we studied,²¹ i.e. Senegal with its stable democracy under the extended hegemony of the Socialist Party, Benin with its intensive “Benino-Marxist” experience, Mali and Niger with their successive single party regimes and military dictatorships. In spite of the changes of regime and official ideology, the sudden crises and *coups d’État*, the national conferences, cohabitations and political changeovers, when it comes to the “real” functioning of the politico-administrative apparatuses from the bottom to the top, all of these countries have ended up with very similar systems.

In other words, beyond their undeniable national characteristics, the French-speaking states of West Africa are largely structured by a set of common characteristics. Whether or not these characteristics are also similar to those found in the Central or Southern African countries or in English or Portuguese-speaking African countries is a different question and one on which it would be impossible for me to pronounce judgement on the basis of my own research.²²

Although far from exhaustive, the inventory of common characteristics suggested here (all of which are empirically founded)²³ is suf-

²⁰ LASDEL (in Niamey and now also in Parakou) was the African base of these research programmes. The main objective of LASDEL is to investigate the delivery of public or collective goods and services in West Africa.

²¹ Irrespective of the variety of rhythms and modes which depend on the successive regimes in each country, the final result today is very similar.

²² Botswana has long been cited a positive example, and one that is very different in terms of its forms of governance.

²³ For numerous references that support these characteristics, see the publications quoted in footnote 20.

ficiently significant. It includes the following features: the pervasiveness of clientelism at all levels, enormous discrepancy between the formal organisational charts and actual division of tasks, systematic “privilegism,” “culture of impunity,” “areas of suspicion,” “every man for himself-ism,” the widespread exchange of favours, systemic corruption, habitual contempt of anonymous service users, the lack of motivation among the civil servants, low productivity and command of “double-speak.” Other equally important elements could also be mentioned, of course, some of which we have explored elsewhere on the basis of our empirical investigations: i.e. the polycephaly of the local political arenas,²⁴ the meagre regulatory capacities of the state,²⁵ the importance of intermediaries of all kinds,²⁶ the pluralism of norms,²⁷ the myths and difficulties of community management.²⁸

First, it is important to clear up a common misunderstanding: all of the characteristics which I will mention here also exist in the countries of the north. We are in no way claiming that these features exist in Africa, and not in Europe. They are simply not as widespread and intensive in the countries of the north as they are in Africa. It could be said that while the “ingredients of the sauce” are the same everywhere, the proportions change and, as a result, the sauce does not taste the same. For example, corruption exists in Europe, but it is sectoralised (in the area of civil engineering, for example) and relatively concealed. It cannot be found everywhere and is not visible at all levels in a sector such as health, for example, which, in contrast, is a sector characterised by widespread corruption in many African countries. Similarly, while clientelism is extremely important in industrialised countries, recruitment or evaluation based on qualifications remains largely widespread within the public services; the same can hardly be said to apply in Africa. Finally, contempt towards anonymous service users has not disappeared among the French or German bureaucrats. The concept of public service remains strong there, however, and the quality of the service provided to users has improved significantly over the past two or three decades. This is far removed from the African situation where the anonymous (and poor) service user is not only badly served

²⁴ See Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (1998).

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ See Blundo & Olivier de Sardan (2001), and *infra*.

²⁷ See Chauveau, Le Pape & Olivier de Sardan (2001).

²⁸ See Olivier de Sardan & Elhadji Dagobi (2000).

or not served at all on a systematic basis, but also ignored, humiliated and exploited.

Finally, one last and crucial point: we focus only on the common factors here, i.e. the main trends that emerged from our investigations in the five countries and the few sectors studied. However, it should not be forgotten that no administration is monolithic and that the civil servants are not all alike in their profiles or functions. Some of the services fulfil procedural tasks, others engineering tasks and some of the state apparatuses have predominantly repressive or controlling roles, whereas others exercise educational, therapeutic or management expertise. Similarly, some official enclaves undoubtedly exist which operate on a better than average level and where the gaps between the norms and practice are definitely less pronounced than in the examples presented below. This is why there is a need for further detailed investigation, taking all of the public and parapublic services into account.²⁹

Clientelism

The social sciences somehow neglected this old concept which, however, has the merit of explaining the numerous phenomena of factional solidarity, patronage, bonds of affiliation and partisan preference encountered on a daily basis at all levels of West African administrative services. Thus, appointments, assignments, promotions and “sidelining” follow the rather systematic logics of networks, individualised protection and redistribution which really have very little to do with officially designated job profiles or skills. Moreover, the recent spread of the multi-party system has thrown up a huge and omnipresent system of partisan preferences from the top to the bottom of the state apparatus on a well-established priority basis of personal recommendations and intervention at the expense of professional criteria: electoral clientelism and its post-electoral and pre-election repercussions³⁰ have thus been superimposed on the other pre-existent forms of clientelism.

In Niger for example, each coalition party in power is entitled to a quota of positions at all levels of the administrative services, for which it chooses the militants it would like to “thank.” Thus, in a survey conducted by LASDEL on the local state, we met a teacher in Tahoua who had no experience of the administration and was appointed sub-prefect because

²⁹ Hence the research programme we intend to develop on the local state in a few average African towns.

³⁰ See Banégas (2003).

he had served the party. A local civil servant had the following comment to make: "It is like giving a car to somebody who has no driving licence." In any case, he will be judged above all on his capacity to improve his party's performance at the elections. Another example: tax collectors at the markets are chosen all over the country by the political parties as a way of rewarding their militants and filling the party coffers before those of the Treasury. People say that "they have two pockets, one for the state and one for themselves" (and their party).

The formal and the real

Organisational charts, official texts, files and maps, listings and schedules are, indeed, far from lacking in the countries we studied, and attest to the existence of a reassuring and functional bureaucratic world. Yet the reality is very different and far removed from this smooth image. The tasks carried out are not those that are planned; the officials pursue activities other than those for which they are officially recruited and paid. Voluntary and other informal back-up agents, who are not on the official payroll, perform a considerable proportion of the regular tasks; budgets are purely fictional; officially formulated instructions are never respected. The real everyday functioning of any administrative service in the countries studied cannot be gleaned from the written documents that regulate it: only meticulous observation makes it possible to acknowledge the extent to which practices deviate from these documents. Some of the tasks are fulfilled by an informal sector, which may be located within or outside of the public services.

In the health centres, employees from all levels very often fulfil tasks which have nothing to do with their official expertise or training. Caretakers dress wounds, manual workers perform injections, ward orderlies deliver babies, nurses issue prescriptions and doctors complete the bureaucratic tasks. Moreover, up to a third of the staff can be "voluntary" staff who are not mentioned on any register and are unknown to the administration: e.g. housewives seeking a pastime, "first-aiders" trained by the Red Cross, the unemployed parents of an employee, new unemployed medical graduates.

"Every-man-for-himself-ism"

In spite of the clichés and stereotypes extolling the community solidarity there, the West African countries studied are kingdoms of "every-man-for-himself-ism," at least with regard to the public sector and, undoubtedly also, beyond it. In the administrative services, teamwork is more or less unknown and no one interferes in a colleague's work. Meetings involving the collective discussion of measures to improve quality or

productivity are extremely rare. Everyone carries out their tasks in a kind of “bubble” (two or three people may, of course, inhabit the same professional bubble), which nothing penetrates from the outside and which does nothing but pass or bounce off other bubbles. Everyone applies the proverb “If you go through a village of one-eyed people, close an eye and walk on!”³¹

In the law courts of Niamey, Cotonou and Dakar, the judges “rub shoulders” without consulting each other, the clerks work on their own, the department heads are happy as long as there are no problems (and sometimes receive a cut from the illicit intrigues of their subordinates), and there is no real control of the quality (and sometimes the reality) of the services provided by the staff. Even the manual workers are not really controlled and are largely left to their own devices (all the more so as they are well aware of each other’s tricks and schemes).

‘Everyone tries to preserve their field of action as personal property. When you tell a colleague that he does not do his work or that he’s done it badly, he will tell you to mind your own business’, says a voluntary worker (Moumouni, in Moumouni & Souley 2003)

“Areas of suspicion”

Any form of collective action immediately gives rise to considerable suspicion, rumours and accusations, both from within and outside the institution in question. In the rural context, there is no co-operative, grouping, association or management board that has not been overtly or covertly subject to accusations of embezzlement. The world of the political parties is universally perceived as a world of intrigues, endless reversals of alliances, arm wrestling and blows “below the belt”, betrayals and shifting allegiances (or “transhumance”). The political-administrative apparatuses do not escape this law of suspicion. There is hardly a single service director who is not potentially corrupt, partial or partisan in the eyes of his collaborators and subordinates; in the same way, any decision of a judge is automatically suspected of having been taken to please X, or because Y gave him an “envelope,” i.e. containing a bribe.

Of course, it is not possible for us to vouch for the truth of all of these accusations and some are probably unfounded or slanderous. What remains attested, however, is the extent and significance of these “areas of suspicion” in the administrative services and elsewhere, which

³¹ Quoted by Souley, in Moumouni & Souley (2003).

undermine the construction of minimal relations of confidence or trust, necessary to the satisfactory delivery of public or collective services.

In Niger, the Zarma term *baabize-tarey* (i.e. being the children of one and the same father) suggests jealousy and competition, in both everyday and political life. The election of a chief for life over other candidates, who are also his brothers or cousins (i.e. his *baabizey*) and will consequently remain his opponents for life, symbolises this. This general climate of mistrust is furthermore maintained by the frequent consultation of soothsayers, magicians and other marabouts ready to denounce a relative, friend or collaborator in the subject's immediate circle, who is held responsible for the latter's past, present and future sorrows.

"Privilegism"

Any position in the public services is assessed first and foremost according to the access to privileges that it provides. Given that salaries are derisory and frozen almost everywhere, and the investment in work itself is minimal, be they formal or informal, licit or illicit, the privileges actually make a difference. The aim of the game is to somehow extend these privileges to the maximum, sometimes excessively, either on account of the associated material benefits and resources or because of the prestige they provide. The "advantages of one's position" are, therefore, genuine "markers" of status and operate as signs of "distinction" (in Bourdieu's sense) *vis-à-vis* colleagues, subordinates and service users.

The privileges range from the reserved and private use of a telephone line to the "appropriation" of the service car by civil servants, from obtaining lucrative "assignments" to the villa that goes with the position, from using subordinate employees for one's own shopping to the unlimited use of air-conditioning, the use of the service's gas coupons for private tips or a personal bonus, the *de facto* appropriation of work premises for personal business or receiving friends etc. The comparatively luxurious world of the "projects" (with its four-wheel drives, its air-conditioners and functioning offices) presents as an ideal world of privilege to which everyone aspires. Thus, when a project is supporting some public service department, being the "focus point" (i.e. local contact) for this project is a highly sought position due to the access it grants to certain—even minor—advantages specific to this enchanted world of the projects.

Contempt for anonymous users

Irrespective of the nature of the public service, i.e. land registry, post office, registry office, police station or medical centre, the anonymous user starts from a weak position and finds himself in a hostile environment. He must embark on a virtual assault course and nobody will

offer any help—quite the contrary. The civil servants regard him as an intruder and a troublemaker—or even prey (see below)—and intend to allow him to disturb them as little as possible. His ignorance of procedures does not invite help, but reprimand. Whereas the external social world favours the values of propriety, hospitality and respect, the bureaucratic universe appears to be based on contempt of the user and, in particular, his time.

In the course of the interviews, the users of the health services repeatedly remarked: “They don’t even look at us.” This statement expresses their perception of not being respected, of being non-existent and humiliated.

He does not look at you, he alone speaks, you do not understand, and then he gives a prescription... I told him that my daughter’s body overheats, he did not even look at her. (Fanta, 24 years old, Abidjan, quoted by Koné 2003)

I was trying, along with an orderly, to encourage a birthing mother to push. She was very tired and moaned a lot. This irritated the midwife, who said to me: ‘Cut her, they are all like that, ready to go with men, relishing the pleasure but unable to control themselves when faced with pain; the children of today are just shameful.’ (...) I was about to do it, I had told the ward orderly to give me a blade, but I still wanted to wait for a while. Then, with a sudden start, the patient pushed and the baby began to come out. Everything was fine then. I was relieved. The midwife said to the patient ‘you’re lucky, because if I had been delivering your baby I would have cut you at the outset.’ (FL, second year trainee midwife at the school of midwifery, ENSP, Niamey, quoted by Souley 2003)

The generalised exchange of favours

This contempt stops, however, where the recommendations start. Anyone who comes with a direct or indirect recommendation is treated very well and often at the expense of waiting anonymous users. When dealing with a PAC (“*parent, ami ou connaissance*,” i.e. relative, friend or acquaintance), civil servants fall over themselves to be polite, facilitate access to the required services and willingly leave their desks to accompany their patron. The “recommendations networks” are multiple in nature and involve members of the extended family, neighbours, people originating from the same region, colleagues, former schoolmates, people who pursue the same leisure activities, political party associates etc. The favour rendered will not necessarily be returned equally by the “debtor” but through other services rendered by other acquaintances. For this reason, to parody Lévi-Strauss’s formulation on kinship, it is possible to refer to a “generalised exchange of favours.”

To survive in the administrative domain it is necessary to know somebody or know somebody who knows somebody. When faced with an administrative problem that needs to be resolved, people do not try to find out about the procedure that needs to be followed, but who they need to see, someone who can pull strings for them.

Favours for colleagues or their children are normal. For example, they do not have to respect precedence; I can even give them drugs if I have some. The official can even leave his working place to go with his friend's child to another better-equipped health centre. However, you cannot do the same thing for people you hardly know. You cannot do favours for everyone you know. There's no need to get carried away. (EM, manager of a CSI,³² Niamey)

When they come for a consultation, some of our "*passes*" (i.e. recommended people) do not even stop to pay the bill. They go directly to see the hospital staff. If I decided to oppose the '*passes*' system, we would not get along anymore. (BI, tax collector at a hospital, Niamey)³³

Systemic corruption

A solution for the service user who does not have any contacts but has money is to resort to corruption which is systemic, omnipresent and quite visible. However, corruption also unites people in continuous business relationships, or structures itself according to organised and even reciprocal networks (the police officer must give "his share" to the sergeant, who gives his to the superintendent etc.). Thus this systemic corruption takes multiple forms: commission for illicit services, gratifications, string-pulling, undue remuneration of public services, tributes, sidelines, embezzlement etc. It can be punctual, dyadic or regular. Insofar as the government official does not do his work, or any work, unless he receives direct remuneration from the service user or colleague, it leads to a kind of "informal privatisation" of the state.³⁴

Popular semiology conveys the multiple dimensions of corruption and its everyday omnipresence very well: "the goat grazes where it is tied;" "he who crushes or grinds always keeps a mouthful for himself;" "the money for the sauce ingredients must be given"; "to put a stone on a file, so that it does not fly away;" "to grease the mouth"; "it takes two hands to be

³² Centre de Santé Intégré.

³³ Quotations from Souley (2000); cf. also Souley (2003).

³⁴ See Blundo & Olivier de Sardan (2001a).

able to wash each another;" "one should not come empty-handed;" "the ropes of those drawing from the same well always get mixed up" etc.³⁵

The "culture of impunity"

The absence of any real sanctioning of serious professional misconduct (such as misappropriation or corruption) is evident everywhere. The worst that can generally happen is re-assignment, i.e. being posted to a different workplace. Many heads of department told us they were unable to sanction incompetent, negligent or venal subordinates as any sanction would immediately trigger a flood of protests and intervention in support of the sanctioned official. This may be done out of solidarity or pity, but may also involve power struggles based on patronage or clientelism, which may or may not be associated with political party affiliation. If one also considers that the offenders' unscrupulous behaviours are well known to the others and that "everybody has a hold over everybody else,"³⁶ either vertically or horizontally, it is easy to understand why such a "culture of impunity" prevails.

A midwife caught several times cheating the patients or their companions at the maternity hospital of Niamey was finally "punished" and had to leave the service: her head of department had to threaten to resign in order to have her leave the service. She attacked him physically and promised to return soon. Three months later, she was reassigned to the maternity hospital.

Officials from the health service in Niamey report (see Souley, in Moumouni & Souley 2003): "There is never any sanction, that is why it does not work;" "there are untouchable people;" "there is an incredible carelessness on such a level, some unscrupulous officials are protected by the managers;" "the entire system does not allow any sanction;" "there are so many cliques that sanctions cannot be made."

The lack of motivation among civil servants

It is difficult to encounter a happy or simply motivated civil servant in the countries studied today. Moreover, the term "motivation" has lost its usual meaning and refers to nothing more than the illicit payments the civil servant demands as his due. The sense of a job well done and the satisfaction to be gained from a completed task are only referred to by our informants in the context of a nostalgia for a lost paradise or the dream of an unattainable utopia.

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of this popular semiology of corruption, in particular in Wolof and in Zarma, see Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2001b).

³⁶ See Jaffré (2003).

While the effectively derisory salaries paid to the civil servants are at the heart of this dissatisfaction and remain the explanation given—in this era of globalisation when there is no end to the range of consumer goods available and possible enhancements in standards of living—they are not the only factors behind the annoyance and even disgust expressed by the state officials. Each of the following factors plays a role in the disheartened collective mood: i.e. the lack of recognition of professional competencies, the never-ending political and clientelist intervention, the absence of efficient human resources management. Moreover, the fact of having to supplement one's income with these small acts of corruption does not contribute to maintaining the self-esteem necessary for professional motivation.

At the Primary Education Inspection Department of Tahoua in Niger we encountered numerous teachers assigned to ridiculous administrative tasks, vegetating for years in empty offices: a town planning technician who has become a librarian but without any books; a teacher assigned solely to the management of the meagre “outgoing” mail record (a few letters per day) while a colleague fulfils the same task for “incoming” mail along with her other duties; a teacher-storekeeper who manages the few rare consignments of school material available all year round; and the following quotation posted visibly in an inspection office: “Life is a slice of shit, a piece of which has to be swallowed every day.” At the same time, the country suffers badly from a lack of teachers in the field and recruits “education volunteers” with a low level of education and without skills or motivation who are paid FCFA 20,000 per month and often go missing from the classroom and even “tax” their pupils.

Unproductiveness

Demotivation, privilegeism, every-man-for-himself-ism, corruption—all of these phenomena clearly lead to an extremely high level of unproductiveness in the state services. This is confirmed by our observations: a significant proportion of working time is taken up with what could be described as “social absenteeism” (i.e. for attendance at christenings, marriages, burials) and a further proportion is consumed by “micro-absenteeism” (i.e. arriving late at the workplace, undertaking personal shopping during working hours and leaving early). In terms of the remaining time actually spent at the work place, a considerable part is devoted to non-professional activities, i.e. receiving friends, chatting or “slacking” with colleagues and the taking of short naps. Professional tasks are accomplished during the remaining time, but often with bad grace and either slowly or too quickly.

As opposed to this, department heads and senior management are sometimes overburdened as all of the work tends to be focused on them, even subordinate tasks. They are usually unable to or do not want to delegate tasks to their unproductive subordinates and are unable to form a team.

Finally, everyone is forced to waste his time on archaic and absurd administrative procedures.

In Abidjan, as in Niamey and Conakry, consultations at the medical centres we investigated never started before 9 am—the women had sometimes been waiting since 6 am. In general, they finished before midday and the women who arrived later or in the afternoon were generally sent away. The staff of these medical centres are, however, supposed to work eight hours per day, and do not do any ward duties.

In Tahoua (see the above-mentioned case), the departmental Director of Primary Education is overburdened and must, moreover, answer two or three times a day to summonses from the Prefect while the offices under his management are full of idle personnel. The only telephone is in his office where there is a constant procession of subordinates receiving and making telephone calls.

In Cotonou as in Niamey, due to the lack of a rational bill-payment system, you have to queue to pay electricity bills at the end of the month. This involves waiting in the hot sun for three or four hours.

Doublespeak

Like the generalisation of illicit practices, the “informal privatisation of the state,” and stealthy partisan patronage, the gap between the formal and real organisational chart of public services results in a kind of structural schizophrenia or institutional personality split among government officials. On the one hand, there is an official language for external show and national political rites, i.e. that of a sovereign state, founded on the basis of a legal model and a Western bureaucratic ideal-type. On the other hand, there is an everyday language, i.e. that of “arrangements” (*ajara* in Hausa) which is, in fact, a language of tricks and favours, intrigues and negotiations. Similarly, the public norms, i.e. those of the constitutional and legal apparatus, of proclaimed modern citizenship and of administrative and quantifiable procedures coexist with the practical norms, established uses, informal codes and local professional cultures.³⁷

³⁷ For an analysis of the practical norms and the local professional cultures in the field of health, see Olivier de Sardan (2001).

In communications with the aid donors, the international institutions and also in official and public circumstances, an organised semantic universe is used, i.e. that of the standardised and euphemised language of the universal modern state, on the one hand, or that of development aid, which is, of course, omnipresent in Africa, on the other hand. This universe is constituted, therefore, of two intricate stereotyped languages, where concepts such as “democracy,” “transparency,” “civil society,” “free elections,” “sustainable development,” “human rights,” “the promotion of women,” “popular participation,” “freedom of the press,” “feeling of responsibility,” “the war against poverty,” and many others coexist in harmony.

Quite a different semantic universe is used in the context of daily interaction, i.e. that of everyday expressions of derision, familiarity, complicity and competition. Moreover, whereas the first semantic universe—and the one in which the western institutions prefer to communicate³⁸—is French, the second is mainly rooted in the national languages (or sometimes in local version of French), and this is the one the local actors enjoy speaking. These two semantic universes coexist peacefully, but remain relatively clearly separated and situations and interlocutors clearly belong to one or the other.

For example, the workshops, seminars and other training courses largely prescribed by the projects and aid donors, which value the expression of official norms, have long been “taken over” and “superseded” by the existing practical norms as additional resources to be appropriated (i.e. expenses, commissions, corruption), or as a possible way of being recruited by the projects and getting away from the public service. Hence, their effect on the professional practices of the participants on their return to their places of work is minimal if not non-existent: the practical norms resume after the brief reign of the official norms during the training course.

Analysis: an historical perspective

These observations and diagnosis should not, of course, be presented without tackling the inevitable question as to why such a situation exists.

³⁸ In a context of development, the command of this doublespeak is an important resource, as the importance of development brokers reveals it (cf. Bierschenk, Chauveau & Olivier de Sardan 2000).

It should be noted that in the social sciences, we are much more at ease with the description of what exists than its explanation, i.e. with the “how” rather than “why.” In effect, social phenomena bring an extremely complex set of variables into play within contexts in which, strictly speaking, the assertion “all things being equal” can never be uttered.³⁹ Even if certain quantitative or positivist analyses continue to nourish the illusion of its possibility, the isolation of a variable and measurement of its impact would appear to constitute an impossible task.

The multiple explanatory hypotheses which should be taken into account simultaneously include, *inter alia*, the Cold War heritage in the early days of the era of independence which was characterised by granting of the vassalage bonuses to the new African regimes; the resignation of the post-colonial elites; the inefficiency of the reforms originating from the top of and/or outside the regimes and promoted on the basis of conditionalities and subsidies; the perverse effects of the development projects and the strategies adopted by the aid donors; the damage caused by structural adjustment; the infernal mechanics of the current “informal internal privatisation” of the states; the ties established between business and political parties everywhere etc.

I would like to explore a group of these factors which refer to colonial heritage and to the methods involved in the construction of the modern administration in Africa and, hence, the relationships between private and public spheres.⁴⁰

The pre-colonial heritage should not be completely forgotten, of course. However, in our view, it has been highlighted too often. It is important to remember that prior to colonisation, Africa experienced extremely different forms of governance: i.e. from multiple lineage societies⁴¹ to savannah or coastal states, from war-like confederations to intricate vassalages or micro-chieftaincies, from tributary regimes to commercial networks or economies based on slavery (which certainly and above all benefited the Europeans, but were also aimed at the Arab countries) etc.⁴² So, one cannot, in any case, speak of a “traditional African culture of governance”, even if it is true that the long tradi-

³⁹ See Passeron (1991).

⁴⁰ An initial version of the following analysis, leading on to the particular case of health, was published in Olivier de Sardan (2003).

⁴¹ “Tribes without rulers” see Middleton & Tait (1958).

⁴² See Anderson (1974).

tion of “written governance”, which was the norm in the Europe of the Ancien Régime (in other words a pre-modern bureaucracy entirely founded over centuries on the handling of registers, legal texts and files), was missing in pre-colonial Africa (the use of Arabic writing remained relatively localised and episodic). In other words, it is above all the absence of a true pre-modern bureaucratic culture that distinguished Africa from Europe in the 19th century. However, even in Europe, modern bureaucracy, although it has incontestably profited from this old written tradition, built itself in many respects by breaking away from the pre-modern bureaucracy of the Ancien Régime, on the basis of the construction of a distinction between public and private spheres, absent in the pre-modern forms of governance.

Therefore, our hypothesis is that *bureaucracy in Africa is not a radically different one which would refer back to “traditional culture.” Instead, it is a particular form of modern bureaucracy (that postulates a division between the public and private sectors, the source of the “production of indifference”) which emerged in Africa as a result of a particular historical constellation, i.e. inherited from colonisation and intensified during the post-colonial period.*

In fact, African bureaucracies were born of a double rupture: a colonial rupture with the pre-colonial forms of power and a bureaucratic rupture which introduced the “public-private” dichotomy and the adoption of written procedures. Thus, a “colonial and post-colonial construction of contempt and privilege” was superimposed on the “social construction of indifference” that is typical of any modern bureaucracy.⁴³

Interface bureaucracy and the “membrane”

We will now examine a structural dimension, i.e. the rupture triggered by modern bureaucratic norms, and a representational dimension, i.e. the popular stigma associated with interface bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic rupture

Modern bureaucracy, which is one of the main pillars of the contemporary state as it developed during the 19th century in Europe in particular, was established through a rupture with the previous modes of management of public affairs, i.e. with the state of the Ancien Régime

⁴³ Indeed, contempt and privileges also exist within the northern bureaucracies: however, as we have already seen, the scale on which they are practised varies.

which was characterised by systems of personal allegiance between aristocratic and political dignitaries and their assistants, attendants and right-hand men, in which pre-modern bureaucracy was embedded.⁴⁴ The venality of office, generalised exchange of “services” and devotion to a patron gradually lost ground (i.e. this was a slow process) to impersonal procedures, recruitment based on qualifications and state service.⁴⁵ The famous *legal-bureaucratic rationality* theorised by Max Weber is not so much a matter of technical or scientific rationality (which would replace “irrational” management with “enlightened” management—a common misinterpretation) as one of *procedural rationality* supposedly ensuring the equal and standardised treatment of “cases” (i.e. files), irrespective of the people involved. This procedural rationality is based on a strong (and new) rupture between the private and public spheres.⁴⁶ *From then on, the universe of modern bureaucracy, i.e. that of the public sphere and its administrative forms, had its own impersonal and egalitarian laws, opposed in a way to those governing the “normal” external world, i.e. that of everyday, personalised, emotional and socialised relations.*

This bureaucratic world was generally perceived in its institutional manifestation as an “apparatus”⁴⁷ or “organisation”⁴⁸ with its internal logics, power games, and systemic attributes. Yet it is also possible to express an interest in the relationships it maintains with its environment and, more particularly, its users. We shall refer to what Lipsky described as a “street level bureaucracy”⁴⁹ as an “interface bureaucracy.” Entire sectors of bureaucracies do not have any interface with their users; it is also possible to consider the functioning of the bureaucracy without focusing on the relationships between public officials and service users. In the context of this study, however, it is important to focus on these relationships.

⁴⁴ There are other types of bureaucracies, of course, relating to other historical forms, such as the various imperial bureaucracies, i.e. Roman, Chinese, Ottoman, etc. Modern democracy differs radically from these too.

⁴⁵ See Dreyfus (2000).

⁴⁶ On the construction of the individual and private spheres—which is, of course, symmetrical to the construction of the public sphere—and hence the distinction between both, see Sennett (1979).

⁴⁷ If it is not reduced to its “repressive” connotations, the term “state apparatus,” from Althusser (1970), could be used here.

⁴⁸ The analysis of bureaucracies is also one of the fundamental topics of the sociology of organisations (Crozier 1963).

⁴⁹ Lipsky (1980).

In this respect, and in reference to the title of Herzfeld's book (1992), if modern bureaucracy is a huge machine "producing indifference," in the general sense of the term (files are treated indifferently), interface bureaucracy adopts this indifference at the heart of the bureaucrat-citizen relationship, and, *to some extent, transforms the structural indifference into a behavioural indifference*. The bureaucrat behind the counter only sees typical cases, he is not supposed to have feelings or compassion; he applies the rules, directives and procedures. However, in his everyday life and outside of his workspace, far removed from the norms which define the latter, the bureaucrat's ordinary behaviour does not differ in any way from that of other citizens: he likes some people, hates other people, and vacillates between propriety and coarseness, in accordance with his feelings of antipathy or sympathy in his relationships with others. In the world of bureaucracy, respecting the procedures and treating all cases with indifference is the norm. As opposed to this, in the other world, i.e. that of ordinary social life, networks, affinities, bonds of proximity, permanent differences in the way people are treated are the rule.

The nature of this bureaucratic model is indeed ideal-typical, and only helps in evaluating the omnipresent gap between rule and reality. Admittedly, a radical and permanent separation of public and private behaviours is impossible. This "division" is always relative, and there are always "shifts," "interferences," "overlaps." A Goffman's (1961) metaphor offers an appropriate solution to the expression of the simultaneous need for both this division and its relativity: a "semi-permeable" membrane exists between private and public behaviours which, depending on the actors or contexts, allows greater or less more or less shift of elements of the "private" into the "public."

In my view, this metaphor could prove helpful in the attempt to compare African and European interface bureaucracies. Assuming that a semi-permeable membrane exists between the private and public spheres in both cases, which is the very condition of the existence of a modern bureaucracy, the "membrane" works differently in Africa and Europe, and does not filter the same things. This is evident if we compare the respective stereotypes of European and African bureaucracy from a representational perspective.

Classical European and African bureaucracies: the common stereotypes

There is a long tradition of denunciation of bureaucracy in Europe, both in formal contexts (i.e. press, literature) and in the "little oral tradition" (i.e. jokes, conversation, banter). Courteline, the French playwright,

satirises this well. In his works, the bureaucrat is presented as an insensitive, limited, finicky person who rigidly implements obscure or unsuitable regulations without showing any spirit or sense of initiative. The bureaucratic world is “Kafkaesque.” In Africa, both literature and the “little oral tradition” depict bureaucracy as insensitive, inefficient, rapacious, greedy, despotic, absent, untruthful and lazy.⁵⁰

Divergent foci assemble around a shared notion, i.e. the “insensitivity of the bureaucrat:” in terms of the European perceptions of bureaucracy, the user is regarded as a victim of the rigid application of procedures whereas in the African perceptions, the user is instead confronted with insecurity and arbitrariness. On both sides, there is a common factor, i.e. indifference—and hence a certain form of “dehumanisation.” However, this indifference divides tendentially along different lines: a dominant logic of egalitarian mechanical procedural productivity on one hand (i.e. Europe) and a dominant logic of unproductiveness and arbitrariness on the other (i.e. Africa). In one case, the user is reduced to a simple number, in the other, he is treated badly, humiliated or exploited.

In terms of the “impermeable” dimension of the membrane, in both cases it does not usually leave any space for a “personalisation” of the relationships, *at least for the “anonymous” user*, and produces a profound “indifference” towards this anonymous user which is typical of the public sphere. It may be considered that, in Europe, permeability has been weak for a long time, but that the traditional model has recently been joined—and partly replaced—by an “improved” model which “humanises” the behaviours of interface bureaucracy. In other words, the membrane now allows some behaviours from the private sphere through, which tend to regard the user as a customer and not a number. However, the inspiration behind this development comes not so much from the individual, relational or domestic private sphere as from the private world of business. The public service, which was so discredited, is now humanising itself, by gradually basing itself on a commercial enterprise.⁵¹ Moreover, this process is driven “from the top” (i.e. top-down); it is based on a formal management approach and controlled

⁵⁰ To mention but two examples Chinua Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People* and Sembène Ousmane’s film *Le mandat*.

⁵¹ This metamorphosis is, indeed, far from complete (should it reach an end at all) and well established sectors of the classical interface bureaucracy remain in place: i.e. “humanised” interface bureaucracy is far from winning the game.

by a managerial staff, and tends, in fact, to modify progressively the norm of the public sphere itself. The permeability of the membrane is rather different in Africa: it is not only stronger *in certain sectors*, but it is also informal in nature and reflects both the strong interference of the individual private world (over-personalisation) and an informal internal privatisation of the public service (corruption).⁵²

The distinctive features of African bureaucracies: a diachronic perspective

In our view, referring to the “traditional (pre-colonial) cultures” to explain the very particular situation of the African state, in general, or the African administration in particular,⁵³ is not very relevant:⁵⁴ *modern bureaucracy emerges everywhere as a result of a rupture with previous administration modes, and this was even more applicable to Africa than Europe.*⁵⁵

Bureaucracy as a colonial creation

As a matter of fact, a very specific form of bureaucracy was imported into Africa by the colonial regime,⁵⁶ which was very different from the model dominant in France in many respects. The gap between the administrators and the administered, inherent in the structuring of any bureaucracy, actually opened a much deeper and radical gap between the Europeans and the “locals” there. The very exceptional and dispensatory regime (as compared with the standards of the

⁵² In the broad sense of the term; corruption is more generally inseparable from a whole series of “internal malfunctions” of the public services (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2001).

⁵³ The state and its administrations are often confused. In reality this is indicative of the lack of interest in the administration (which is, however, central though to any empirical study of the state) and a fascination with the state, which is more noble but also vague and polysemic.

⁵⁴ Chabal & Dalloz (1999) is based on this inadmissible “culturalist” argument. Moreover, the work is not substantiated empirically.

⁵⁵ Indeed, this rupture at the origin of the bureaucracy does not involve the pure and simple disappearance of earlier modes of management of public affairs. In most cases, the forms of successive powers and their apparatuses accumulate (cf. Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1998 on post-colonial Benin). However, modern democracy intends to oppose, i.e. break with, these earlier forms in accordance with its own norms, even if, in reality, it must co-exist with them.

⁵⁶ Our acknowledgement of the obvious “importation” of bureaucracy through colonisation does not mean that we support Badie’s thesis (1992) on the “imported state” and its basic extraneity, which denies any hybridisation processes and appropriation of the western state by the developing societies. On the contrary, these processes appear fundamental to us—and we agree with Bayard (1989; 1996) this point—however they have been insufficiently documented in their practical forms.

French administration) of the *indigénat* granted exorbitant powers to the *commandants de cercle* and deprived the administered subjects of basic rights. It has effectively produced a “modern” bureaucracy, however in a somewhat monstrous “colonial” version which combined an entire series of features from the imported modern bureaucratic model (i.e. organisation charts, official procedures, documents, reports etc.) with another group of features “invented” by the colonial situation and often contradictory to the former—hence the bureaucratic schizophrenia, of which traces can still be found today.⁵⁷ I will limit myself here to three main features of this colonial bureaucracy, i.e. despotism, “privilegism” and the role of intermediaries. In our view, they explain some of the behaviours found in contemporary African bureaucracies.

1. Colonial despotism is well documented⁵⁸—unlike its effects on the structure of colonial bureaucracy, despite the fact that they are obvious and important. The extent of the gap between bureaucrats and “local” service users,⁵⁹ the provisions of the *indigénat* code and dominant colonial practices (varying proportions of racism and paternalism) introduced a great deal of arbitrariness and even violence into the procedural rationality of the modern metropolitan bureaucracy, officially imported in a “ready to use” form to the colonies.⁶⁰ The long-term consequences here are important, insofar as, beyond the

⁵⁷ Whereas the *indigénat* regime has been suppressed since 1945, thanks to the action of African political activists, the behaviours of European and African (so-called “evolved”) bureaucrats have not magically changed.

⁵⁸ See Mamdani (1996), who speaks of a “decentralised despotism.” In terms of my own analysis of colonial despotism, I focused on one particular aspect, i.e. despotic exploitation as a system of taxation and extortion (of material products, work, cash, taxes, forced labour, compulsory deliveries etc.) that serves the colonial state by means of political constraint and violence (Olivier de Sardan 1984: 159–172).

⁵⁹ The term of “user” appears strongly anachronistic given that it implies that the administered native is the “beneficiary” of a “service” provided for his benefit by an European civil servant. According to Brunshwig (1983: 24–25), most of the European—and in many cases incompetent—administrative officials appear to have been motivated by an “appetite for power” and the “quest for material gain.” Some famous and not so famous exceptions to the rule do not undermine this tendency.

⁶⁰ The contrast between the metropolitan and colonial administrations has been already stressed, in some cases to bolster the latter: thus Delavignette contrasts “an impersonal, irresponsible administration, lacking control” (1939: 24) to be found in France with the territorial administration of the colonies, which is supposedly endowed with “an inherent internal principle: the personal authority of the administrator and, in the final analysis, personality in the art of ruling” (1939: 27) which he believes will be the administration of the future, i.e. “revolutionary and authoritative” (id: 27).

contempt often demonstrated by European civil servants to their administered "subjects," generations of auxiliaries and African "clerks" learned from the colonisers how to build a barrier between themselves and the local populations, to multiply the signs affirming their privileged status, to establish their superiority by asserting the inferiority of others, to maltreat their "populations," to make use of arbitrariness etc.⁶¹

With independence, these minor African civil servants would not only assume responsibilities in continuity with the former colonial bureaucratic machinery (simply taking the place of the former European masters), but, apart from some exceptions, would allow or sometimes even support the reproduction among their subordinates of the rather particular "administrative culture" inherited from colonialism. Within the colonial bureaucracy, bureaucratic indifference assumed a strong despotic aspect which it has undoubtedly retained ever since. In other words: *whereas in Europe modern bureaucracy developed more or less in parallel to the emergence of citizenship and democracy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, in contrast, in Africa it has gone hand in hand with inequality, violence and contempt, in the absence of any real civic or egalitarian tradition, even since independence.* A collateral characteristic must be underlined: whereas in Europe bureaucracy was established in relative autonomy with respect to executive power, in Africa it has been not dissociable from the arbitrary nature of power from the colonial period to the present day.

2. "Privilegism" (which covers despotism in part) refers directly to innumerable "advantages that go with a position" specific to colonial bureaucracy: apart from salaries doubled by extra allowances, the European administrators were entitled to everything: i.e. accommodation, domestic staff, means of transport, gifts and presents in kind from the populations, free services, mistresses etc. The gap between the conditions enjoyed by the colonial officials and their counterparts in France was even greater when we consider that, in general, the colonial officials were clearly less well educated. Their "position" in the colonial administration alone granted access to these privileges, independent of competence or merit.

⁶¹ The defence of their privileges by the auxiliary "indigenous" staff, in contrast with the populations, has often been noted (see Delavignette 1939: 59).

3. With regard to the intermediaries, they were essential to the functioning of the colonial bureaucracy, insofar as it was characterised by both permanent under-administration and a huge gap between the norms and local practices and the norms and official rules. Due to the lack of human resources and their ignorance of local codes and practices, the colonial bureaucrats not only tolerated, but also systematically availed of various types of local sub-contracting—yet again removed from the metropolitan rules—and employed numerous auxiliaries, additional administrative staff, chiefs, brokers and other henchmen and right-hand men. The main, if not sole, origin of the above-mentioned “pluralism of norms” can be found here along with origin of the “schizophrenic” structure of the administration which ranges between procedural (in particular rhetorical, written or superficial) formalism and multiple oral arrangements negotiated by willing and omnipresent intermediaries.⁶² This prominent role of negotiation and intermediation, which results in multiple “arrangements,” is undoubtedly at the root of the initial forms of the petty everyday corruption, which emerged from the colonial period and undoubtedly certainly benefited the chiefs and their auxiliaries⁶³ as well as the clerks and their staff, but also some of the French civil servants who held posts in the colonies.

The inspectors (who came from France to evaluate the colonial administration) were astonished by the incompetence, the frequent dishonesty and impunity of the staff and the waste of resources astonished the inspectors. (Brunschwig 1983: 24)

The system of the “administrative chieftaincy” (i.e. the use of “traditional”—in fact often “neo-traditional”—chiefs by the colonial administration to control the countryside), which was based on the need for intermediaries and the dispensatory status of the colonies, introduced a neo-patrimonial political system to the heart of the public administra-

⁶² The often highlighted need for the colonial administration to “compromise” with local habits and customs (so as to *innovate* in relation to the rigidity of the metropolitan model, see Delavignette 1939: 123) was facilitated by these intermediaries and resulted in the *production* of an original and unstable form of bureaucracy.

⁶³ Brunschwig quotes, *inter alia*, a circular of the acting Governor of Guinea, who denounced the “gifts” received by the colonial civil servants, and their “abuse of authority in order to purchase at very low prices” (1983: 23–24). The character of the interpreter described by Hampaté Ba in *L'étrange destin de Wangrin* is a good representation of some of the auxiliaries of the colonial administration.

tion: the chief does not have his own budget, his personal funds and those of his position are mixed together.

Colonial legacies and post-colonial innovations

It is difficult to separate the colonial legacy (adopted in its existing form by the new elites who emerged from the “indigenous” layer of the colonial bureaucracies and who came to power at the time of independence) and the variations or innovations which took place from 1960 up to now. This applies to the many forms of clientelism (involving business, political parties, factionalism or neighbourhood affiliations) which have indeed thrived since independence, but were in the main already promoted by the “colonial situation.”

It is known that the “handover of service” between the former colonisers and the new single-party regimes was implemented “carefully” and without rupture.⁶⁴ One of its characteristics was to allow the ultra-accelerated promotion of the former colonised “clerks,” who attained the “colonial” positions in the new state in one day and, as already highlighted, therefore gained the “right” to practise and even extend “despotism” and “privilegism” themselves.

For example, the expression of scornful or arrogant superiority towards the service users and the disproportionate extension of the formal and informal advantages associated with a position—with the exception of the salaries⁶⁵—were fully embraced by the national civil servants, who were even less trained than their predecessors, at the time of independence. Are not these facts indicative of a real process of appropriation? Could a sovereign national public service be conceived that would not deserve the same respect and, therefore, the same advantages as those enjoyed by the masters of yesterday? Thus, the gap between “privilege” and skills was further reinforced and, far from being diminished, the privileges granted to the colonial bureaucracy

⁶⁴ This has often been noted (see, for example, Tidjani Alou 2001: 93). The only ruptures that occurred (e.g. in Guinea and, to a lesser extent and later, in Benin) involved the importation of an even more despotic bureaucratic model, i.e. that of the so-called “communist” countries. It is revealing that in the first two years of independence and during the Cold War, even the most pro-western regimes had borrowed certain elements of political technology (e.g. single party rule, mass political rituals etc.) from the eastern countries.

⁶⁵ As the salaries remained “local” and were not aligned to previous colonial salaries and their subsidies, the discrepancy between the low official salaries and the scale of the advantages and privileges associated to a position increased.

were even extended to the entire hierarchical chain. This mechanism of deployment or promotion far in excess of rank or qualifications and taking only little into account the competence and professional experience (“*reconversion surclassante*”)⁶⁶ could indeed be observed from the top of the bureaucracy to the lowest levels: around the 1960s, when a teacher became minister, a typist became an executive secretary and an orderly became police officer etc. Afterwards, during the first 30 years of independence, entry into the public service was certainly based on more suitable qualifications, but a quasi-systematic system of deployment beyond rank or qualifications continued to prevail as compared to the usual career structures in European bureaucracies. A recent graduate with a primary university degree will have in Africa direct access to positions reserved for graduates with postgraduate qualifications and ten years of professional experience in Europe.

Thus, a completely atypical social elevator was created in the public services. It did not operate with “official salaries, which remained extremely underdeveloped in comparison with those of European counterparts,⁶⁷ but with “privileges” which largely exceeded those available to European counterparts. It was for the most part disconnected from both the average professional experience required in Europe and the typically slow career progression in traditional bureaucracies. Moreover, it merely gave the holder of a position the “tools” of power or semblances of function divorced from any functional environment. This system functioned up to the 1990s, creating “very rapidly promoted” simultaneously privileged and frustrated bureaucrats often lacking the skills or experience normally associated with the positions they occupied. Hence, this system nourished both the arrogance of the “big interface bureaucrats” *vis-à-vis* their subordinates and the contempt of the minor “interface bureaucrats” *vis-à-vis* the service users.

Finally, the role of the intermediaries has continued to expand to the present day to become one of the structural characteristics of African administrations.

All the services studied were able to function thanks to the support of the informal non-administrative staff, devoid of any clearly defined status, sometimes “volunteering” for around 20 years (...). According to our analysis, this supplementary staff has a triple role. On the one hand,

⁶⁶ To use the expression coined by M. Tidjani Alou (1992).

⁶⁷ With the exception of state and semi-state companies.

it would appear to play a functional role by facilitating service users in accomplishing their administrative tasks or the completion of the tasks of the regular personnel. They help to accelerate procedures (at the cost of those users who do not have access to their services). They can protect their clients, avoiding sanctions or multiplying the latter's chances of winning a legal case or asserting their rights. They also facilitate the personalisation of the administrative procedures while reassuring the citizen dealing with an administration perceived as omnipotent. On the other hand, they reproduce the "local professional culture" with its habits, tricks, strategies... and schemes: they always remain in the same location whereas the civil servants are subjected to regular transfers and thus constitute the "memory" of the service. Finally they heighten the "informalisation" of the public service, making the boundaries between the administration and small commercial business, between public and private services and between informalisation around and within the state even more confusing. While they may not be the systematic vectors of corruption, they can nevertheless contribute to the euphemisation of illicit practices and making them commonplace. (Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2001).

Other features of the "real" functioning of the African administration undoubtedly represent more recent phenomena, at least in terms of the scale on which they operate. This is the case with the absence of sanctions and "every-man-for-himself-ism." The lack of productivity and chronic absenteeism of staff, the widespread practice of corruption and the "informal privatisation" of the state of the 1980s–1990s can also be added to the post-colonial innovations. The financial crisis of the African states from the 1980s, the structural adjustment policies (which represented a brutal shift from the imprudent loans granted to the states) and the economic and political favours of the Cold War period obviously bear considerable responsibility.

Thus, once independence arrived, African bureaucracies did not move away from the atypical colonial model so as to move closer to the European model as predicted by the theories of modernisation. On the contrary, the difference between African and European bureaucracies increased in a certain way. This is particularly true of the interface bureaucracies.⁶⁸ *At a time when policies to improve the quality of service were gradually adopted within the European bureaucracies, i.e. from the 1980s and in particular the 1990s, African interface bureaucracies remained captives*

⁶⁸ An analysis of the upper strata of the African bureaucracy would, of course, be different and would bring other phenomena to the fore (see Tidjani Alou 2001: 17–19; 1996: 72 for Niger).

of a colonial model which the post-colonial innovations tended to exacerbate rather than improve (in any case in terms of the relationship with users). Clientelism, privilegeism, and “every-man-for-himself-ism” converged, for example, within an increasingly degraded administrative environment, towards growing general contempt for the anonymous user, often associated with extortion at the expense of the latter, the most common manifestation of corruption and informal privatisation found in the interface bureaucracy.⁶⁹

In such a context, “over-personalisation” would appear to constitute a compensatory mechanism and the only one guaranteeing that a real service is rendered to the user, as long as he or she is “recommended.” The “permeability of the membrane” would therefore allow a dispensatory zone of personalised operation through an episodic importation to the interface bureaucracy (i.e. the scornful public domain) of “human” relations originating from the outside (i.e. the cordial private domain), thus enabling a usually inhuman, predatory and dysfunctional machine to become human, benevolent and functional for a time and for an individual. Thus, this membrane would function like a valve. However, it is a vicious circle which is perpetuated and grows. The discouraging fate of the anonymous users makes it all the more necessary to mobilise networks of favours which further promote the dysfunction of an unproductive and demotivated interface bureaucracy.

Conclusion: dissatisfactions and reforms

Original and paradoxical forms of state and general dissatisfaction

It is important to note there are many other factors at play in addition to those analysed above; in any case the outcome is clear. A rather specific type of modern bureaucracy was established in the post-colonial African states which refers as well to very specific forms of governance, which were highly convergent from one country to another. These are

⁶⁹ The everyday reproduction of this bureaucratic culture, which is common to all African administrations, needed a favourable environment, i.e. a general crisis of the state in Africa or even its decay in this case (Olivier de Sardan 2000), of which the main causes are well known: i.e. the quasi-bankruptcy of the states and multiple delays in the payment of salaries in many countries, the various adverse effects of the structural adjustment policies, the fictitious nature of the budgets, the irresponsibility of the political elites and of their “politics of the belly”, the widespread electoral corruption etc.

neither simple “deviations” from a European “model,” which should be respected or imposed, nor—even less—extensions of a so-called pre-colonial political culture. They are original forms based on the modernity of African countries and their recent histories.⁷⁰

However, even if the African state is original, it does not give satisfaction to its citizen. On the contrary, all of our data reveal a profound dissatisfaction on the part of both government officials and service users with respect to the current system of governance. The statement of a certain “decay” in the contemporary African state is not necessarily an ethnocentric western prejudice; on the contrary, it reflects the general feeling that emerged from our investigations among both the civil servants themselves and the users.

At the same time, some of the state’s activities more or less “work in spite of everything.” Beyond the diagnosis suggested above, which appears irrefutable, small islands of functionality remain or are sometimes created here or there, and not only due to drip-feeding from support projects or sectoral assistance—although in many case this occurs for just such reasons. Similarly, some of the routine practices provide a minimum if unsatisfactory service “in spite of everything.” Thus, these states are not “disintegrated” or phantom states, and we are far from the quasi-anomie observable in other places where civil wars prevail or previously prevailed. The public service survives, albeit only in cobbled together and shaky forms; this should not be forgotten. These states are paradoxical and ambiguous, ranging between increasing informal privatisation and universally acknowledge appalling quality of public service, on the one hand, and an undeniable capacity to reproduce somehow and succeed in maintaining a minimal level of public activities, on the other.

Furthermore, we encountered “admirable exceptions” everywhere: qualified, honest and affable civil servants and government officials, anxious to improve the services provided. Of course, these “reformers” only represent a small minority at present. They are usually isolated and have sometimes become embittered, but they do exist.

⁷⁰ I refer here to a set of stimulating reflections, criticising visions of the state in Africa as a simple, more or less monstrous deformation of the western state (Hibou 1999; Meyer & Geschiere 1999). They are limited, however, in that they discuss the state in general in a register of “the characterisation of the state entity,” and are not supported by empirical data relating to the everyday functioning of the administrative services.

This entire context should be taken into account when it comes to tackling the question of the reform, which, in the general opinion of the citizens of the countries studied, is now a matter of urgency.

The question of reform

It is possible to be sceptical as to whether the current leading elites can produce reform “from the top,” particularly in response to external injunctions which come to nothing but often enhance the already extensive skills of the political classes in the area of “doublespeak” (i.e. the language of the aid donors, and that of real policy and governance, far removed from western arrogance and naivety). Our diagnosis calls instead for the invention of new governance forms “from the bottom,” i.e. at the level of the primary state services, or “from the middle,” i.e. at the level of the reforming civil servants. In our view, this involves starting from the practical norms, the local professional cultures and real behaviours, rather than from the official norms and formal organisational charts.

This is why the “training” proposed as a solution is often an illusion: not only do the civil servants often undertake this training for mainly financial reasons (the “*per-diem* or daily allowance culture”), moreover they do nothing but add new layers of official norms to the existing ones which are not respected. Once the diversion of the training seminar has passed, the civil servants return to their desks and their former work practices based on practical norms and their local professional culture.

A reforming impulse internal to the state, or in any case to some of its services, is thus necessary and urgent. It could be based on the aforementioned “admirable exceptions,” in other words on non-typical local civil servants who do their work conscientiously “in spite of everything”, are not greedy and listen to users—mostly discreetly. Ignored or feared by their bureaucratic hierarchy, isolated, often discouraged and sometimes bitter, these actors should be recognised, helped, put in networks and given front-line support so that they can influence and ultimately become positive models for their colleagues. It would appear obvious, however, that a degree of “external national pressure” also needs to be exerted by civil society with the establishment of new citizen cultures, the emergence of real citizen movements or users’ associations, their rejection of contempt and extortion, their mobilisation, and exertion of pressure on the authorities or the media.

This is undoubtedly easier said than done and may be justifiably viewed as a pious wish which is based more on the opinion of the citizen than the observation of a researcher. However, the researcher is also entitled to react as a citizen sometimes, as long as he does not mistake one role for the other. One of the modalities of this relationship between the citizen and researcher can take inspiration from Gramsci who aimed to combine the optimism of the will—from my perspective: of the citizen—and the pessimism of reason, i.e. the researcher. In other words, in opposing *afro-pessimism*, which rejects any form of action, and *afro-optimism*, which sustains illusions, we defend *afro-realism* fostered by solid investigations and placing hope in locally emerging reform while acknowledging the considerable difficulties involved.

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‘BAD GOVERNANCE’ AND THE PERSISTENCE OF
ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL ARENAS: A STUDY OF A
TANZANIAN REGION

Felicitas Becker¹

Introduction

The notion of ‘good governance’, as used in Africa in recent years, has its origins in the desperation of donors to find a formula for producing development, or at least, economic growth. Problems with governance were singled out as the reason why the structural adjustment measures of the 1980s and early 90s did not lead to the hoped-for growth, and ‘good governance’ was expected to correct this. As far as the role of rural society was concerned, recommendations for ‘good governance’, like those for ‘structural adjustment’ before them, rested on a view of rural society as largely passive and responsive to initiatives by the centre. In the ‘good governance’ discourse, the origins of rural state institutions in the authoritarian colonial state readily underpin the notion of rural peoples’ helplessness. The co-optation of pre-colonial rural power brokers by colonial rulers is central to this narrative. In this analysis, rural power brokers need local roots to be effective, but the state established itself from its inception as the new source of their powers. Securing and maintaining connections with the state is the first task of any intermediary. Given this dependence, the obvious explanations for the practical failures of these state institutions in the terms of ‘good governance’ are incompetence or corruption. Campaigns for ‘good governance’ are what serves to remove them.

This overall view clashes with many detailed studies of rural local politics in Africa, which show a wide variety of processes, with at least some scope for local actors to shape outcomes. Nevertheless, social scientists too have struggled to conceptualise the influence of both pre-colonial and colonial heritages in present day politics, where it appears ever palpable, but near impossible to pin down. Two productive

¹ Historian, Department of History, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada.

approaches to the phenomenon are those put forward by Mahmood Mamdani and Jean Francois Bayart. The former identified the roots of post-colonial authoritarianism in the creation of rural 'subjects' by the colonial state, describing Indirect Rule chiefs as tapping 'authoritarian possibilities in culture' to be come 'decentralised despots'.² The latter similarly describes local African rulers turning the orders of colonial administrators to their own advantages.³ He described this colonial process as a stage in the centuries-old history of 'extraversion', whereby political leaders in Africa exploit their linkages with the outside world and marginalise others from them.

The present study offers a variation on these themes, in a bid to show that the discourse of 'good governance' is not merely formulaic, but itself political. It argues that in Southeast Tanzania, local political actors continue to reason not only in terms of political processes and arenas centred on the state, but also in terms of local political processes which escape definition by the centre. While the imposition and formation of the state changed political practice, state institutions did not come to define it exclusively. From the villagers' point of view, the end result of the changes aimed at by colonial administrators or modern-day technocrats, i.e. the functioning 'modern' state was—and is—not obvious. They have lived and still live through an open-ended process where the relative strength of institutions based on the central state and of those based on local sources of power is negotiable. Ambitious villagers can think of the institutions of the state as a player among others within the local arena, even if it is the dominant one. Controlling their interaction with state institutions has nevertheless been a constant problem for local power brokers, and arguably, the discourse of 'good governance' has itself become an ambiguous factor in their efforts.

The present study, then, supports Bayart's view, important from the point of view of campaigners for village democratisation and good governance, that misuse of office among members of local government is not so much an effect of ignorance, to be done away with by 'capacity building', or of the hijacking of state-conferred power for narrow self-interest, as it is part of a deeply rooted, if adaptable, practice of politics. Attention to the internationally connected regime of transmission and

² Mamdani (1996: 21, 122–128 and *passim*).

³ Bayart (1993: 70–83).

accumulation, into which Bayart suggests the state has morphed, needs to be balanced by attention to the local arenas in which it can be set to work according to agendas of which central state and international networks know little. While it takes inspiration also from Mamdani's account of the post-colonial failure to democratise the rural state, it parts ways with him in one regard: his reference to 'culture' as a source of the power of rural 'decentralised despots'.

The region studied here offers the opportunity to critically examine this identification of the roots of rural authoritarianism in pre-colonial political culture precisely because it has been held up as an example for the failure of Indirect Rule among people with no pre-colonial tradition of centralised rule, so-called 'stateless' people. It forms the South-Eastern corner of the Republic of Tanzania, bordering in the east on the Indian Ocean, in the south on Mozambique, and in the north and west on other regions of Tanzania. It is inhabited by at least half a dozen different ethnic groups (more if you count some sub-groups separately), which live quite interspersed and in the past often owed allegiance, irrespective of ethnicity, to the same local leader. The major ones are the Makonde, Mwera, Ngindo, Makua and Yao. For the last eighty years, this region has been described as a 'backward' part of Tanzania, itself a 'backward' country. The region has low incomes combined with low investment. This problem is connected to the low price and unpredictable yields of the main export crops, grain during most of the colonial period and, since the 1940s, cashew nut.^{4,5} There is no all-weather road to the capital and no rail link; roads within the province are famously bad. Child mortality is among the highest in the country, a testimony to poor nutrition, poor education and poor medical services. The educational and 'human development' records are also poor.⁶ The reputation of Lindi secondary school is such that despite the general shortage of teachers' jobs and secondary school places, appointments and places at this school are often not taken up.

The administrative history of the region in the colonial period was characterised by the efforts of officials to accommodate the 'stateless',

⁴ On the history of the region and its environmental conditions, Becker (2002).

⁵ On cashew nut see Seppala (1998).

⁶ On the present economic marginality of the region, see Seppala and Koda (1998). On its origins, Becker (2002: especially chapter 4).

decentralised power structures of its ethnically mixed population.⁷ Rather than appointing 'paramount chiefs' as 'Native Authorities', the British here veered between rule by councils formed of numerous village headmen, and by appointed executives supposedly loosely based on precedents from the pre-colonial coast.⁸ Yet in spite of its pseudo-traditional justifications, arguably the problems with this structure did not lie in its failure to overcome the pre-colonial lack of centralisation. As we will see, authority had been *more* centralised in the pre-colonial period, and the weakness of the intermediaries lay not only in their small geographic reach, but also in the paucity of legal competencies attributed to them by administrators. Arguably, this was no less important a cause of their ineffectiveness than pre-colonial heritage. Moreover, the main 'problem' administrators found with their intermediaries was not necessarily harmful for local people: it was their failure to collect taxes. It will be argued here that administrators tended to insinuate a conservative, 'anti-developmental' bent in local society partly to deflect from their own failures and pragmatic compromises. In their formulaic communications, 'bad governance' among African intermediaries, while sometimes embarrassing, often made a convenient excuse, while promises of reform were cheap.

The paper is based on archival records, mostly from the Tanzanian National Archives in Dar es Salaam (TNA), and three tours of interviews in the region, in 2000, 2003, and 2004. It charts ruptures as well as continuities in the problems faced and methods used by several generations of local leaders in Southeast Tanzania. In parallel, it examines the way the administration represented itself, and the role of accusations of corruption and inefficiency in this representation. It concludes that while villagers struggle to participate in political processes within arenas defined by state institutions, they also continue to pursue a polycentric, informal political practice at the local level. In fact, the separation between these two spheres has gradually been refined since independence. Corruption allegations and 'good governance' rhetoric are set to use in both spheres; they are a means of the political process rather than a means to change it.

⁷ The term, a product of classical British social anthropology, only dates from the mid-twentieth century. Its classical formulation is found in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940: esp. 5–23) but the lack of centralised authority and stable institutions in this area had been noted since the days of pre-colonial exploration. For example, Elton (1874).

⁸ The contrast emerges clearly e.g. in relation to the neighbouring region of Mahenge. See Larsen (1976).

The beginnings of local administration and the beginnings of 'bad governance'

Southeast Tanzania's political dispensation at the onset of colonial rule can be characterised by use of travellers' and early administrators' accounts. With the exception of the Makonde plateau, which offered exceptional security from warfare and famine,⁹ southeast Tanzania was then very sparsely populated. Most settlement consisted in scattered hamlets. Many people had arrived here recently from further south; generally the mobility of the population was high.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there was actually a higher level of centralisation of control over people than there would be under Indirect Rule. The most abiding characteristic of the men who dominated the population was their use of shifting, personalised networks rather than centralised, permanent institutions as a means to control their followers. None of the ethnic groups in this region had what the colonial administration would have called a 'paramount chief'. Instead, early German sources tended to use the term 'sultan' to refer to the existing rulers, a term that made implicit reference to the way these rulers styled themselves in the image of the Muslim patricians of coastal towns.¹¹

The absence of a dynastic indigenous power centre is highlighted by the fact that several of these rulers were immigrants or of recent immigrant descent. The Yao Machemba, who had arrived on the Makonde plateau in the 1870s from further south, and by 1890 was strong enough to defy the German rulers at Lindi and Mikindani for over a decade, was typical of rulers in this region with his use of a mixture of military leadership, patronage and coercion. Among leaders who did have local roots, few had a clear dynastic prerogative; rather, they rose from among a group of people advantageously placed within their lineages to claim authority over their kin. While a multi-ethnic, multi-lineage following such as Machemba's could be spoken of as if it were a kin group, neither local origin nor distinguished descent were required in order to become a leader, and they were not enough to fulfil someone's aspirations. The self-made, personal character of this form of rule is reflected in the term 'big man', with which these men

⁹ On Makonde agriculture, H. Gillmann, 'Makonde bush fallowing', Newala District Books, vol. 1. Tanzania National Archives; on the role of the plateau as a refuge against famine, *Missionsblaetter von St Ottilien* 11 (1907), pp. 52-67.

¹⁰ On South-East Tanzania as a frontier, see Ranger (1979).

¹¹ Take for instance German accounts of Machemba and similar potentates along the trade routes to Lindi: Stenzler (1922).

are often described in local languages, and which has been introduced into the language of historians of Africa by Jan Vansina (1992).

In the run-up to colonial rule,¹² means to assert one's standing as a 'big man' included participation in slave raiding and trading, acquiring guns and organising one's followers in defence against raids by others, raising tributes from travellers, acquiring slaves and other dependants, and participation in long-distance trade. Resources acquired from outside the region were crucial to this generation of big men, both consumables such as gunpowder and cloth to pass on to one's followers, and luxury goods for one's own display and consumption.¹³ Nevertheless, their power was defined also with regard to domestic and environmental concerns. One of the benefits of association with a big man was the protection against illness, animal attack and all forms of misfortune afforded by his medicines, and his roles in looking after his following were partly analogous to those of a family head. Along with their far-reaching trade and kinship connections, successful big men also tended to acquire control over a fertile stretch of land to help feed their followers.¹⁴ Success as a ruler, then, depended on the skilful accumulation of influence and power from a variety of sources.

The enforcement of colonial rule in the Maji Maji rebellion, and later on Indirect Rule, in effect meant a reduction of the scale of operations of local leaders, compared to the late nineteenth century. A number of 'big men' died the Maji Maji War of 1905–07; others were reduced by the First World War, which devastated the area in 1917/18.¹⁵ The survivors found their power much reduced.¹⁶ After

¹² On kinship as a political idiom see Giblin (1994).

¹³ The authoritative account of the political role of material culture on the late pre-colonial Swahili coast is Glassman (1996). The 'big man' phenomenon in this region indicates that the sort of regime he described in the coastal belt had in some measure extended into the interior.

¹⁴ Interviews with Saidi Bakari Matupulango, Mnero-Kipara, 23 September 2000; with Ali Omari Mpinga, Mnero-Kipara, 23 September 2000; with Juma Ali and Ali Juma Malibiche, Ita, 8 October 2000; with Alois Ali Gomea, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 September 2000.

¹⁵ On the early political response of the 'big men', see Becker (2004).

¹⁶ Nevertheless, while they were cataclysmic, the wars of the early colonial period did not create a blank slate. Although the technological means of destruction that came into play were unprecedented, the survival strategies used to counter them were much the same as in earlier wars: retreat into the bush and into foraging, avoidance of or short-time alliance with passing troops. It is likely that those who had survived relatively well in peacetime also did relatively well at surviving the war. It was less devastating on

the dust had settled, British colonial institutions were established in the years 1927–1930, during the heyday of the doctrine of ‘Indirect Rule’ in British Africa. In keeping with this policy, British administrators in what was now the Southern Province of Tanganyika Territory went out in search of ‘legitimate’, ‘traditional’ local rulers. Realising that large-scale ‘paramount chiefs’ were not to be found, they appointed dozens of putative clan or village heads, known as *wakulungwa*,¹⁷ to ‘govern’ a few villages each and take many decisions collectively. The arrangement was supposedly guided by tradition, yet they did not acknowledge the diversity of power sources that had characterised the big men.

Initially, the introduction of the *wakulungwa* was described in almost idyllic terms as a return to ‘tradition’ and social consensus. This did not last. Over the next fifteen-or-so years, the men and occasionally women appointed as *wakulungwa* were charged with promulgating orders on anything from soil conservation to marriage registration, and above all, with collecting tax. Because of its difficulty, tax collection was extremely important. It was almost synonymous with colonial rule, and led to endless conflict. Villagers remember ‘tax clerks’ in collusion with District Officers, *wakulungwa* and their aides extracting taxes by many forceful means, including making people march in the midday sun in chains, making them sit uncomfortably close to fire, forced labour and beatings.¹⁸ On the other hand, the administrative record is full of the manoeuvres whereby villagers evaded paying tax. The most important were hiding in the forest when the tax collectors arrived, and shifting one’s allegiance round all the different *wakulungwa* in one’s neighbourhood, so that no single one of them could claim the right to extract tax. Officials had expected that the small size of territory under each *mkulungwa*’s control would strengthen their hold over the people within that realm, but the far-reaching kinship networks and spatial mobility of local people enabled them to evade it.¹⁹ The

agriculturally relatively marginal regions such as the one discussed here than on the most prosperous ones.

¹⁷ From a Yao term said to signify ‘big man’. *Wakulungwa* is the plural, *mkulungwa* the singular.

¹⁸ Interviews with Bi Sharifa Mzee Saidi Mwingi, Lindi-Ndoro, 18 July 2000; with Esha Issa Saidi Baharia, Mingoyo, 9 August 2000; with Musa Saidi Chilala, Mingoyo, 11 August 2000; with Mohamed Kawambe Selemani Mamba, Mnacho-Nandagala, 3 September 2000; with Alois Ali Gomea, Mnero-Ngongo, 13 September 2000.

¹⁹ Liebenow (1971); Becker (2002: 157–162).

wakulungwa lacked power bases that Indirect Rule 'chiefs' elsewhere held. In particular, they had no control over land, and administrators were much more ready to dismiss and replace them than 'chiefs' in whose dynastic legitimacy they put more trust.

The accounts of officials avoid going into the reasons why tax collection was so difficult. Oral sources today are in disagreement whether villagers could not or just would not pay the tax; at any rate, they resented it deeply and often didn't pay. Tax collection was patchy throughout the 1920s and during the economic crisis of 1930–35 it collapsed. This is how higher-level administrators described the collapse in hindsight, in 1940:

These Native Authorities... were subjected to an exceptional test in the period of depression... The uncertain authority of the headmen collapsed under the effort of trying to collect the Shs 10 tax from the impoverished population. In Lindi, out of 69 originally appointed, 20 were dismissed after conviction for peculation, 7 for neglect of duty, 5 for drunkenness, and 9 on the ground that they were usurpers.... In 1937 it was decided to carry out more radical changes.²⁰

The administrative account in the mid-thirties gives the impression of a complete failure of authority. Oral sources, though, deliver a more differentiated picture. Villagers' recollections make clear that, contrary to the doctrine of councils of *wakulungwa* equal in rank, an internal hierarchy emerged among them. There were some in whom officials put particular trust, and who commanded particular respect among villagers. There were others who were considered efficient by administrators, but highly unpopular among their people, and there were those who commanded respect only among villagers, or on neither side. The most useful *wakulungwa* were given perks and privileges, and their quest for personal advantages was tolerated. For instance, the most powerful *mku-lungwa* in the district of the provincial capital Lindi, Salum Nachinuku, had tax defaulters working on his plots and, while their labour reduced the tax debt of the district, profited personally from their work. On the other hand, his persuasiveness in making villagers pay tax apparently stopped the most intrusive practices of tax collectors. Nachinuku was given a donkey and later a rikshaw as a sign of his authority, had a house in Lindi and enjoyed the respect of colonial administrators and

²⁰ Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office (CO) file 847/21/20: Lord Hailey's report on Tanganyika, par. 37.

villagers alike. In the official record, the favours bestowed on him were rarely mentioned, so that the myth of equality and consensual decision-making among *wakulungwa* remained undisturbed.

In effect, the endorsement by the colonial state conferred only limited authority on the *wakulungwa*, which required careful handling to be effective. The art of the *wakulungwa* consisted in keeping both sides, villagers and officials, happy (a renewed form of Gluckman's headman dilemma). It was important to have the ear of the administration, but on the other hand, *wakulungwa* also needed personal qualities similar to those of earlier generations of local leaders: Shrewdness, persuasiveness, the ability to bring about consensus, wise use of limited means of patronage, and clever handling of their kinship network. Moreover, the particularly popular *mkulungwa* Nachinuku was a practising Muslim and patron of the mosque in his home village. His children, meanwhile, were educated at his behest partly in mission schools, partly in Muslim madrasas. Religious prestige and educational success were additional feathers in Nachinuku's hat.

We can see now why it is misleading to attribute the trouble with Indirect Rule in Southeast Tanzania to pre-colonial 'statelessness'. Certainly, the ethnic mixture and lack of dynastic rulers in the region influenced the form Indirect Rule took here, and they helped local people 'work' this system, for instance by shifting lineage allegiance or residence. But the structure was not as egalitarian as it purported to be, and 'traditional' only in the imagination of colonial officials. Lack of legal and material resources was as much of a cause of the *wakulungwa's* limitations as was the undeniable distaste of local people for colonial authority. Meanwhile, decrying the ineffectualness of these leaders had already become a means as well as a description of the political process: it exculpated colonial officials and provided reasons for tinkering with the regime.

The jargon of rule and the selective use of corruption allegations

The written record of the provincial administration is characterised by a constant effort to represent this pragmatic approach, where looking through one's fingers was an essential virtue, as orderly and consistent administrative process. They needed the unacknowledged methods, for, while colonial administrators had every means of enforcement in principle, in practice their resources were limited. Moreover, they had

very little information on the societies they were supposed to govern. Like African intermediaries, European provincial staff were caught between two fires. They had to pass on, explain and justify orders from on high to 'Native Authorities' and they had to explain and justify the putting in practice, or failure to do so, of these orders to central government. As their careers depended on the impression they gave to central government, they had a vested interest in appearing in charge without using drastic means of enforcement or otherwise drawing attention to administrative problems. The correspondence between the provincial and central administrations is marked by a straight-faced formalism that bravely ignores how much it elides and obscures. Ignorance was not only an inescapable condition for administrators, but also a fundamental part of the way they lived with their situation.

Occasionally, ignorance shaded into the active ignoring of facts. This can be observed when British administrators changed their mind about the *wakulungwa* in the mid-1930s. After the qualified praise of the early years, they were now as straight-facedly condemned for idleness and systematic corruption. The change in opinion stemmed from administrators' frustration with the consistently poor tax collection record of the province. The quote from Hailey's report, given above, implicitly makes this point. It states that the problem with the *wakulungwa* was their inability to collect taxes. But this was not the reason given for most of the dismissals. Rather, *wakulungwa* were dismissed for reasons to do with abuse of office ('peculation') and legitimacy ('usurpers').²¹ The way in which officials discussed the *wakulungwa* prior to their demotion, in other words, carefully avoided acknowledging the extent to which they were a colonial creation and the confidence and reliance of earlier administrators in them.

Even before then, accusations of corruption against *wakulungwa* arose with some regularity, and the way they were dealt with was distinctly opportunistic, depending on the standing of the accused with the administration. For instance, a *mkulungwa*'s retirement could be his downfall: abuses of office that had been ignored while he or she was in office were prosecuted once they were no longer needed. Given the close association between wealth and power in earlier generations and the scarcity of sources of wealth in the region, it would have been surprising if none of the *wakulungwa* had sought to enhance their fortunes while

²¹ Becker (2002: 157–162).

in office. Yet the accusation of corruption was unlikely to come out of the bag as long as the office holder did not incur the dislike of officials. Salum Nachinuku, who probably derived more fringe benefits from his office than any of his colleagues, never attracted official scrutiny.

To try to make a corruption allegation stick, then, meant entering a power struggle, to persuade administrators to listen to one side and not the other. Effectively, local colonial officials and intermediaries were locked into a political process where nobody understood nor had access to all the sources of power and authority. Administrators lacked legitimacy and knowledge; intermediaries lacked access to central government. Moreover, they risked diminishing their authority by subservience to, or imitation of, colonial officials. They could not merely decree, they had to wrangle and persuade. When they were challenged by local people, the representatives of the colonial state were unpredictable arbiters who invited manipulation.

Here we see an elision between the procedural and the political plane that was built into the Indirect Rule system. Administrators were concerned with effectiveness, with the practice of power, when they chose or dismissed intermediaries, but they pretended that these were merely administrative acts governed by legal rules. Indirect Rule was supposed to work with whatever power structures were found in place in a region, and at the same time to bestow a salaried office, with the appropriate ethos, on the 'Native Authorities'. But rather than describing pre-existing power structures, the official view of 'native law and custom' was full of shaky assumptions. 'Traditional' rulers were supposed to be hereditary and 'tribal', and to operate within territorial boundaries. They were not supposed to exploit people. Officials had to work within this limited set of concepts. But where the ideas came up against reality, these collisions were framed not as a divergence from the theory, but as a breach of good practice. For instance, when the legitimacy of a *mkulungwa* became subject to dispute, one would not say that the notion of hereditary, tribal, territorial rule at village level did not fit circumstances, but simply that this particular office holder did not fit the criteria, i.e. was an 'usurper'. All one had to do was find the 'right' one. Both the rules and their application thus oscillated between description and codification, between the cognitive and the normative plane.

To some extent, local people were players as well as objects in this process. When administrators passed from heavily interpreting to inventing tradition during the 'more radical changes' introduced from

1927, Africans vocally objected to the interpretation of 'tradition' used as justification. Inspired by the former German administration's use of so-called *akida*,²² which had once been rejected by the British as too authoritarian, the provincial administration now introduced African executive officers at the sub-district level, called *liwali*. The reform was accompanied by a propaganda campaign that justified *liwali* rule with reference to Islam, implying that African Muslims 'traditionally' accepted the 'superiority' of coastal Muslims, of whom the appointed *liwali* were said to be specimen. In the sub-district of Mnero west of Lindi, this stratagem promptly backfired. The appointment of a coastal man, an 'Arab' in local parlance, to the office of *liwali* led to so much resentment that administrators changed their mind and replaced him with a local man. Further south, where Salum Nachinuku had been so successful as *mkulungwa*, his son Rainald was made *liwali*, but he was not popular. As one informant put it, 'Salum Nachinuku's reign was good, only that it was hereditary'.²³ The conflicts over *liwali* appointments are indicative of the way in which Africans engaged with the language of the administration. They did not challenge the construct of pseudo-traditional *liwali* as a whole, but rather rejected one particular aspect of the reasoning of officials; in the Mnero case, the supposed 'respect' of African Muslims for coastal Arabs.

The pragmatic motives of the initial narrative of 'traditional' respect for coastal Muslim rulers became evident as during the following decade. As demands for independence grew louder and 'development' became the chief justification for colonial rule, the official rationale for the choice of *liwali* appointees shifted.²⁴ The emphasis shifted towards modernising rhetoric; the ideal *liwali* now was supposed to be well-educated, literate and 'progressive'. This change reflects changes in the standing of the colonial power itself, as Britain was being challenged at the United Nations over its handling of its mandates. In some sub-districts, the provincial administration actually acted on the rhetoric, for instance by appointing the young secondary schoolteacher Justino Mponda as *liwali*. He would eventually be remembered above all

²² On the German administrative system and the role of *akidas* in it, see Iliffe (1969), and Iliffe (1979).

²³ Interview with Mzee Simon Gabriel Kambanga, Mnacho-Nandagala, 1 September 2000.

²⁴ On the late colonial administration see Becker (2002: 310–20); Liebenow (1971).

for speaking out on behalf of the colonial government against Julius Nyerere's demands for independence at a United Nations meeting. Even before then, his schoolmasterly 'modernising' ways made him unpopular with many elders.²⁵ But in other cases, the choice of *liwali* amounted to a silent admission of the limits of the 'progressive' agenda by the administration. Thus in Mahuta on the Makonde plateau, Manzi Matamula was appointed *liwali*, a Makonde trader literate only in Arabic script, but popular with both local people and the administration. His good standing with officials was due partly to the way he had used his connections to Mozambique to secure scarce goods during the Second World War, reviving in a very different guise a trade route which sixty years earlier had sustained Mchemba, the fiercest opponent to German rule on the plateau.²⁶

At the end of the colonial period, then, local leaders and representatives of the state were well practised in the use of a political rhetoric that posited general notions of legitimacy where individual office holders' legitimacy was cobbled together in idiosyncratic ways. Likewise, it pretended general rules on proper procedure were in place even though individual office holders had long taken liberties with them and, depending on political skill and luck, got away with it. The divergence between formal descriptions of the way the local state worked and the way it did was part of what had allowed the colonial state to function. Allegations of corruption were part of the game, 'good governance' a political means to be used selectively rather than a generally enforced standard of political and administrative practice. One result of the development of these 'fictitious worlds' of administrators is a remarkable dearth of reliable information on political practice on the ground in the colonial record.²⁷ They tell us next to nothing about the norms that this practice actually worked by.²⁸ But this ignorance was quite functional.

²⁵ Liebenow (1971: 179–81); Jacob D. Iddi, 'The life of Justino Mponda.' Unpublished typescript in the possession of John Iliffe, St John's College, Cambridge.

²⁶ Liebenow, *Colonial rule*; Becker, 'A social history', chapter 7.

²⁷ The term 'fictitious worlds' is taken from Gerd Spittler (1981).

²⁸ As I argue elsewhere, there was a strong discourse about the practice of local politics couched in Muslim terms. See Becker (2008), *passim*.

Piling on the reforms: independence and beyond

The independent state, then, took up an inheritance not just of authoritarianism, but also of misrepresentation in the practice of power in the countryside. In retrospect, it is hardly surprising if the transition of power into the hands of Tanzanians did not do away with this. It is well to remember, though, that at the time, independence was looked upon as a panacea, and that the high expectations it carried with it continued to colour interpretations of events for decades.

Moreover, independence did make a real difference, both in the structure of state institutions and in the way they were perceived. We will see, though, that it did not remove the scope for, or the practice of, misrepresentation. Our look back into history showed a transition from the relatively centralised power of the pre-colonial big men to the small-scale colonial regime, accompanied by the development of a complex, fluid, unpredictable practice of mediation between local society and the colonial power. The post-colonial period, in turn, presents a different transition: from an optimistic assumption of the connectedness of local society to government to the re-orientation of local actors towards local arenas, partly as a way of coping with the instability of connections with the centre. While informal local arenas and those defined by the state (both centrally and locally) interact constantly, local actors' access to the latter presents them with constant problems. A look back at the transformations of state institutions in the countryside and at their impact on local society helps trace the genesis of this situation.

As evidenced in Liebenow's study, the co-existence of appointees with modernising, above all educational, credentials with those who lacked such but were kept on board because they were effective, continued right up to Independence.²⁹ Inasmuch as people within the region took sides in the developing stand-off between TANU and the British administration, though, the division of opinion cut across this distinction between 'modernising' and 'backward-but-useful' office holders. For instance, the educated Justino Mponda threw in his lot with the British administration while the educated Lawi Sijaona left his government post to campaign for TANU, and while some less educated notables and intermediaries grumbled at TANU, the not-so-educated trader-cum-liwali Manzi Matamula was said to give tacit support to

²⁹ Liebenow (1971: 227–74).

the TANU membership campaign.³⁰ Practically, independence at first meant three things in Southeast Tanzania: The introduction of elected district councils in all districts, the introduction of parliamentary elections, and the re-designation of, and redistribution of tasks among, administrative officials.

Arguably, the most important change accompanying independence lay in the fact that villagers could now think of the state as 'ours'. This was not only because it was no longer run by foreigners. TANU had come to power as a mass movement, and every village had campaigners who had made personal contributions to its success. Now that TANU leaders were in office, these people constituted a direct link to government, or so villagers thought. There was something paradoxical about the increase in legitimacy of the state, though. While it was in a better position to command compliance, villagers also expected their 'own' government to be more understanding, to explain itself better and to be more helpful than the colonial one had been. Especially while it continued to collect taxes, the independent government had something to prove to its citizens. Villagers' demands were quite concrete: more schools more hospitals, help with crop marketing, roads. Yet villagers were willing to give their new government the benefit of the doubt; they were willing to wait when improvements did not arrive immediately after independence.³¹

Nevertheless, a new distinction quickly became apparent between two sets of political actors and arenas, now all peopled by Africans. The re-staffing of the entire administration over the first post-independence years funnelled off many better-educated people from the region, including Lawi Sijaona, the first TANU leader in Newala, who became a cabinet minister.³² Among candidates for national parliamentary elections, educated men predominated. On the other hand, in local, i.e. District Council, elections, a clear majority of candidates were peasants.³³ There were two tendencies at play here. Many stalwarts of the Independence campaign hit a glass ceiling in their political ambitions due to their limited education. On the other hand, and in spite of the prominence

³⁰ Liebenow (1971: 179–81, 245–47, 258–59).

³¹ Interview with Alois Ali Gomea, Rwangwa, 7 September 2003.

³² See Tordoff (1966), on the difficulty of staffing the civil service after independence.

³³ Liebenow (1971: 312–22).

of Nyerere as a national figure, the higher turnout for local elections³⁴ and the prominent role of the sub-district chairmen of TANU attest to the tendency of villagers to focus on local issues. It was here that they expected to see the benefits of independence. Still, the development of the distinction between 'educated technocrats' at the centre and what could be called 'backward, but useful' local party representatives also indicated the continuation of the knowledge differentials that had been such a marked feature of the colonial administration.³⁵

The government acknowledged the problem of rural participation. Independence marked the beginning of a long line of reforms attempting to deal with it.³⁶ Arguably, the now on-going Local Government Reform Programme is the latest instantiation. They included the restructuring of District Councils under appointed executives, the introduction of further appointed officials, the abolition of District Councils in 1972, the introduction of village chairmen and committees in 1977, the reintroduction of District Councils in 1982, the separation of government from party offices beginning in 1992, and the redistribution of responsibilities and financial resources between central, regional, district and village administration during the current reform programme. This long line of reforms tends to be overshadowed by the most dramatic event to hit the rural areas since independence, namely villagisation. Arguably, though, it is also the determination of officials to present the local government reform programme as new that leads them to pass in silence over its precedents. The shortness of institutional memory is a continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial period, as comparison with the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of *liwali* indicates.

Villagers sensed the practical constraints on the TANU government and the persistence of established administrative structure and procedure, and tended to equate certain offices in the newly independent administration with earlier colonial ones. The most visible representatives of the new order after independence, though, were officials who had no colonial equivalent: the sub-district chairmen of TANU. In their way,

³⁴ Liebenow (1971: 312-22).

³⁵ Here, one may identify the truth of Mamdani's claim that Independence was accompanied by a failure to democratise administrative structures. It is hard to see, though, how this failure could have been avoided, if only because of the constraints on the educational system of Tanzania.

³⁶ Bryceson (1993), is a perceptive account of the tinkering with institutions in a bid to enable participation.

they were heroic figures. Most often they were local men of limited formal education, but who had been in the front line of the campaign for Independence. They also tended to have credentials derived from other, non-party, sources. In Mingoyo near Lindi, the chairman Mzee Bin Juma had long been leader of a dance association and of a branch of the Shadiliya brotherhood. Further inland in Rwangwa, sub-district chairman Issa Makolela claimed relations with Maji Maji leaders from the area and doubled as *shehe* of the local mosque.³⁷ Their political role was not very well defined. They were sloganeers and organisers of mass meetings who popularised party and government decisions. Even if these decisions were in fact taken elsewhere, this first generation of post-Independence politicians, now well in their eighties, still command respect and are consulted on matters of local importance. As party mobilisers and mediators between local and higher-level decision making, these notables were unlike any generation of leaders before them, with their connections within the party and the methods of mass mobilisation at their disposal. On the other hand, they were much like earlier generations in that they used a combination of official and semi-official functions with personal flair to build their positions.

The role of these intermediaries, though, came to an end in the course of the best-known event in Tanzania's post-colonial rural history: the villagisation campaign of 1973–76. By now, villagers are no longer dealing with the effects of villagisation, but with the effects of its effects; with the thinning out of state institutions in rural areas that followed their over-exertion in villagisation. To see its significance, though, we have to deal quickly with the villagisation campaign itself. It formed the high water mark of the interference of government with rural life, and of post-colonial authoritarianism. After an initial period of voluntary movement into villages in 1968–72, villagisation was made compulsory. 'Nyerere ordered us to move into villages', is the short formula used by peasants in Southeast Tanzania.³⁸ By 1976, hundreds of thousands of peasants had been moved. The organisational and technical demands associated with villagisation gave much scope to technocrats, salaried

³⁷ Interviews with Mzee Bin Juma, Mingoyo, 8 November 2003; with Issa Makolela, Rwangwa, 3 September 2003.

³⁸ E.g. interview with Athumani Pachoto, Rwangwa, 23 October 2003. A common way for villagers to explain villagisation to outsiders. In fact, an order making movement into villages compulsory was given by Nyerere, publicised by radio, in 1973. See Hyden (1980).

emissaries of the central state. It is hardly surprising if contemporary observers interpreted villagisation as an onslaught on the independence of villagers.³⁹

At the end of the campaign, the sub-district chairmen mentioned above were no longer in office. It is important, though, to see how they were removed. Villagisation entailed the imposition of 'constitutions' on the new villages. Although they were formulated by central government, they were based on democratic participation: on the election of village officials by villagers.⁴⁰ These newly created institutions of village chairpersons and executive officers, village assembly and committees on matters such as education, production and development, were immediately taken up by villagers as arenas of local politics. In Rwangwa, one such assembly elected a new settler as chairman over the local hero Issa Makolela within a year of the resettlement. Generally, new settlers have participated in the politics of these institutions on equal terms. Older residents hung on to some privileges: the notables of old cores of settlement were involved in the sharing out of plots for building and fields for cultivation. While inhabitants of the pre-ujamaa quarters of Rwangwa, for instance, had to give up cashew plots for building sites at the insistence of their district councillor, they managed to hang on to their fields in a nearby valley in spite of the campaigns for collective farming (which was conducted only on newly cleared plots in the hills).

All these political manoeuvres make clear that, contrary to much good governance rhetoric, even villagisation did *not* make villagers passive. Still, it entailed their acquiescence into official rhetoric. Villagers remember that some did not believe the government had the

³⁹ E.g. McHenry, *Tanzania's ujamaa villages*; Goran Hyden, *Beyond ujamaa in Tanzania*. Hyden has described villagisation and ujamaa as an attempt by the state to 'capture' the peasantry, i.e. break its independence from other spheres of production and exchange. Considering the endless squabbles over tax money, mostly obtained through the sale of agricultural produce, and the vulnerability of these earnings to the depression of the 1930s, Hyden overstates the leeway peasants had in relation to markets and the strength of the 'economy of affection'. Moreover, the history of Southeast Tanzania demonstrates that the colonial state's influence in getting the peasants involved with markets had not translated into complete political control, as even in the small-scale and loosely organised societies of this region politics enjoyed a degree of independence from economics. Hyden, however, uses a political economy parlance that fails to distinguish between economic and political control.

⁴⁰ von Oppen (1996), gives an account of how the institutions of the ujamaa village have superseded and partly marginalised older forms of mediation and control.

wherewithal to force the villagisation programme through and tried to ignore the order. They were heavily penalised with forced removals that led to the loss not only of homes, but also of crops and household implements. It caused much bitterness and disappointment, and it made glaringly clear that their strong commitment to the ruling party did not give villagers a voice in either the formulation of government policy or its implementation. They had to play along with official doctrine. On the other hand, the democratic institutions of village government were also part of its heritage, and it was here that villages used their initiative.

The conditions of village politics shifted again with the political and economic reforms introduced from the mid-1980s onwards. This time, the main effect was to increase the polycentric character of local politics and the complexity of individual power bases. The term 'liberalisation' for these reforms is misleading inasmuch as the ruling party retains a strong dominance in rural areas. Still, the reforms brought a retreat of the state from the sphere of commercial exchange, paralleled by a partial retreat of the ruling party from its grassroots organisation. The effects of IMF-inspired trade liberalisation in rural areas have been brilliantly described by Deborah Fahy Bryceson as a 'scramble for livelihood' (Bryceson 2002). As villagers struggled to compensate for the increasing insecurity of their livelihoods under the new conditions, economic connections became means of patronage, producing a faint echo of the political practice of pre-colonial 'big men'.⁴¹ Yet, as the salience of the problematic term 'liberalisation' shows, the policies which led to these transitions were still couched in terms that prescribed, sometimes obscured, rather than described. The introduction of the term 'good governance' is itself part of this process.

The centre, local politics and the call for good governance

Thus villagisation brought a reorientation of the interests and energies of local political actors, if not to say their return, towards the local plane, and liberalisation brought a diversification of the means of building influence at the local plane. We can now have a look at current-day political practice and the place of 'good governance' rhetoric in it.

⁴¹ For a related interpretation of Tanzania-wide political change (with a strong emphasis on the influence of outside agents), see Kaiser (1996).

In 2003, the face of the administration that villagers met most often was that of elected officials at village level. These *maafisa watendaji*⁴² and *wenyeviti wa kijiji*⁴³ were responsible for the collection of school and trading fees. They also organised villagers' participation in state-supported campaigns, for instance on HIV/AIDS, and mediated in minor conflicts among villagers. Most of them had no further distinction beyond this office; they were peasants like everybody else. Their effectiveness and standing differed between locations, depending on the circumstances of their election and their connections and relations with villagers.⁴⁴ Still, both villagers and higher-level administrators routinely called on their services. In an environment where consensual decision-making was valued highly and controversy eschewed, they were above all considered mediators.

From district level upwards, especially at the regional level, office holders were appointees, often from outside the region or, if they were born there, with long working lives in other parts of the country. The hallmark of a higher official was a four-wheel drive car, which stood out a lot in a region where private car ownership was very unusual. In Lindi, many of the regional staff lived along one road with a nice view of the sea. The offices where they work were even further out of town. In a thoroughly Muslim town, they were mostly Christian. Like their income, their power derived from the capital; they had no local roots and did not seek to acquire them. Although the Regional Commissioner might be found 'touring' his region in the tradition of colonial Provincial Commissioners, if he chose to he could be as far away from the running of its day-to-day affairs.

The basic distinction along which colonial administrators and African intermediaries operated, that between powerful outsider (colonial official) and influential insider (African intermediary), never quite disappeared.⁴⁵ Birth alone still did not make the insider. 'Local boys' who had long and successful careers outside the region may return as de-facto outsiders with power. The most prominent example is the former President Benjamin Mkapa, a graduate of Ndanda secondary school but, according to the political lore of the Southeast, too much in thrall to

⁴² Singular *afisa mtendaji*, 'executive officer'.

⁴³ Singular *mwenyekiti wa kijiji*, 'village chairman'.

⁴⁴ I had the opportunity to observe them at work in half a dozen fieldwork locations in Southeast Tanzania in 2000, 2003, and 2004.

⁴⁵ On this continuity with the colonial period, see Ranger (1996).

his 'Northerner' wife and the political establishment in Dar es Salaam to understand the concerns of the Southeast. Conversely, somebody who is not strictly speaking local may still become an insider, as is true of Makonde traders who have settled in Mwera-speaking areas.

In effect, local politics took place not merely along a dividing line between grassroots politicians and emissaries of the centre, but rather in a grey area staked out by the influence of the central state and the offices it bestows, the influence of non-state organisations, above all church and mosque, but also the even less formal networks involved e.g. in the staging of initiation ceremonies, and the economic resources and political skill of individuals. The organs of the state formed part of a web of relations, which were political not only in those ways recognised by the state. Political control was not a black-or-white affair; apart from state-conferred office, there were other, more or less subtle forms of control over fellow villagers, over resources and over family members or business partners further afield. In everyday parlance, such informal influence would be expressed by the use of the designation *mzee* in finely nuanced tones of respect.⁴⁶ A village could have many *wazee*, some of them quite frail and poor men who were respected for their knowledge or for religious offices, such as Muslim sheikhs.

Other *wazee*, though, were wealthy men whose careers showed the importance of economic roles since the onset of liberalisation, and the scope for 'straddling' between administrative/political, economic, and local-political roles. A good example was Mzee Kizota, who started out as development officer in a sub-district of Lindi and, a good ten years on, has become the owner of a guest house and several bars, the only supplier of petrol in his sub-district and an owner of lorries. The elected village government squabbled with him over non-payment of taxes, but had no means of enforcement. In a telling gesture, he displayed a photograph of himself in his guest house in the place normally reserved for that of the president. He was a person to turn to in order to 'get things done'. While the arenas in which villagers pursued these aims were rather lowly if viewed from the lofty heights of the provincial capital Lindi, let alone Dar es Salaam, they counted for something in the minds of villagers, and representatives of the central administration, too, recognised that it is important to have them on board in order to achieve practical goals.

⁴⁶ Mzee singular, wazee plural, is Swahili for 'elder'.

As for the current rhetoric on corruption and ‘good governance’, its first striking characteristic was that, while few would deny that it is ‘an enemy of law’ and of progress, informants were rather bashful to go into actual cases of corruption in their village or district and tend to suggest that it is not so much of a problem locally.⁴⁷ The most interesting accounts and observations on corruption often occurred in informal conversation. At this level, small-scale rent-seeking and embezzlement by minor, unpaid officials was taken as a fact of life. It could be described fairly good-humouredly, as long as it did not affect the observer personally. Moreover, many village officials did not support sending offending colleagues to jail. Instead, they were expected to repay the money they pinched. Villagers mistrusted the aggressive enforcement of ‘good governance’ even while they acquiesced in the official line of zero tolerance for corruption.⁴⁸

It was an important aspect of corruption allegations in the villages that they were directed with much greater verve against the higher administration, while within the village condemnation was tempered by the hope that one may oneself occasionally obtain some fringe benefits, all the more as government and party were perceived to have become stingier in the era of liberalisation. A spat that arose in one village where I worked illustrates this. Word went round that the executive officer had been taking large sums of money from me, keeping them all for herself. An assembly of ‘elders’ (councillors, notables and *wazee* of all descriptions) was called and quizzed me about my background and intentions. When the subject of money came up, and I insisted that I had not made large payments, the animus against the executive officer desisted. Meanwhile, the elders suggested that I make a major donation to the mosque committee. They had no objections to me making large payments, but they wanted to make sure they got their share. This tolerance for local-level corruption suggests that it is fairly widespread, and serves as a reminder of the entrenched mistrust of villagers against higher officials.

⁴⁷ *Rushwa ni adui wa haki*, ‘bribery is the enemy of law’, was an official slogan found on posters in many administrative buildings in the countryside.

⁴⁸ The views summarised here were voiced in a number of interviews with members of the village government in Rwangwa town. Especially interviews with Ali Sefu Marongora, Rwangwa 9 October 2003; with Ismail Makota, Rwangwa 14 October 2003. I prefer not to attribute the specific cases of corruption, as I am not sure the people who told me would be at ease with it.

Another characteristic of stories of corruption is that they presented wildly different outcomes, in keeping with their political nature. For instance, the chairman of one village ward in Lindi rural district insisted that the cash till of the government dispensary in the village be moved from the dispensary to his house. The assistant medical officer working in the dispensary, a woman, a 'foreigner' (i.e. not from the village) and only in her mid-twenties, protested but was sidelined. Like the medical officer, outside observers had few doubts that the sub-village chairman in question would occasionally help himself to some cash from the till. The councillors of the village, however, supported him, most probably hoping for kick-backs, and other villagers acquiesced. As long as his embezzlement was not excessive, the sub-village chairman was likely to get away with it. On the other hand, a development officer at district level who tried to take a cut out of a loan given to a women's group from a central fund was caught out and sent to jail.

The decisive difference between the two cases would seem to be that the sub-village chairman brought on board the people who otherwise would have made the most likely whistleblowers, his councillors. The development officer, on the other hand, tried to act alone. He appears to have misjudged his position as junior relative of the local Member of Parliament. While he may have thought it a protection, the MP was in fact willing to dissociate himself from his relative and make an example of him. Villagers, meanwhile, were satisfied to see a member of the higher, appointed administration fall. What these examples show is that whether or not allegations of corruption were voiced, whether they were heard, and whether they stuck, was still a matter of the political position and skill of the person seeking advantage.

The head of the Local Government Reform Programme in Lindi, Alfred Fuko, was well aware that the task of getting villagers to speak up against corruption was a political one. He saw the aim of the programme partly in enabling ordinary villagers to challenge officials at all levels. Not least thanks to the work of the reform programme, the notion of 'good governance' has reached the villages, in the Swahili translation of *utawala bora*. Yet asked what that means, grassroots officials emphasised not the fight against corruption, but rather office holders' personal modesty and their ability to broker consensus. While this certainly reflected some of their core values, the emphasis away from corruption may also be seen as politic, as grassroots officials did not want too close control of their affairs.

Conclusions

It is evident from this long-term narrative that since the inception of the Tanzanian state, local political actors have always faced two ways—towards state institutions on one hand and towards their personal networks on the other—and that the negotiation between these two spheres was never adequately reflected in the way administrative processes were spoken about. The two spheres have always been interdependent, but they never converged. In the colonial period, intermediaries had to combine state endorsement with the use of influence derived from factors external to the state, such as kinship, religion, trade relations, or access to land, in order to become effective. These stratagems were not unrelated to the colonial order within which they were deployed. But the political roles envisaged and decreed by the administration were only a feeble effigy of the complex, crafty manoeuvrings of local African politicians. Since Independence, such politicking, the use of influence built up by an office-holder rather than conferred by office, has not died out. Its relation to official politics has been ambiguous and, from a village perspective, has not become less problematic.⁴⁹

It is important, though, to recognise that the apparent continuity in the negotiated character of relations between the state and local society does not imply the uninterrupted functioning of a stable ‘mode of articulation’ between the two, or of an unchanging political tradition in the region. Rather, it depended on many contingencies, from the pragmatically ingratiating attitude of early company officials towards ‘sultans’ to the peculiar set-up devised by a British Provincial Commissioner for the Native Authorities here and on to the current financial and practical constraints on the Tanzanian state. It was a pragmatic, day-by-day compromise; the result of all sides ‘muddling through’. There has been genuine change in the way local people look upon organs and representatives of the state: from rejection and evasion in the colonial period to optimistic endorsement and then back (as it were) to cautious watchfulness, in turns opportunistic and pleading. Arguably, the strongest continuity lay in the enduring poverty of both local society and the state, circumscribing the options of both.

⁴⁹ A separate paper would be needed to ‘factor in’ the presence of aid organisations and the shifts in their relations to state institutions on one hand and villagers on the other. It has certainly dented the role of the state in the villages, but I suspect less so than at higher levels of decision-making.

The account given above indicates that a focus on institutions, and on their continuity with the colonial period, is not enough to understand the failings of rural democracy. There was genuine institutional change after independence, yet the interaction between these institutions and local society remained problematic. Now as in the colonial period, official descriptions of the formal, intended structure of institutions are a poor guide to actual political relations. Nevertheless, now as then, they work, and in several ways. This applies equally to examinations of the adequacy or otherwise of local institutions to notions of good governance. They help local officials explain their actions towards their superiors and remind them of the constraints they are under. In the mouth of such officials, they also rhetorically put local leaders in their place, reminding them of their failings and obligations. On the other hand, members of village government may use them to plead for material support and even—very mildly—question on-going political processes.

In keeping with Bayart's view, the elements in the political system that formal descriptions fail to account for are not merely a momentary distortion arising from individual abuses of power or ignorance of procedure. Rather, they are the most recent form of a long-standing process of negotiation between organs of the state and the societies of the region. Arguably, a certain kind of parochial political ambition has actually become more widespread and pronounced in Southeast Tanzania after independence. Local actors afford themselves the liberty to define their aims in decidedly local terms, but there is also more than a hint of resignation about this. Villagers feel a very real sense of helplessness when faced with state interventions. Defining oneself and one's ambitions in terms of local arenas is an alternative to snapping at the ankles of the machinery of the state, the way Bayart describes it for urban youth.

With regard to local government reform, possibly the most important implication of the long-term perspective applied here lies in the persistence of misrepresentation. From its inception, when German administrators styled some big men sultans, the envoys of the central state have had trouble defining the role and legitimacy of the local power brokers. The way they did it was typically a product of both ideology and expediency. The officials who reported on the working of the local administration were assuming the role of disinterested observers, but in fact they were not; their own careers were bound up with the success or failure of 'their' intermediaries and their definitions

of them. While officially procedural correctness was the main criterion for the acceptability of office holders, in fact their usefulness mattered as much, if not more.

Combined with but going beyond misrepresentation, both actual and declared ignorance play an important part in the interaction between local actors and representatives of the state. Much of the time, the misrepresentations covered the ignorance of officials. Concomitantly, the transition to (not necessarily any more factual) 'knowledge', that is, the ability of officials to 'discover' the 'irregular' nature of the actual arrangements when it suited them, in effect worked as a lever of their control. In this complex of practice and rhetoric, 'good governance' appears as yet another means in a rhetorical arsenal that has long been developing. Occasionally, it will probably empower local people in interaction with state authorities. On other occasions, it will serve to schoolmaster them. Which outcome occurs depends on factors that are currently not part of the conceptual framework of good governance, and arguably beyond the interest of the donors who push this agenda.

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HOW CAN THE LOCAL LEVEL EXIST? THE CASE OF THE DECENTRALISATION OF THE HEALTH SYSTEM IN CAMEROON

Marc-Éric Gruénais,* Raphaël Okalla,** Eric Gauvrit***

Health and education are the two sectors most affected by structural adjustment policies in sub-Saharan Africa. Up to the 1980s, the paradigm of the welfare state largely dominated the public policies of post-independence African states. In the late 1940s, the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* claimed that one of the duties of the state was to provide free healthcare for citizens. During the years after independence, Africans grew accustomed to free medical care. However, as the states fell into debt, their ability to finance public services declined, on the one hand, while demand continued to increase, on the other. Against a background characterised by a reduction in national budgets and the aim of international financial institutions to minimise the role of the state, public healthcare has been in constant decline. Nevertheless, healthcare had to be financed by the state because one of its duties is to protect its citizens. Thus, mechanisms for the self-financing of public health facilities became well established (in accordance with the Bamako Initiative). In order to achieve this, however, it was essential that all national territory be served by viable health centres; in other words, structures in the most peripheral and remote areas should not be jeopardised by “deregulation.”

Thus, the sub-Saharan Africa health services were particularly affected by the changes in the modalities of governance. After the “all state” period and the subsequent “less state” period, from the early 1990s the need emerged for a degree of regulation and the planned organisation (or “rationalisation” to use the specific term) of the provision of medical care on national territory. One of the main instruments of this rationalisation was decentralisation, which took the form of the division of the national territory into health-administration sectors. Like many other sub-Saharan African countries, with the support of bilateral and multilateral donors, Cameroon undertook a reform of its

* Anthropologist, Institute of Research for Development (Marseilles); ** Public Health Doctor, Ministry of Public Health and Population (Yaoundé); *** Political scientist, CREDES (Paris).

health system in the 1990s, in compliance with various international directives, i.e. the Bamako Initiative and the resolutions of the Harare Conference, in particular.

Among other measures, the reform consisted in the establishment of a new health map, one of the main tools for the management of the health system. Very broadly, the health map is used to verify the available equipment and personnel requirements of the health system. Thus, it is also a planning instrument used, for example, to identify remote areas where health centres need to be built, to assist the teams that supervise the practices of health personnel and in the refurbishment of existing centres. Thus, this management instrument organises the health sector in accordance with the technical standards of public health. It necessitates territorial division on the basis of the hierarchised provision of care; however any new territorial division is likely to generate conflicts and negotiations, in particular when the political rationales adopted at local and national levels do not match the technical recommendations supported by the foreign aid donors.

The three case studies presented below,¹ which were conducted in urban and rural areas in Cameroon, demonstrate that, given the actual methods of decentralisation and externalisation of development used at the local level, the dynamics of decentralisation underlying the drawing up of a new health map can lead paradoxically to the reinforcement of the central administration and, therefore, of the state. We start by describing the nature of the model on which the reform of the health system in Cameroon is based. We then analyse some concrete cases which illustrate the extent to which the negotiations at local level triggered by a reform of this kind are generally resolved at the highest level of the central administration.²

The reform of the health system in Cameroon

The model

Since the Harare Conference in 1988, according to the World Health Organization, the health district has been considered as the cornerstone

¹ The data presented here was collected in 2001 as part of a research programme entitled "The local organisation of the health systems in Central Africa." The research was financed by the Research Department of the French Ministry of Employment and Solidarity (Research, Studies, Evaluation & Statistics Dept).

² For a more detailed presentation of these examples, see Gruénais (2002).

of the reorganisation of health systems.³ The district is supposed to constitute the interface between the norms and strategies defined by the central level, on the one hand, and the demands of the community and the local authorities, on the other. The most important co-operation agencies, including the World Bank, have adopted this approach and have cooperated with many countries to create sustainable health districts. When developing countries choose to reform their health systems, the health districts then become the main target for donors and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).⁴

The health district is supposed to correspond to a given administrative area and cover a specific population; its scope can, of course, vary, depending on the country and region.⁵ It constitutes the smallest urban or rural unit for primary healthcare programmes. In theory, the health district is an autonomous component within the national health system; all of the institutions and individuals that provide healthcare (including private providers and traditional practitioners) are regarded as actors within the district health system. In theory, the district has a local administration, which was assigned tasks by the central health administration. It is under the responsibility of a district health committee, which is part of the district development committee and is in charge of implementing health objectives with the support of the district health team. The district, which has decision-making powers, must be able to manage its own financial resources. The district management team, which is led by a district medical officer, is responsible for the supervision of the health facilities, the collection of medical data and the coordination of the activities of all medical staff in the district. This team constitutes the link between the peripheral and the superior (i.e. provincial or regional) levels. Usually the district medical officer is not the director of the district hospital: the former must work in a public health capacity with all of the health actors in his

³ See, for example, Monekosso (1989).

⁴ For a complete analysis of the implementation of health districts, see Grodos (2004).

⁵ The population admissible for a rural district is between 50,000 and 75,000 inhabitants, and 100,000 to 150,000 inhabitants in an urban area. However, the population numbers in the health districts, in which we worked in Cameroon, tend to demonstrate that these norms can vary: there were 90,000 and 210,000 inhabitants in two contiguous rural districts in the extreme north of the country, 77,500 people in a rural district of the central region and the urban health district of Yaoundé which is dealt with below had 315,000 inhabitants in 1999.

district and hospital doctors do not always receive the training necessary for this task.

The health district should be composed of two levels of reference: the health centres, and the reference hospital or “hospital of first reference,” which is usually called the “district hospital.”

Each health centre serves a community belonging to a “health area” and all of these areas together make up the health district. The health centre is on the first level of the medical pyramid; this is where the medical staff, patients and the community are supposed to interact. These health centres offer primary care.⁶ The services are provided by a range of health professionals, i.e. nurses and auxiliaries. The health centre is not supposed to benefit from the services of a doctor, the latter works at the level of the district hospital. The “community” is invited to participate in the management of the health centre which must have a board of management. The latter is made up of staff of the centre as well as representatives of the community, one of whom is generally responsible for the organisation of the centre’s supplies, in particular of generic drugs. The health centre’s board of management is accountable to the health committee and made up of representatives of the health area who collaborate with the staff of the centre to take specific—in particular preventive—action. The health centres are financially independent due, in part, to the receipt of payments from the community (in reality the centre’s “customers”) for the services provided and based on a cost-recovery policy implemented in accordance with the Bamako Initiative (1987).

Thus, in theory:

- the rural and urban populations set up the community health initiatives for the benefit of individuals, households and communities;
- the state provides the district management teams and the staff of the health facilities;
- the community and the health centres present medical problems to the medical district team;
- patients who cannot be treated in the health centres are transferred to the district hospital of first reference and, in very serious cases, possibly evacuated to regional or national hospitals; when discharged,

⁶ Maternal and child health, family planning, treatment of illnesses and current injuries (curative care), the prevention and control of local endemic diseases.

these patients must be referred back to the health centres for follow-up visits.

The hierarchy of the health system—from the top to the bottom of the pyramid—is organised as shown in Table 1. Whether they involve the management of medical problems in general (medical information or monitoring, management of epidemics etc.) or the treatment of the patients, transfers must only be carried out in an upward direction to the next highest level (i.e. from the health centre to the district hospital, from the district hospital to provincial level, from provincial level to central level) or, in the case of back referrals, down to the next lowest level.

Table 1: Theoretical health pyramid.

Levels	Administrative structures	Competencies	Healthcare structures
Central	Central services of the Ministry of Health	Policy making and strategy definition	National reference hospitals University hospitals
Intermediate	Provincial delegations	Provision of technical support to the districts and programmes	Provincial hospitals
Peripheral	Health districts Health areas	Setting up of programmes	District hospitals Health centres

Comparing the model with the system inherited from the past

In accordance with this model, Cameroon has tried to limit the number of levels in the pyramid. However, because of choices made prior to the reform, some health structures located at levels that are not even defined in this model had to be preserved. This concerns, in particular, the case of the *centres médicaux d'arrondissement* (CMA). Prior to the reform, these health units were linked to administrative divisions called "*arrondissements*." Several *arrondissement* hospitals were built from 1980 with the aim of improving access to healthcare. However, the economic crisis forced the Ministry of Health to abandon this type of investment from 1985. With the advent of the health reform some of these establishments became district hospitals, others have disappeared.

However, the population and local authorities saw in these *arrondissement* hospitals an indicator of how the state treats their region, and gifts to the *arrondissement* hospital served the local populations as a yardstick of the true level of interest a candidate in the legislative elections took in them. Thus, it was necessary to maintain these intermediate health units (between the health centre and the district hospital) in some districts although it was clearly known that, as they constituted facilities located at an ambiguous level within the system to be established, these hospitals interrupted the continuity of the organisation of healthcare as planned by the reform.

In 2000 Cameroon had 143 health districts, divided in turn into 1388 health areas. The table below presents the number of health structures located at the different levels of the health pyramid.

Table 2: Health structures in Cameroon.⁷

Structure Type	Number
District hospitals	130
Other hospitals	67
<i>Arrondissement</i> health centres	92
Private and public health centres	1698

This table highlights, in particular, the gap that exists between the number of district hospitals and the number of districts created. In addition, even though there are more health centres than health areas, there are still 412 health areas that do not have a health centre. This kind of situation clearly opens the door to all kinds of competition and challenges the demarcation of the area served by health facilities located in the same region—i.e. their legitimacy or lack thereof, in offering services to nearby areas that do not, however, belong to their official “territory.” This simple quantifiable observation reveals conditions that promote conflicts which, as we shall see, are further amplified by the discrepancy between the health and political-administrative divisions.

In administrative terms, Cameroon is divided into provinces, *départements*, and *arrondissements* and, in the case of some *départements*, admin-

⁷ Source: Health map of Cameroon, Ministry of Public Health/AEDES (Belgium), 2001. “Other hospitals” refers to religious hospitals of national reference, and private or parapublic hospitals (for example, the National Social Insurance hospital); “Other health centres” refers to religious centres and also to structures belonging to companies.

istrative districts. The administrative district, which is the smallest administrative unit in the country, and the health district are defined on the basis of completely different criteria and often do not coincide. The country currently has ten administrative provinces, 58 *départements*, 269 *arrondissements* and 53 administrative districts. Whereas the definition of the administrative divisions is dictated by political rules, the definition of the divisions in the health system is dictated by a rationalisation of the public health system, whose primary concern is the viability of a health centre on the basis of its potential number of customers.

Local elites desperately seeking health centres

The two selected examples presented below, which are located in two very different areas of Cameroon, i.e. one in the centre of the country and the other in the extreme north, clearly illustrate the kind of local issues that have emerged as a result of the implementation of the new health map.

The first example concerns a *département* in the province of the centre, the *arrondissement* of A, which is named after the city that became its "capital." When this administrative unit was created, the worthies of A found themselves embroiled in a serious conflict with those of the locality of B concerning the location of the capital of the *arrondissement*. The creation of an *arrondissement* is an important matter: established by presidential decree, the *arrondissement* involves the simultaneous designation of a capital city which then becomes the main beneficiary of public investment and enjoys a privileged connection to the central administrative services. Given the size of their agglomeration and its advantageous geographical location at the crossroads of two provinces and four *arrondissements*, the population of locality B believed that the capital city of the new *arrondissement* should be theirs. However, some of the regime's influential figures came from the other city and managed to have A nominated as the capital city of the *arrondissement*, which therefore became the *arrondissement* of A on the new administrative map.

In order to compensate for the injury they had suffered when they lost the *arrondissement* capital, when new health centres had to be created as part of the implementation of the new health map, the worthies of locality B put pressure on both the French NGO, which was responsible for the establishment of the health system in this region, and the sub-prefect of the region to have a new health centre built in locality B. Given that this area already benefited from the services of an

efficient Catholic health centre, there was no justification whatsoever for such a project. However, as one of the managers of the French NGO stated, the population of locality B “did not listen to our explanations about the minimum population size necessary for the operation of a health centre or of the pointless competition it would generate with a centre which had been taking good care of them for a long time. I got the feeling that it was not the medical centre that they wanted, but a public institution in locality B by way of consolation for their previous administrative misadventure.” Thus, in the end, the managers of the French NGO and the sub-prefect had to agree to the establishment of a public health centre in locality B just one kilometre away from the Catholic medical centre.

This example reveals the difficulties encountered on the ground when applying norms that originally took only the technical aspects of the model into account. In a context of scarce resources, the individual in charge of implementing the health reform in this area was forced to establish a medical centre that had no justification other than the appeasement of a local political conflict. In this example, the conflict relating to the local implementation of a national reform was resolved by the intervention of locally represented national actors in reaction to the pressure exerted on a foreign NGO, which was forced to make concessions that contradicted the technical rationale of its appointed task. It was clearly necessary for the NGO to make these concessions to ensure the continuation of the entire project. In other cases, the solution to a local problem can be found directly at national level, as illustrated by the following example involving a health facility in a northern province of the country.

A health district had been recently created in an area already served by a Catholic hospital. It was not long before the establishment of a public health system at local level within the framework of the health reform resulted in competition between public and private sectors. Moreover, it took shape against the background of a conflict between Catholics and Muslims, the latter constituting the administrative and political elite of this predominantly Fulbe region. The second most important person in the Cameroonian state and President of the National Assembly, a Muslim and native of the village in which the Catholic hospital existed, had long been presenting himself as a firm supporter of the development of the public service and supported the project of building a public district hospital near the Catholic one. This project was implemented by the provincial medical officer of the

time who was described by some as a “Muslim fundamentalist.” In this conflict situation between the public and the private Catholic sector, the chief medical officer of the new medical district came into open conflict with the head doctor at the Catholic hospital. Based on the new health map, which assigned a specific area and population to each unit, the former ordered the latter to respect the limits of his territory and refrain from dispatching his “itinerant health workers” all over the region. The Catholic hospital refused to give in to this administrative order, stating *inter alia* that a large population spread beyond the boundaries of the area assigned to the Catholic hospital had been accustomed to Catholic medical care for thirty years. Therefore, according to the latter, the population of the area would refuse to be served by public health facilities which, moreover, would be incapable of taking good care of them and was likely to cause a medical disaster. As for the local authorities, they complied with the technical provisions of the new public health map, according to which the Catholic private hospital did not have any status or any particular position, thus justifying the existence of a public district hospital. In addition, the local health and administrative authorities accused the Catholic health service of proselytism through its hospital and of choosing the villages it served on the basis of their populations’ observation of Christian values.⁸

In reality, however, the state did not have the resources to back up its policy and several years after it had been built, the public district hospital still had no doctor,⁹ received less than ten patients per day, in some months facilitated no childbirths and, above all, was still being renovated. According to its staff, this public district hospital only provided services to non-local civil servants living in the area and the natives all used the nearby Catholic hospital which had three doctors, 130 beds, radiology and ultrasound equipment, surgery services etc. In the end, the provincial medical officer (and reputedly “fundamentalist Muslim”) was replaced by a Christian doctor, which by common accord enabled a significant improvement in the dialogue between the local authorities and the Catholic health service. The President of the

⁸ This region of north Cameroon, and most particularly its towns, was definitively dominated by Islamised Fulbe in the 19th century. However, so-called “pagan” populations, who were reputedly more receptive to Christian values and beliefs remained, in particular in the rural areas (see Schilder 1991).

⁹ In fact, the district medical officer also held the role of district hospital doctor thus fulfilling two, if not three positions as one of these doctors also worked at the Catholic hospital.

National Assembly and the head doctor of the Catholic hospital reconciled in the capital, Yaoundé, and the Catholic hospital became the hospital of first reference for the district. The public district hospital, which had been built against the wishes of the Catholics, became a basic health centre.

In both of these cases, the technical rationale that dictated the demarcation of the health districts was challenged by local political issues, from which the main actors—be they the state authorities, the Catholic Church or a French NGO—drew their legitimacy in a reference framework that was quite external to the local situation. As demonstrated by the third example involving the implementation of health districts in the city of Yaoundé presented below, this type of local situation sometimes brings not only national actors or private western institutions (e.g. NGOs, churches), but also international institutional actors, such as the World Bank, into play.

*Negotiating the local level with the central and international authorities
in an urban context*

Due to the spatial heterogeneity (ranging from the town centre to semi-rural peri-urban areas), the multiplicity of healthcare services on offer and the difficulties in mobilising very different populations, who find it easier to express their disagreement than in rural areas, the demarcation of health districts in cities appears to be an even more complicated matter than in rural areas. This heterogeneity does not facilitate the organisation or grouping of people from a neighbourhood in one and the same health centre. Moreover, the greater purchasing power of some city dwellers makes it possible for them to use private clinics and select their health services independently of any health map. The constraints specific to the urban environment undoubtedly explain the lack of commitment on the part of some donors to become involved in urban health projects.

The solution originally adopted for the establishment of urban districts was to base their delimitation on the existing administrative divisions. The World Bank had tried to establish a pilot urban health district as early as 1987, selecting the *arrondissement* as the corresponding administrative division. Thus, the health districts created thereafter matched the four administrative *arrondissements* in Yaoundé at the time. The process continued to the level of the health areas, where the demarcation again respected the existing division in administrative

areas. This correlation of health districts and administrative units made it possible to contain the difficulties posed by administrative coordination in a generalised context of decentralisation.

Initially, four health districts corresponded to the four urban *arrondissements* of Yaoundé. Nevertheless, the overlap between the health districts and the pre-existent administrative divisions could not be maintained when the number of *arrondissements* in Yaoundé increased from four to six in 1994. There were various reasons for this administrative development. President Biya's regime increased the number of administrative divisions during the transitional period from 1983 to 1987. Based on the age-old "divide and rule" maxim, this strategy made it possible to weaken some political strongholds: more administrative units meant the availability of more administrative posts and, therefore, more applicants representing potential political clients indebted to the established regime. However, technical structures are not as dynamic and flexible as political-administrative entities. Increasing the number of health districts to match with the six *arrondissements* of Yaoundé was considered as a possible solution; however this proposal met with reservations on the part of the World Bank. The World Bank, the main donor behind the reform of the health system, rejected the revision of its plan as the establishment of the four health districts in Yaoundé had already been organised and financed. Thus, the city now has four health districts for its six *arrondissements* where by two of the health districts each cover two *arrondissements* as opposed to one.

According to the medical officers involved, the reporting of their activities to their superiors (i.e. to the two sub-prefects of the *arrondissements* corresponding to their health district) does not pose any particular problems. The two sub-prefects collaborate if necessary, even if, in the words of our informants, it is easier "to manage one sub-prefect than two." The chief medical officers of the district health units simply refer to one or other sub-prefect, depending on the location of the issue at stake.

Nevertheless, juggling between two sub-prefects does raise issues regarding the clear identification of the relevant administrative representative, i.e. when the district medical officer needs to request a meeting with the administrative authority which sub-prefect should he ask? The health districts in Douala which straddle contiguous *arrondissements*, i.e. the opposite situation of the health districts of Yaoundé, present a particularly striking example of the difficulties that can arise in such a situation. In this case, each sub-prefect has to deal with two district

medical officers, whose respective districts also come under the authority of another sub-prefect. This type of situation obviously raises problems of representation for the district medical officer who must attend the meetings organised by all the sub-prefects, to whom his district is subject administratively. The situation can be problematic, for example if the district medical officer has the technical authority to organise meetings, but does not have the administrative authority to convene the community representatives of the *arrondissement*, a prerogative of the *arrondissement* sub-prefect and the provincial governor. Furthermore, problems of precedence between the two sub-prefects can arise on the occasion of official ceremonies, thus the health service has no other choice than to refer to a higher, more central authority, i.e. the prefect. In the case of one of the two medical districts of Yaoundé, which is divided between two *arrondissements*, the history of their creation made it possible to alleviate such problems: the *arrondissement* of Yaoundé VI emerged from the partition of the *arrondissement* of Yaoundé III, the sub-prefect of “big Yaoundé III” remained sub-prefect of the new smaller district of Yaoundé III and his relationship with the sub-prefect of Yaoundé VI has been described as akin to that between an older and younger brother, a qualification further substantiated by the fact that the latter is, in fact, younger than the former.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, due to the heterogeneity of their demarcations, the decrees that created the *arrondissements* did not specify which authorities should supervise the health districts, thus creating a legal gap on this level.

Nevertheless, these arrangements, which result in the prioritisation of the most central levels under a reform that was intended to promote decentralisation, cannot resolve all of the problems. The sub-prefectures employ and manage some of the healthcare workers, in particular the ancillary staff of the health centres (maintenance staff, nursing auxiliaries). When, for technical or accessibility reasons, the demarcation of the health areas further dissects the administrative boundaries, the management of the healthcare workers becomes an impossible task. This situation arose, in particular, in a health centre that served a health area located in the *arrondissement* of Yaoundé VI, but had been built

¹⁰ In January 2002, this district was finally divided in two at the very end of the project financed by the World Bank; If the state wishes to comply with the dynamics of the health map, it will have to find the funds necessary to establish a new district hospital, and the existing medical areas will have to be re-organised to facilitate the definition of the health centres' reference structures.

in a neighbourhood belonging to Yaoundé III and resulted in certain problems with regard to personnel management: it was unclear which administrative authority was responsible for the assignment and assessment of staff employed by the territorial administration in a medical centre that was “not in the right place.” This administrative dispute could only be settled by closing the medical centre and re-establishing it “in the right place.”

Thus, in order to avoid delays and red-tape frustrations, if they live in the capital city, the actors on the most peripheral levels of the new districts prefer to go directly to the most central level, i.e. the Ministry of Health, and circumvent the intermediate level, i.e. the district. Therefore, the health instance that is supposed to constitute the very basis of the reform of the health system is denied its function.

Autonomy or marginalisation of the peri-urban area?

In fact, the question arises as to the extent to which this reform of the health system, which is supposed to grant a greater autonomy to the peripheral structures in a general context of decentralisation, is likely to result in the marginalisation of this periphery and abandon it to fulfil tasks that are neither rewarding, nor attractive or lucrative.

Indeed, the first-line healthcare units and the establishments to which patients are initially referred (health centres and district hospitals) are the least well equipped, have the least qualified and skilled staff and provide the least specialised care. They are sometimes situated in locations which are rather inconvenient for staffs who are accustomed to the living conditions of the major urban centres where they studied and trained for relatively long periods. The various corrupt practices, which are known to be widespread among the employees of African health facilities seeking to compensate for their low salaries,¹¹ are not widely pursued in these centres. Healthcare workers occupying positions that could, in theory, provide opportunities for misappropriation actually fail to accumulate significant illicit gains because the equipment in the district health centres is not very specialised and, thus, relatively inexpensive, primary medical care is provided at a low cost to a poor population and the stocks of medical products held by the centres is

¹¹ The corruption practised by the health staff in Africa has been observed in almost all countries; for a recent description of these practices, cf. Olivier de Sardan (2001).

limited. In addition, since the financial administration remains highly centralised and since there is no banking network, the staff must travel to the main town of the province or even to the capital to receive their wages or to obtain the public funds allocated to them. Considering the difficulties always faced when dealing with the financial administration (lengthy procedures, bribes to be paid at each stage) many simply give up on the attempt to obtain their funding,¹² and this contributes to the further deterioration of services.

In fact, the financial autonomy now granted to the healthcare structures as a result of the implementation of the Bamako Initiative mainly benefits the main central establishments. In contrast with the situation in the previous structures, the significant role of the pharmacy, the cost of the equipment and the fees charged to the “rich” population living in the urban centres for specialist consultations make the handling of significant sums of money necessary, thus making it more likely that situations will be created that could provide lucrative opportunities for the misappropriation of funds. Moreover, the proximity between the medical care structure and the central administration makes it possible to resolve problems more quickly and to ensure that salaries and allocated funding are paid. For example, the increased revenue enables central hospitals to recruit personnel themselves who are not financially dependent on the central administration but on the health facility in question. As a result of this autonomy, the central healthcare facilities are less vulnerable to the whims of the central administration when it comes to the allocation of staff. Moreover, the staffs who work in facilities located at the top of the healthcare pyramid in an urban environment tend to be more satisfied with their assigned locations.

It should be noted, therefore, that general healthcare, which is the prerogative of the peripheral structures, is less and less likely to receive the support it requires.¹³ Indeed, a desire to achieve greater visibility

¹² This is one of the reasons for the very low rate of execution of public budgets which is often confirmed in the health sector.

¹³ Cf. preamble to the final declaration of the “Healthcare for All” conference, Anvers, Institute of Tropical Medicine, October 2001, which was staged under the aegis of the Belgian Presidency of the EU, which states that “During its EU-presidency in 2001, Belgium will focus the international agenda on the unacceptable state of health in large parts of the world. While reinforcing the political momentum for the fight against AIDS, TBC and malaria, it will in particular draw attention to the need to develop and strengthen accessible and efficient healthcare services, as a basic human right, as the cornerstone for sustainable health systems, and as an essential element in the renewed world-wide efforts to reduce the burden of infectious and poverty-related diseases”. A

(for the donors, states, experts and technicians involved in these programmes) combined with a certain ideology originating from the pervasive sense of the urgency of the fight against the main diseases (in particular AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria) explains the rise of vertical programmes, as demonstrated by the creation of the Global Fund To Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. However, it is a known fact that it is very difficult to integrate the initiatives of these vertical programmes, which require very specialised and targeted action, with the general medical activities implemented at the level of the first line structures.¹⁴ Moreover, the national directors of these vertical programmes, who negotiate the financing of their programme directly with the bilateral and multilateral donors, may use decentralisation as a pretext for preventing the flow of their funds down to peripheral structures, which are supposedly autonomous and should have the same competencies as central structures for the implementation of activities to fight specific pathologies. The national programme against AIDS in Congo Brazzaville in the 1990s, which considered that there was no need for the national programme to continue its support of the regional programmes, represents a particularly good example of this phenomenon. However, at the same time, the national programme continued to position itself as the sole partner of the foreign institutions (if only because of the practical difficulties posed by direct communication with the peripheral authorities), and remained the manager of all national AIDS projects which could only be implemented at central level.¹⁵

Thus, in a context of this nature, associations that could be expected to act as centrifugal forces have, in fact, little room for manoeuvre. In the case of Congo Brazzaville and the fight against AIDS, given that the national programme alone could give the *imprimatur* for any project involving its area of activity, and given the ties of dependency, and even clientelism, that bind the central authority to the associations engaged in the fight against AIDS,¹⁶ the national programme came to be in a position to decide which associations could exist and were, therefore, likely to obtain external funding for the implementation of activities at local level. In Cameroon, however, as if to anticipate this risk of being

complete report of this conference can be found in the special issue of *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, n° 18, Oct.–Dec. 2003.

¹⁴ Cf. Van Lerberghe & de Bethune (1998).

¹⁵ Gruénais (2001).

¹⁶ Delaunay (1998).

marginalised, as soon as they had become established on the periphery, most of the officially registered associations (i.e. 51 out of 66) engaged in the fight against AIDS based themselves in Yaoundé.¹⁷

However, even if an association is based on the periphery, it does not necessarily follow that the main frame of reference for its activities will be situation at local level. A decision of the Ministry of Health of Cameroon of April 14, 1999 “defining the framework of collaboration between the Ministry of Public Health, the associations and the NGOs” stipulates that an association wishing to collaborate with the local health authorities must obtain approval from the Ministry of Health. This approval can be obtained on the submission of a file at the Provincial Health Office which must transmit the file “together with a well-founded position” to the Minister. Article 5 of this decision specifies that “the Minister in charge of Public Health has a period of 30 days from the date of receipt of the file to decide on the application. Once this period has lapsed, its silence is an expression of approval of the collaboration.” According to Article 6 of the same decision, “the association or organisation must obtain the prior approval of the Minister of Public Health for any change in its area of intervention.” Thus, in the final analysis, as pointed out by a provincial medical officer, the central authorities alone decide which association will receive the approval necessary for collaboration with the local health authorities. The local representative of the Ministry must provide a “well-founded position” on the matter but can be ignored by the Ministry, i.e. if the provincial medical officer’s opinion of the potential collaboration is negative, but the Minister still does not reply, the association will be approved all the same. The aforementioned medical officer stated in less diplomatic terms that a direct relation could now be established between the heads of the local associations and the Minister, disregarding the intermediate level, i.e. the provincial medical officer. However, in view of the fact that these local development associations are usually run by members of the elite, i.e. members of the government or Parliament who come from the areas in which the associations in questions are active, it is clear that this regulatory text officialises a privileged relationship between a central political authority and its stronghold, a relationship often accompanied by strategies for obtaining the resources allocated for development.

¹⁷ Eboko (2002).

To conclude, it emerges clearly from the case study presented here that the implementation of a new health map intended—in the minds of the people who conceived it—to reinforce the peripheral level by granting it greater autonomy, can in fact lead to the reinforcement of the central level and the development of clientelism due, in part, to a lack of any real political will to support this peripheral level and, in particular, to the imposition of a model of organisation on areas that are under-administered to a very significant extent. As a result, the peripheral levels of the health pyramid sometimes only have a purely formal and potentially conflictive existence which enables the regular reaffirmation of the complete power of the centre, the only level that is capable of resolving these conflicts.

It should be noted that these findings on the Cameroonian health system confirm observations made in other developing countries, particularly in Latin America where it could be noted that "...decentralization may be viewed as both product and determinant of political conflict... In Latin America, decentralization to municipal government can strengthen the hand of dominant groups."¹⁸ It should not, however, be concluded that these situations are specific to the developing countries. For example, in relation to the management of health issues by the municipalities in the Bordeaux region of France, J. C. Guyot states that "Basically, since the 1980s, decentralisation has barely changed the rules of the game, health policy remains a matter of the state or the national social welfare organisations."¹⁹ In fact, in this field, in Cameroon as elsewhere and, undoubtedly, in many fields of public action and development, "apart from some rare exceptions, developers tend to disregard politics... [and] decentralisation is reduced to basically technocratic approaches."²⁰ However, politics cannot always be easily disregarded, even in the health sector: in practice, decentralisation can help to reassert the project of a unified state against local centrifugal forces.²¹ In fact, given the knowledge that neither decentralisation measures nor the existence of associations and NGOs are determining factors, the entire situation would prompt one to question the real conditions surrounding the existence of a public policy at local level.

¹⁸ Collins (1989: 168–171).

¹⁹ Guyot (1995: 51).

²⁰ Lemarchand (1998: 11).

²¹ This was also acknowledged in quite a different context concerning the measures taken by the Senegalese state in relation to the Casamance region (cf. H. Dramé 1998).

For the time being, it is above all the worthies of the governing regimes who end up negotiating the role of the state at local level. The local entities created in the course of decentralisation appear to have some autonomy from a formal and administrative point of view, but the rules of the game played by the local state are ultimately defined by central state actors. Moreover, the mechanisms established as part of the decentralisation process create new channels for intervention by these actors.

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LIKE CHAMELEONS:
CIVIL SERVANTS AND CORRUPTION IN MALAWI¹

Gerhard Anders

In the civil service you have to know how to manoeuvre.
Senior civil servant in Malawi

The making of rules and social and symbolic order is a human industry matched only by the manipulation, circumvention, remaking, replacing, and unmaking of rules in which people seem almost equally engaged.

Moore (2000: 1)

In many tales and myths of Malawi's past the chameleon figures as a morally ambiguous and cunning character (Schoffeleers and Roscoe 1985:17–38). The acclaimed poet Jack Mapanje (1981), who was imprisoned without charge or trial between 1987 and 1991, used the image of the chameleon to describe survival strategies during the days of Kamuzu Banda's authoritarian regime when persecution and detention of so-called "confusionists" and "separatists" was the order of the day. Like chameleons, adopting the colours of the background to outwit their predators, people had to veil their criticisms of the regime to avoid detention. Since the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1994 the chameleon is used as a metaphor to describe the opportunism of politicians who sell their vote to the highest bidder (Dzimhiri 1998, Englund 2002). Civil servants in Malawi resemble chameleons in many ways. In order to manoeuvre successfully in the civil service they have to negotiate the often-conflicting claims and expectations from colleagues, superiors and kin. During President for Life Kamuzu Banda's authoritarian regime between the country's independence from Britain in 1964 and the introduction of multi-party democracy in 1994 civil servants behaved like chameleons in Jack Mapanje's sense whilst

¹ This is a thoroughly revised version of a text published in Blundo (2002) (ed.) *The governance of daily life in Africa: public and collective services and their users/La gouvernance au quotidien en Afrique: les services publics et collectifs et leurs usagers*. APAD Bulletin No. 23–24: 43–67.

since 1994 many seem to take advantage of the new liberties to use the public office for personal gains.

Malawi, known until the 1990s for relatively high levels of integrity and diligence among the country's civil servants, seems to have caught up with the rest of Africa although the situation is a far cry from countries such as Angola or Nigeria where corruption is rampant. Since the introduction of multi-party democracy corruption appears to be on the rise and is hotly debated in the media and the political arena. Generally my interlocutors stressed that corruption was virtually unknown in Malawi until 1994 and expressed sentimental feelings for the "good old time" under the rule of Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), the only legal party till 1993. It was striking how popular discourse drew a clear line between the period between 1964 and 1994 with little corruption, on the one hand, and the time since 1994 with widespread corruption and nepotism, on the other.²

This perceived increase in corruption since the 1990s has several reasons.³ First of all it is now official policy to talk about it openly. Since 1994 media and people have enjoyed more leeway to talk about corruption than in the past. Newspapers, for example, mushroomed and although most of them were only short-lived a range of professional national newspapers survived. In 2002 three national newspapers were available in the urban areas and many trading centres: The Nation, the Daily Times and the Chronicle, an investigative weekly. These papers reported extensively on corruption scandals among politicians and public servants in spite of occasional harassment from the government. This is something unheard of under Banda's rule when strict control and arbitrary arrests of alleged dissidents created a culture of paralysis and fear. In those days any critical remark could lead to one's arrest or interrogation and the only newspaper, the Daily Times, primarily functioned as the mouthpiece of Kamuzu Banda and the MCP.

The changes in attitude and policy are to a large degree attributable to the keen interest the "donor community", led by World Bank and IMF, has been taking in the improvement of governance since the

² Anthropological fieldwork was carried out between November 1999 and November 2000, and February 2002 and March 2002 in Lilongwe and Zomba.

³ This chapter only addresses the perceived increase in corruption since there is no reliable data on the phenomenon either before or after 1994. The only thing that can be safely said is that the *talk* about corruption has increased since 1994. The various corruption indices only present a very incomplete picture reflecting the current obsession with corruption rather than its actual extent.

1990s. The democratically elected government's alleged susceptibility to corruption coincides with publicly announced policies to curb corrupt practices. In 1995 parliament passed the Corrupt Practices Act and in 1998 the donor-funded Anti-Corruption Bureau became operational. This policy is a direct product of the promotion of "good governance" by the World Bank, the IMF and the international donor community (e.g. World Bank 2000a, 2000b). This is in stark contrast to the time under authoritarian rule. In the past practices nowadays perceived to be corrupt were simply part of the political system. In fact, there existed no boundaries between Kamuzu Banda's personal property, the ruling and only legal party MCP, and the state institutions. As a retired district commissioner put it: "when the district officer of the MCP wanted to borrow your tractor you couldn't refuse, could you?" This has changed considerably since 1994 and in recent years politicians and functionaries have often been accused of and have been accusing each other of corruption (Englund 2002). Corruption accusations are now routinely used to get rid of political rivals and often it is hard to tell what motivates an official investigation into the conduct of officials and politicians.

Finally it should be noted that many civil servants cite the dire economic situation as explanation for the apparent increase of corruption. Malawi has been in the grip of economic decline since 1982, which has turned into a full-blown economic crisis since the early 1990s, when free-market reforms were being implemented by the World Bank and the IMF. Inflation has constantly eroded civil servants' salaries: in 1992 the real value of basic salaries was about 50 per cent below the levels of 1982 (World Bank 1994: 37–39). Due to currency devaluations and high inflation rate this trend has intensified since 1994.⁴ Poverty is widespread, endemic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and malaria produce staggering mortality rates and civil servants are not only confronted with their own social decline but also by more demands on their resources from impoverished relatives and friends. Furthermore, there is growing discontent about the glaring income differences between them and

⁴ And indeed salaries are generally quite low: in 2002 most junior grades like security guards, gardeners and messengers earned about US \$ 20 per month. Extension workers and primary school teachers earned between US \$ 25 and US \$ 30 per month. Even officers with higher qualifications, like a diploma or a bachelor's degree, rarely earned more than US \$ 50 per month: junior professional officers as secondary school teachers, for example, had a monthly salary of \$ 40. The highest grades, in the so-called Super-scale, earned roughly US \$ 100 per month.

functionaries of donor agencies and NGOs who often do the same job and have the same qualifications but who earn several times the salary of a civil servant.⁵ Consequently, civil servants often refer to their meagre salaries as a justification and explanation of corrupt behaviour.

The socio-political context, which I could only sketch here, provides the background for the analysis presented in this chapter. It takes the ambivalence of vernacular conceptions of practices labelled as corrupt as point of departure. Behaviour violating official rules and regulations that can be justified on moral grounds is often secretly condoned by colleagues and superiors. This chapter argues that the ambivalence towards practices officially labelled as “corrupt” is the consequence of the existence of alternative normative orders justifying and regulating corrupt practices. Continuously switching from one normative code to the other while negotiating their course between expectations from dependants, patrons, colleagues and superiors civil servants resemble chameleons as a case study of a civil servant will exemplify. The case study is followed by an analysis of the different sets of rules either prohibiting or justifying certain forms of corruption.

Corruption in the vernacular

The introduction of multi-party democracy and anti-corruption policies since the 1990s has had a considerable impact on popular discourse. During my fieldwork people used the English word “corruption” quite frequently in everyday conversations in Zomba and Lilongwe but in a very broad lay sense, covering corruption in the legal sense of the term, i.e. bribery, and all kinds of illicit practices like fraud, theft, embezzlement, etc. In everyday conversations, newspaper reports, official documents and statements by politicians “corruption” was invariably condemned as something poisonous that had to be eradicated or stamped out. However, this general rejection of “corruption” did not imply a clear and unequivocal rejection of practices considered to be corrupt.

In many conversations people used the Chichewa word *katangale*. *Katangale* denotes any kind of illegal, dubious or shady deal or prac-

⁵ Excluding European and US consultants hired by the World Bank who earn several hundred US \$ a day.

tice connected to the place of work or the office in the formal sector. *Katangale* also covers nepotism and patronage since the two practices are often connected. *Katangale* is a very ambivalent concept. Whilst people usually express strong disapproval when they use the English word corruption they tend to regard *katangale* as an excusable way of making do. Although people rarely approve of it explicitly they often talk about it in a rather ironic fashion thereby acknowledging the fact that it is an intrinsic aspect of formal employment. *Katangale* is not so much an individualist action but rather an aspect of “the system” or “the way of doing things”. According to the popular perception *katangale* does not constitute an act of a person’s free will but rather something he or she is drawn into; “it is the way how things are done around here”, a system that does not really leave an alternative way of doing things.

Katangale has strong redistributive connotations and is linked to the notions of “allocating” and “sharing”, *kugawira* and *kugawa*. If others benefit from *katangale* the corrupt behaviour is considered to be acceptable and morally right by the beneficiaries. In this regard *katangale* differs from ordinary theft, *kuba*. Theft is an individual act for one’s own benefit. It does not evoke the redistributive associations of *katangale* and is always strongly rejected as wrongful act, which cannot be morally justified. For example, in the markets it was common practice that a thief who was caught red-handed was subjected to spontaneous mob-justice that often resulted in severe physical punishment or the death of the thief. Unlike theft, which usually is an open act, *katangale* is characterised by its surreptitious character. It is something that takes place in the shadows, hidden from the view of outsiders and very hard to detect. If *katangale* does not serve altruistic ends it can be associated with witchcraft, *ufiti*, also a phenomenon taking place in secrecy. A person who is engaged in anti-social practices of *katangale* will face gossip and in extreme cases even ostracism.

Corruption and normative pluralism

The moral ambivalence of *katangale* indicates a more complex normative landscape than the public denunciations of “corruption” suggest. In Malawi, as elsewhere in Africa, certain expectations and obligations arising from kinship relations and other social norms co-exist with the

law of the state. Often obligations between friends, kin, patrons and clients are invoked when the transgression of official rules requires justification. Corruption usually is justified in moral terms if it serves altruistic ends as the term *katangale* indicates. The phenomenon of multiple normative orders co-existing in the same social field or pertaining to the same domain of social life is known as legal pluralism in the legal anthropological literature (Benda-Beckmann and Strijbosch 1986, Griffiths 1986, Melissaris 2004, Merry 1988, Snyder 1993, Woodman 1998). Such a conception of legal complexity harks back to legal sociologist Eugen Ehrlich's (1967) notion of "living law", the adherence to practical norms in a society where the scope of state law is limited.

Studies of the African state also note the existence of multiple normative orders. Olivier de Sardan, for example, points out that "what is considered to be corruption from the perspective of official norms is not, or seldom, viewed in the same light from the perspectives of practical norms and actual practices." (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 263). This contradiction is more than a discrepancy between norms and practices but should be analysed in terms of a contradiction between different sets of norms (Médard 1995, Olivier de Sardan 1999: 263).

Of course rules as such are abstract and do not interact by themselves. Rules are instantiated and only conflict with each other through human interaction. Civil servants are very adept in picking their way through the normative plurality. They suffer and profit at the same time from conflicting norms. On the one hand, they often are caught in catch-22 situations since whatever they do will result in a violation of a rule: if you help your brother you might have to violate official regulations but if you do not help him you run the risk of undermining kinship solidarity. On the other hand, civil servants use their position as brokers as a resource always ensuring that they get their share, either by profiting themselves or improving their status and position in their respective networks. The following case study of petty corruption nicely exemplifies the possibilities and constraints offered by normative complexity in Malawi.

A chameleon in action

While conducting fieldwork in Malawi I was able to gather quite comprehensive ethnographic data about corruption in the civil service in

spite of the well-known methodological difficulties the anthropology of corruption is confronted with. One of the most complete cases is presented here. It is an account of events that occurred in December 1999 at a civil servant's house where I was staying at the time. The name of the civil servant is fictive to protect his identity and place names, the department or any other information, which might reveal the identities of the people involved, are not disclosed. It concerns a relatively minor transgression of office rules and regulations concerning the use of government vehicles for the transport of deceased civil servants and their family members. The unauthorised and illegal use of government property is known in French as "perruque" and is a very common form of corruption in Africa (cf. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001a).

Mr. Mashanga was a senior civil servant. In his early forties he was at the height of his career. It was amazing to see how he handled his superior officers, subordinates, relatives, clients and all kinds of relationships including that with a European PhD-student who had taken quarters in his compound. Like a chameleon he switched effortlessly between codes and environments, talking a very learned and bookish English at one moment and within a split second putting a subordinate or client at ease with a funny remark in Chichewa. He had contacts everywhere, from the patrons of seedy bottle-stores in town to the highest officials in the civil service. He could arrange almost anything and his subordinates would react on the wink of a finger. Everywhere he was greeted with respect and although he did not belong to the highest echelons of power he could mobilise an impressive network and certainly had a high social status.

He lived in large house provided by the government. His wife, who had also been a civil servant, had passed away a year ago and he lived together with his son and a number of relatives and dependants, some of them in the main house, others in servants' quarters. Two of the younger ones attended school in town. All of them depended on him for accommodation, school fees, food and hoped to find employment through his contacts in the civil service. Mr. Mashanga had enjoyed a good education at a Catholic missionary boarding school and had graduated from the University of Malawi in 1985. His father had been a primary school teacher and had made quite an effort to ensure that his son would get a good education. Mr. Mashanga had joined the service in the late 1980s as a junior professional. Later he had served on different

posts where he distinguished himself as able administrator and a good leader who enjoyed both, the respect of his superior officers and the loyalty of his subordinates. Swiftly he had moved up the promotional ladder to the post he held during the events described below.

Mr. Mashanga employed a housekeeper who lived together with his wife, children and mother in one of the servants' quarters on Mr. Mashanga's compound. Although the housekeeper worked in the household and was paid wages it would be inadequate to describe their relationship only in terms of an employment contract. As is common in Africa their relationship could best be described in terms of that between patron and client. They were very close; the man had worked for Mr. Mashanga for more than ten years. One day in December the housekeeper's mother died unexpectedly of malaria. He turned to Mr. Mashanga, his patron or *bwana* (literally master), for support. This came as no surprise to Mr. Mashanga since he, as *bwana*, was expected to help his dependants in situations like this. His client had no one else he could turn to because he and his family were poor and the home village far away. The housekeeper was sure Mr. Mashanga would help him because he had a reputation of helping his widespread circle of clients in times of need.

Mr. Mashanga really wanted to help the man who was very distressed and very dear to him, "like a relative" as he stated. Yet, he faced several difficulties in helping the housekeeper. First of all, he needed vehicles to transport the corpse and the funeral guests to the village where the funeral was supposed to take place. His own car had been grounded for a couple of months. The engine had broken down and the necessary spare part was not available in Malawi and anyway, he could not afford a replacement at the moment since the spare part would cost him at least two months salary. Prices for spare parts had rocketed in the past months due to the high inflation rate of more than 30 per cent. But even if his car would have been running it would not have been really suitable for the transport of the corpse and the family members attending the funeral in the home village. To rent a pick-up truck was out of the question because it was far too expensive for Mr. Mashanga. Instead he turned to his office for help and arranged two government vehicles with drivers.

This entailed the violation of official rules and regulations. According to the Malawi Public Service Regulations (MPSR) (Supplement 1:192.1, 192.2) the government provides a coffin and vehicles to transport the body and the guests to the place of burial only for the civil

servant him- or herself or a civil servant's family member living at the service station. Despite their apparent rigidity even official regulations leave some leeway since they do not exactly define who qualifies as a family member living at the service station. In a typical civil servant's household, where relatives often stay for weeks or months, this border is often difficult to draw. Stretching the meaning and with a little bit of goodwill even a nephew or cousin on an extended visit could be considered to be a "family member living at the service station" as long as there was some kin relation with the civil servant and the relative died at the service station. In Mr. Mashanga's case the situation was a little bit more complicated. Although his housekeeper had worked for him a long time and was considered by Mr. Mashanga to be a relative, *abwale*, neither he nor his mother would qualify as family member in terms of the MPSR, which does not recognise fictive kinship.

Mr. Mashanga was well aware of the violation of the MPSR, which he held in high regard. According to him "everything concerning the civil service is in there [i.e. the MPSR]" but in cases such as the funeral of his housekeeper's mother it was necessary to circumvent official regulations that "existed only on paper" as he pointed out. The following day he had arranged two government vehicles with drivers who transported the corpse and the funeral guests from town to the village at approximately 60 km distance. After the funeral in the village the drivers had stayed overnight in a trading centre nearby since it was already too late to return to town. By using government vehicles Mr. Mashanga was able to keep the costs for his personal burse very low. In the end he only had to pay condolence money which was about 10 percent of his monthly salary, still a considerable sum of money. This money was used by his housekeeper to cover the other costs of the funeral such as food and drinks for the guests. His housekeeper and the funeral guests praised Mr. Mashanga and many expressed their gratitude for his support during and after the funeral as I was told.

Whilst the use of the government vehicles amounted to an arguably minor violation of civil service regulations all involved took utmost care to respect official procedures in order to cover up the illicit use of the cars. Mr. Mashanga submitted a request for the vehicles, the superior officer signed the transport order, the executive officer countersigned it and the drivers filled in their logbooks. With regard to the justification for the allocation of the government vehicles an alternative set of rules was invoked. At the office everybody fully understood that he had to fulfil his social obligations and the impossibility to refuse the request by

referring to official regulations. As patron the employer has a responsibility not only for the employees but also for family members. A civil servant denying access to the state's resources would appear selfish and heartless, *ubombo*. Although employers often complain about this often quite costly obligation, it is virtually impossible for them to reject such a request on their resources since funerals have the highest priority in social life and anybody who appears to have no empathy in such a matter would be threatened by ostracism and witchcraft attacks.

Mr. Mashanga's case exemplifies the moral ambiguity of *katangale*. The circumvention of official regulations was considered to be justified because of the obligations arising from the relationship with his housekeeper. Brokerage on behalf of his client had consequences for the social networks at the office: he became indebted to his superior officer, the drivers and in a more indirect way to his colleagues at the department who knew about the improper use of the vehicle. Mr. Mashanga's ability to arrange two cars within a day for a trip far away gives testimony to his high status and influential position within the department. Furthermore, considering the ease with which he was able to arrange not only one but two cars with drivers indicates also that there might have existed a debt on the part of his superior officer and other colleagues stemming from earlier acts of *katangale* committed by them. This web of indebtedness at the office indicates the existence of a certain *modus vivendi*, a set of unofficial rules providing some guidance in situations where the law in the books is considered too far removed from the predicaments of real life.

The relative ease with which Mr. Mashanga was able to circumvent the restrictions of the civil service regulations does not imply that the official regulations were irrelevant or not applied. On the contrary, they were applied—albeit in a selective manner. As Mr. Mashanga's case shows it can be very easy to circumvent official rules and regulations. In the unfortunate case, however, that a citizen has no relationships with functionaries who could pull a few strings official rules and regulations are usually applied to the very letter with often Kafkaesque consequences as anyone with even superficial experience with African bureaucrats will confirm.

Three sets of rules intertwined

The central question that arises from Mr. Mashanga's story is whether his actions were corrupt or not. It could be argued that they were cor-

rupt since he violated official regulations for his personal advantage. On the other hand, it is clear that the people involved considered his actions to be morally right. Therefore we can understand his story as an example of a chameleon's careful manoeuvring between normative orders with conflictive rules. Three sets of rules can be distinguished in the case study. First, there are official rules and regulations, then there are the social norms regarding Mr. Mashanga's obligations towards his housekeeper and, last, there is at the office a set of informal and clandestine rules and principles Mr. Mashanga is able to invoke.

Official rules and regulations

African bureaucrats are famous for their often mind-boggling formalism. Comaroff and Comaroff (2006), for example, comment on the excessive legal formalism and the meticulous care for procedures, stamps and documents in the postcolony, which they describe in terms of a "fetishism of the law". Malawi is no exception in this regard: There is an array of legal instruments regulating the conduct of government officials. The primary code is the MPSR regulating salary scales, conditions of employment, and rights and duties of all government employees. Therefore, they are commonly referred to as "the bible of the civil service" by civil servants. This body of rules is supposed to regulate exhaustively the conditions of service.

The MPSR contains a chapter on conduct and discipline sanctioning for example the use of information for personal gain, the use of public monies or property for private purposes, activities which conflict with the interests of the government or are inconsistent with a civil servant's official duties, etc. There have been only two editions, in 1978 and 1991. Since then the provisions have been altered, updated and supplemented by a vast number of circulars, which are usually issued by the Secretary of the President and the Cabinet and the Secretary of the Human Resource Department. In spite of these amendments the rules, the terms of service and the structure of the civil service have basically remained the same since British colonial rule (cf. Skinner 1963, World Bank 1994). These regulations are supplemented by the penal code prohibiting theft and fraud by civil servants, and in 1995 Parliament enacted the Corrupt Practices Act, a consequence of conditions set by the World Bank and the IMF for their financial support. In addition, numerous circulars of the Secretary of Human Resource Management address specific problems such as the misuse of government vehicles. Several agencies have the task to deal with wrongdoings

of public officials. Since colonial times the Auditor General's Office has been the primary department controlling the ministries' accounts. This institution has been joined by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), the Department of the Public Prosecutor and the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament in the late 1990s.

Thus, state legislation and institutions are not a homogenous system but in itself a rather heterogeneous mix with different genealogies determined by changing geopolitical constellations. From independence in 1964 until 1994 Malawi was under the paternalistic autocratic rule of Kamuzu Banda, since 1971 President for Life, and the MCP, the only legal political party. Kamuzu Banda retained and even strengthened the highly hierarchical and centralised structure of the colonial civil service since it suited his interests. This started to change when a new government under Bakili Muluzi was elected in the first multi-party elections in 1994. The new government had a reformist agenda and implemented a number of reforms to transform the service into a "performance-driven", "transparent" and "accountable" provider of public services controlled by democratic institutions and the general public under guidance of the World Bank, the IMF and bilateral donors. As a result of these demands the government has implemented a civil service reform programme. In Malawi the World Bank adopted the so-called "enclave approach" to governance reform. Hereby new agencies are established that are supposed to function as motors of reform (Dia 1993). So far these reforms have not been very successful in transforming the civil service and structures inherited from the period of British colonial rule uneasily co-exist with newly established agencies with the task to promote institutional reforms.

In spite of the scope of official rules and legislation the actual risk of discovery and punishment for corrupt civil servants is very low. Of course the President and the ministers are eager to point out that corruption is an evil and that no one stands above the law. And indeed in recent years several high-profile scandals involving ministers and high officials have led to temporary arrests, transfers and suspensions. Not only grand corruption has been tackled by ACB and the Public Prosecutor, more often "small fish" such as customs officers and clerks are persecuted and sentenced to severe punishment if convicted. However, control by these institutions and the notoriously understaffed Auditor General's Office is incidental at best and enforcement of the various statutes and official regulations seems to be rather restricted to a few isolated cases that are supposed to have a deterrent effect or serve politi-

cal purposes of political rivals. Furthermore, the rivalry and unclear mandates of these institutions have counter-productive effects hindering rather than enhancing anti-corruption measures.

Under Kamuzu Banda's and the MCP's regime discipline was strictly enforced in the civil service. Most senior civil servants were completely dependent on Kamuzu Banda. He had appointed them to their positions and he had provided them with tobacco estates. The loans for the purchase of the estates were granted by the state-owned Commercial Bank that was also controlled by Kamuzu Banda. Compliance to official rules was further ensured by arbitrary arrests of suspected "confusionists" and "separatists". This "culture of fear" as it was called by my informants guaranteed compliance to official rules: any misstep could lead to one's dismissal and arrest. The Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), the paramilitary youth wing of the MCP, had spies and informants everywhere and sudden unexplained wealth would always lead to inquiries. Thus it seems that the reportedly low levels of corruption Malawi used to be famous for prior to the 1990s depended on Kamuzu Banda's system of brutal oppression rather than the rule of law.

Social norms and the ideology of sharing

In Malawi, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, social networks are vital in regard to people's sense of self, status and welfare. A person's status is defined to a large degree by the number of personal relationships he or she entertains and how much of one's wealth is redistributed among kin and clients. Due to the absence of universal and substantial social welfare services people in general have to rely on their networks with kin, colleagues and neighbours for their social security. Most writers emphasise the role of informal or traditional networks with regard to the widespread corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001a, Médard 1982: 172; 1995; Olivier de Sardan 1999: 256, 257). Civil servants act as brokers and patrons within a web of interdependent social networks transcending the sphere of the public office. This position makes them receptive for the temptation of corruption. For many it is almost impossible to refuse the demands of a relative, a friend or an old schoolmate to assist, even if it means they have to circumvent official rules. Of course, not all demands will be treated equally, a relative's request for support might be subject to different considerations than that of a friend and a superior's demand certainly is treated differently than that of one of equal social status.

Generally in Malawi there is a strong moral obligation to redistribute, *kugawa* or *kugawira*, i.e. to share, accumulated wealth with kin. The generous patron enjoys considerable status among his clients. In turn, the connection with a powerful patron enhances the social status of a client. The achievement of an individual is always seen as a collective achievement by a potentially wide circle of relatives, which will grow to the same extent as one moves upward the social ladder to the extent that the senior civil servant or the successful businessman will be visited by "relatives" he didn't even know existed. Social control within these networks is usually tight and the implicit threat of witchcraft, ostracism and gossip functions as a sanction inducing conforming behaviour.

The strength of solidarity networks should not be confused with an idealised picture where all corrupt behaviour by public officials is a logical consequence of demands for support. Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2001b) rightly draw attention to the fact that social or moral norms often merely serve to justify corrupt practices. Civil servants are active agents, brokers who continuously negotiate the terms of their social relationships, making sure that they get their share of the cake. Often civil servants themselves point out that it is no wonder that other officers (of course it were always others) are corrupted when they are confronted by the obligations of extended families and the limitations of low salaries eroded by inflation. This is often not more than an excuse for corrupt behaviour; not everybody is the same: some were not corrupt, others were manipulating and circumventing official rules under severe circumstances only, like Mr. Mashanga, and some were downright corrupt without the pretext of social obligations and solidarity, using the gains from corruption for hedonism and escapism. The numerous civil servants who can be encountered in the bars and night-clubs of the urban and peri-urban areas where they spend a month's salary in one night give ample testimony of this selfish and anti-social aspect of corruption.

Civil servants maintain diverse social relationships with neighbours, colleagues, old schoolmates and fellow members of the church congregation. Especially in an urban environment networks based on residence, social status and church membership are very important. Often these relationships are described in terms of fictive kinship, especially in regard to solidarity. Yet one should be careful to lump all social relationships and personal exchanges under one header as many authors seem to suggest (Ekeh 1975, Médard 1982, Olivier de Sardan 1999, Scott

1979). Civil servants themselves often made a distinction between kin and friends. Of course, relationships with neighbours, colleagues and people from the same congregation can be under strain from demands for support but most civil servants I met stressed the pressure from relatives who expect them to provide support as a major issue of their existence. With regard to friends my informants often stressed that a friend could put less strong claims on their resources. In spite of these complaints their attitude towards expectations by kin is often ambiguous: on the one hand, exaggerated expectations are perceived to be a burden in an environment characterised by severe economic crisis and loss of real income; on the other, the status that comes with the role of a broker and patron is very tempting and kin relations are seen as insurance, a potential asset which has become increasingly important in recent years under the impact of economic crisis.

It would be misleading to represent the rules regulating informal social support as a normative system of defined rights and obligations. It constitutes rather a cluster of basic principles, which order the sphere of personal relationships. Instead of speaking of rights and duties it seems more appropriate to talk about expectations and feelings of obligation. Nevertheless, the latter tend to be felt strongly and people devise the most complicated schemes to avoid or at least control the demands from their relatives. Exchanges are often never fully consumed to maintain a sense of indebtedness, which leaves open the possibility to ask for favours or services at a later point of time. Parallel, terms and conditions of exchanges tend to be implicit and vague, thus leaving space for changes in interpretation and a continuous process of negotiation. For example, the responsibility of the employer is not limited to his employee. As employer Mr. Mashanga is expected to support his employees and their families in times of distress. The employer is generally expected to arrange for or to pay the funeral and costs of transport of the deceased's body to the place of the funeral, usually the home village. There is no clear rule since it is neither in the interest of the employer nor that of the employee to define more precisely who would benefit from the employer's support. Thus both parties have the possibility to negotiate the conditions of help in the light of the specific circumstances of the situation. A more precise definition would be considered undesirable by both, the employer who wants to avoid to give the impression that he or she is keen to limit his obligations and the employees who have an interest to have as little as possible restrictions on support from the *bwana*.

This sketch of principles ordering social relationships in Malawi seems to correspond with Ekeh's concept of the "primordial public realm" as opposed to the "civic public" associated with colonial rule, which is devoid of moral imperatives.⁶ He seems to suggest that a homogenous set of moral imperatives operates in the "primordial public" and influences the private sphere. In my view, this conceptualisation is misleading: in general the idea of a primordial realm is anachronistic at best and seems to be inspired by a search for authenticity rather than social realities in modern Africa. In present-day Malawi there exists not one universal morality but rather a patchwork of different moralities. Often the differences are negligible, as for example between different ethnic groups who have similar moral imperatives, but sometimes they are considerable. This is certainly the case in regard to Christian morality and kinship morality, which are often at odds and give rise to tension and conflict. Ekeh's concept of the "primordial public" in Africa, which he primarily associates with kinship and ethnicity, ignores the profound influence Christian missionary activities have had on society in Malawi (McCracken 2000, Ross 1996, White 1987).

Often civil servants who are devout Christians, especially the rising number of "born-again" or "charismatic" Christians, have high moral standards in regard to an individual's personal conduct. Christian ethics differ in important aspects from kinship-influenced moral imperatives: Charity, for example, is a moral duty for Christians but unlike solidarity between kin with strong social pressure applied by members of the group the obligation is based on the belief in god and the hereafter where good deeds will be rewarded or bad deeds will be punished. For the major Christian denominations corruption and *katangale* constitute sinful behaviour and for some charismatic churches the devil himself tries to seduce the believers from the path of god by tempting them to act wrongly. This strong rejection of illegal acts, which can be traced back to the acknowledgement of secular power in all Christian churches,⁷ differs from kinship solidarity, which does not recognise

⁶ Ekeh points out that there exist two public realms in the postcolonial state: on the one hand, the "primordial public" realm associated with traditional kinship relationships, which is "moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm" and, on the other, the "civic public" of the state's institutions based on the ideology of the colonial administration, which is "amoral and lacks the generalised moral imperatives operative in the private realm and in the primordial public" (1975: 92).

⁷ Of course there are differences between the various Christian churches. Protestant churches have a more pronounced tradition of being apolitical and recognising secular

the distinction between public office and private sphere. Differences between charismatic Christian ethos and kinship morality, however, do not imply that charismatic Christians are less prone to corruption than other denominations or non-believers. I merely suggest here to replace the notion of a “primordial public” by conceptualising a mix of alternative moralities which may have conflicting elements.

The parallel social order in the bureaucracy

All bureaucracies know informal arrangements or codes of conduct at the shop-floor level. In Africa this parallel order appears to be particularly strong and well-developed. Beneath the layer of statutes, regulations and organisational charts a complex web of interpersonal relationships seems to amount to a parallel structure within the state apparatus running mainly along the lines of patron-client relationships. This phenomenon is variously described as “neo-patrimonial state” (Médard 1982), “rhizome state” (Bayart 1993), “shadow state” (Reno 1995, 2000) or even “criminalization of the state” (Bayart et al. 1999). In Malawi this parallel order does not amount to a “shadow state” in Reno’s (1995, 2000) sense who describes a much more institutionalised parallel system in Sierra Leone, where formal structures had been hollowed out completely during the civil war, but a parallel office mores is easily discernible in the Malawian state apparatus.

The parallel social order or office mores is best described in terms of a set of basic moral principles and an unofficial code of conduct based on the principle “respect for the master”, *ulemu kwa bwana*, that guide the interpretation of official regulations and prevail over them in case of conflict. This system soon emerged after independence and constituted one of the main instruments used by Kamuzu Banda and the MCP to ensure absolute control over the state since all civil servants owed loyalty to the party and Kamuzu Banda personally. After the introduction of multi-party democracy the parallel order was transformed into a source of patronage for senior civil servants and politicians who took advantage of the crumbling discipline and the end of one-party rule. Systematic misuse of the public office started among the top cadres of the civil service and spread quickly down to the junior grades who imitated their superiors in an attempt to benefit from the

power than the Catholic Church. Yet, most churches recognise secular laws and adhere to the private/public distinction.

political turmoil of the mid 1990s. Being freed from the constant fear to be disciplined senior officials and politicians of all parties seized their chance to establish themselves as patrons in their own right and appropriated the resources they controlled. In contrast with Kamuzu Banda's system in which only a small circle around the autocrat appropriated the resources of the state one can speak of a democratisation of appropriation with regard to the transition to democracy in the 1990s. The democratisation of appropriation was often seen in the context of the new democratic dispensation and many informants cynically perceived of human rights as a regime that allowed one to exploit the new freedom for personal enrichment or as "the right to grab as much as you can" as one interlocutor wryly put it.

Social relations within the bureaucracy have two central features: asymmetric power relations and the maintenance of indebtedness. Junior civil servants usually drew a sharp line between "the bosses" and themselves who depended on the protection afforded by their superiors. Without the intervention of a patron or friend it was almost impossible to get a salary advance, the permission to attend a workshop, to get a promotion or even to get a job in the first place. For example, in many government departments it was understood that civil servants had to pay a "commission" to their superior officer if they wanted to get a salary advance. Indebtedness was the other important aspect of relationships within the civil service. Mr. Mashanga's story shows how personal relationships at the office produce and reproduce indebtedness thus spawning *katangale*. The production and maintenance of indebtedness were desirable for both, debtor and creditor. The interest of the creditor was obvious: he or she gained influence over the debtor. Often full return was not in the interest of the creditor who preferred to maintain a degree of leverage on the debtor. But even the debtor often perceives of a debt as an asset. If it is not possible to become a creditor the next best thing is the status of a debtor. To have a debt constitutes a means to establish a social relationship with someone who might develop a sense of obligation towards the weaker party and assume the role of a patron.

The production and reproduction of webs of indebtedness is central to the understanding of the parallel order of social relationships in the civil service. By making other accomplice to corrupt and dubious practices loyalty is ensured. In Mr. Mashanga's case the boss authorised the private use of government vehicles because he owed him a favour or wanted to create a debt. The protection afforded by the *bwana* is

vital for the junior officers and usually people are discharged or prosecuted because of corruption when their master removes his protection. The reasons for such a move by the patron may vary. Often a client is sacrificed in order to stay out of the line of fire when the patron is threatened by investigations, often on the instigation of a rival. Sometimes protection is removed because of violations of the office mores by a client who failed to pay proper respect.

According to the junior civil servants I talked to during my fieldwork “respect for the boss” is the most important virtue in Malawian government institutions. “Respect for the boss” overrules the official regulations, the MPSR. One informant pointed out that “we have laws but we also have by-laws”. The superior officer “knows that there is some government regulation but he may divert” whereas the junior civil servant has to obey, “in the office you cannot challenge a senior officer, if you do that he can transfer you” as a junior civil servant put it. My interlocutors often alluded to the office mores as “know how to manoeuvre” or the “rules of the game”.

Obviously there exist differences between different departments and sub-units like offices and schools. According to the old adage that the fish stinks from the head, the conduct of superior officers and managers heading a sub-unit usually sets the tone for the rest of the staff. Opportunities for corruption also depend on the functions of a department: the Fisheries Department, for example, differs from a primary school and police officers or accountants tend to have more opportunities than clerks or messengers. Nevertheless there is a set of basic informal rules and codes, which can be found to some extent in all ministries and departments down to the smaller units such as police posts, health posts and schools.

The central principle of “respecting the boss” was only countered by the principle of sharing and allocating resources with dependants and clients mentioned above. The patron who violates this principle often faces silent resistance or even revenge, in the form of corruption allegations for instance. Junior officers tend to tolerate or even condone corruption by the superior officers as long as it is *katangale*, a system of redistribution in which everybody involved benefits. This attitude of junior civil servants is nicely illustrated in the song *Ndiphike Nyemba* by Charles Nsaku that was very popular in early 2002. A driver accuses his boss of being selfish, “I am your driver, we left Lilongwe together the previous day coming here to the field to work, there you are with money boss, food you are just eating alone, while your driver ate two

days ago". These accusations of being selfish or *ubombo* are not something to be taken lightly in a society where the obligation to share is a central principle of conduct. In the song *Njoka mu udzu* by Lucius Banda the junior officer compares his boss to a snake lacking basic human qualities: "You are like a snake in the grass, when passing us by you smile, deep down in your heart you harbour bad feelings towards us, what is that you are missing boss?" He also warns his boss that one day he might have to depend on his subordinates since "life is like a card game, today we are working for you but your children might be employed by us".

Conclusions

"Good governance" policies in Africa are informed by a reductionist culturalism that blames African "primordialism" or "patrimonialism" for corruption and underdevelopment. There is a tendency to represent state institutions as alien transplants "unrooted in local culture" (Dia 1996: 30) harking back to notions like the "primordial public realm" (Ekeh 1975). The imagined disconnect between institutions imported by the colonial powers and African society or culture is seen as the cause of "weak states" and "failed states". The ethnographic evidence presented in this chapter shows that these simplistic dualisms do not account for the normative complexity in Malawi, arguably a stronger state than the usual suspects commonly cited, where several sets of rules co-exist in the same social field. Civil servants in Malawi are well aware of the existence of official rules and regulations governing their conduct and they incessantly develop ways to get around them justifying their transgression with moral obligations and the impracticability of codes existing "only on paper" as Mr. Mashanga pointed out. His case study shows the careful manoeuvring of a chameleon continuously switching normative codes depending on the situation. It is correct that civil servants in Malawi tend to justify corrupt behaviour with the strong expectations of kith and kin to grant access to public resources and Mr. Mashanga's case illustrates this very well but it would be naïve to assume that corruption in Africa is always a consequence of social pressure.

Mr. Mashanga's is a quite harmless and common case of petty corruption but it aptly illustrates the ways corruption works in Malawi. He invoked his moral obligations as a patron towards his dependant to

justify his misuse of government property. His superior and colleagues accepted this and condoned the misuse of government property in this specific case thereby abiding to the strong ideology of sharing and caring in Malawi. The idiom of kinship solidarity, however, competes with and is influenced by other moralities such as Christian values. It would be, therefore, misleading to assume the existence of a homogenous African morality. A third set of rules, an informal *modus vivendi*, exists at the office that facilitates and regulates violations of official rules and regulations that are considered to be too far removed from real life to be always applicable. The existence of a parallel social order at shop-floor level is not peculiar to Malawi or Africa but due to its specific history it has structured corruption in the civil service since 1994.

It is important to remember that civil servants are active agents exploiting ambiguities and gaps resulting from the plurality of normative orders. Even the lowest civil servants occupy a relatively privileged position in relation to the population at large. This makes them important brokers in their social networks and constantly people try to make claims on them by reminding them of their social obligations. Thus, civil servants experience a tension between official rules and their everyday lives. Mr. Mashanga's case illustrates this virtuous playing with different sets of rules to maintain his position both, in the office and the "private" sphere.

An analysis that takes indigenous concepts such as *katangale* and *kugawa* into account transcends the simple public/private, legal/illegal dichotomies abounding in non-anthropological treatments of the phenomenon. The recognition of normative plurality in the bureaucracy of Malawi reveals alternative dichotomies such as selfish/altruistic and different ideas of conformity and deviance that make it more difficult to believe in the potential of universalistic concepts such as the rule of law and "good governance" to curb corruption. We would be better advised to have a closer look at the alternative sets of rules and moral ideologies for guidance in approaching a phenomenon that is neither inherent to African society nor the symptom of a mere dysfunctionality of an inefficient bureaucratic machine.

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URBAN DWELLERS, POLITICIANS AND DIRT:
AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EVERYDAY GOVERNANCE
IN BOBO-DIOULASSO (BURKINA FASO)

Jacky Bouju¹

The social, anthropological and political questions posed by the provision of a public urban-sanitation and waste-management service appeared to me to offer an excellent opportunity for the analysis of an everyday situation of urban governance. Indeed, far from the normative or ideological approaches to governance, conveyed *inter alia* by the World Bank, this paper attempts to explore empirically the implications for local governance of the complex social relationship between urban dwellers and the cleanliness and healthiness of the city's public spaces. A social-anthropological study conducted over a period of two years in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso made it possible to identify and describe in detail the local actors involved in the area of urban sanitation, their concerns and interaction. However, in this chapter I would like to focus on a particularly interesting point that emerged from the study, i.e. the symbolic political legitimacy that the management of the urban public space by the services representing the municipal authority has for urban dwellers. In the social exchange underlying this political bond, the municipal services division is responsible for the provision of public sanitation services and, in return, citizens must show appropriate public spirit in relation to the disposal of their waste. However, the study revealed that this civic exchange has long been characterised by a systematic failure to meet expectations on both sides. It emerged quickly from the fieldwork that the relationship with the city's sanitation system and general cleanliness had become one of the main modes of expression of a latent political confrontation between a municipal power, whose legitimacy is disputed, and the citizens, who are apparently determined to resist the latter in the same way that they previously resisted state despotism:

¹ Anthropologist, CEMAF UMR 8171—Université de Provence Aix-Marseille 1.

Because the Town Hall has difficulties in paying for sanitation services, it cannot have the septic tanks emptied regularly. Thus, infuriated residents throughout the city started setting the contents of the tanks alight and, as a result, rendered them unusable. H.Y., Sanitation Service, Municipality of Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001).

The process of the democratisation of political life and decentralisation of state power has not yet produced the expected effects; nothing appears to have changed:

It used to be the state, today, it is the municipality, but nothing really appears to have changed in terms of power! (Resident of sector 17)

First and foremost, you try to 'establish your reputation' here. You get involved in politics to fulfil your own aims, not those of the city! B. school principal, sector 12 (Niénéta), former Municipal Councillor (General Secretary of the RDA (Rassemblement Démocratique Africain, i.e. African Democratic Rally).

Nowadays, people consider—rightly or wrongly—that the various means of political expression (party membership, the electoral procedure, recourse to the courts, organisation of ideological debate) remain largely under the direct or indirect control of the local authorities and the majority party, the CDP (Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, i.e. Congress for Democracy and Progress):

The choice [of candidates] for the elections is not always based on ability or competence; we still have a single-party logic and political candidature is motivated by daily expense allowances (per diem) and other advantages. I belong to the PDP. People have no political conviction—perhaps because of religion and fatalism it teaches. Within families, the father, the head of the household, still decides on behalf of all the family who it will vote for. S. retired official of the Abidjan-Niger Railway (RAN), spokesman of the residents of the “Brakina” canal, member of the opposition PDP party (Parti pour la Démocratie et le Progrès, i.e. Party for Democracy and Progress), candidate in the general election of 1998 (Study 2001).

Moreover, the majority of local elected representatives (parliamentary deputies, mayors and municipal councillors) were discredited by their involvement in various forms of misappropriation of public property, the most spectacular being the stockpiling of housing plots in recent municipal developments. This capital in the form of “urban residential plots” became the main source of resources for the local elected representatives and for the officials in charge of the decentralised administrative services affected by the allocation of plots (land register, urban development, public works etc.). It also feeds and maintains the

system of exchange, on which local political clientelism is based (Bouju 2004: 107–122).

The corruption and injustice of the system of local socio-political clientelism are strongly internalised by the urban dwellers who see in the inadequacies of the municipal services—i.e. lack of refuse collection, street lightning, road surfacing, pavements, drinking-water supply, clean gutters etc.—a failure on the part of the local authorities:

The way people behave is related to their mentality and to the laxity of the administration. (...) Corruption has been assimilated by the people at all levels. Once someone is accused of failing to comply with the hygiene regulations, they immediately know who to get in touch with to solve their problem by amicable agreement. In the same way, the authorities sometimes intervene on behalf of certain people. Manager at the Municipal Engineering Department (Millogo 2002: 99)

However, the lack of confidence of the urban voting public in its elected fellow citizens runs longer and deeper than the mere challenging of the democratic legitimacy of local elected representatives. In Bobo-Dioulasso, the authoritarianism of municipal power is a long-established phenomenon and, as we shall see, from the perspective of its population, the daily controls and sanctions imposed by the Municipal Sanitation Service are the sole manifestation of political authority. If this is actually the case, the current problem posed by the dirty state of the city calls for a very different political response that does not involve never-ending campaigns to raise public awareness of the cleanliness of the city, the lack of domestic hygiene and the dangers posed by urban pollution to public health.

Cleanliness and the appropriation of urban space

The city of Bobo-Dioulasso is characterised by significant social instability and poverty. The majority of the heads of households are new urban dwellers and 78.3 per cent of the urban population consists of rural migrants originating from the over-populated provinces of northern Burkina Faso (mainly north-west Yatenga and west Boulikieudé). The mentality, attitudes and behaviour of these migrants remain strongly rooted in their original rural culture, which does not adapt well to the requirements of urban living in relation to sanitation and hygiene. In addition, 46.27 per cent of the city's inhabitants are illiterate and 46 per cent are under 15 years of age. Poverty tends to be concentrated

in certain residential areas (e.g. the neighbourhoods of the historical city centre and undeveloped peripheral areas), in there is barely any urban infrastructure worthy of mention: the refuse-filled open sewers are insufficient in number to provide sufficient drainage, thus the sewage stagnates everywhere around the houses. However, the people manage to keep themselves clean.

Indeed, one is constantly struck by the startling contrast between the widespread indifference to the dirt and squalor of public places, on the one hand, and the scrupulous attention generally paid to the cleanliness of domestic and private spaces and the people themselves, on the other. In order to understand the reasons behind this apparent paradox, I have decided to analyse in detail the relationship between the disposal of waste and the appropriation of private space and public locations underlying urban practices of neighbourhood sociability (Bouju 2002: 96–103).

Like everywhere else, in Bobo-Dioulasso cleanliness consists of tidying and putting things in order, in other words putting oneself, one's possessions or environment in order. "Cleanliness," *saniya*, is associated with quality of life, self-respect and well-being and is considered as an important criterion of sociability and civility. In particular, and this point is very relevant to the topic under discussion here, the act of organising and putting one's living space in order always reflects the will to reproduce the social relationship fostered with those who share this space. Something described as "clean", is something one appropriates or makes "one's own." The behaviour of a city dweller depends, therefore, on the urban territory to which he feels connected, i.e. his back yard, his "*six-mètres*," neighbourhood or town/city. Thus, like the semantics of the French word for clean, i.e. "*propre*," the Dioula term also incorporates the ideas of both cleanliness and ownership. A clean space is one that someone appropriates, setting limits and bans and which keep the dirt and stains away. Hence, the demarcation and definition of interaction and (physical, visual and auditory) contact is at the heart of everyday neighbourhood relationships.

In the working-class areas of Bobo-Dioulasso, urban residential space is generally conceived and used on the basis of the model that governs village space, whereby the inhabited centre is cleaned everyday and many activities are consigned to the periphery of the central living space. In the village, activities involving cleanliness (waste disposal, defecation, washing, winnowing etc.) are relegated to specific locations on the periphery of the residential buildings, in the space that borders the fields and the bush.

This social structure of urbanised space is very common throughout West Africa. It reflects a topocentric conception of inhabited space which tends to display a concentric and gradual distribution, starting from a strongly appropriated centre loaded with symbolic values and moving towards to an exterior space which is increasingly less appropriated but without limits. This idea explains urban practices which radically oppose a jointly socialised and appropriated interior private space with an exterior public space, the access to which is perceived as open, and from which anything may be taken or where anything may be abandoned.

Of course, this very widespread endogenous conception contrast particularly sharply with the geometrical conception of inhabited space which originates from the colonial period and is characterised by rigidly defined spaces delineated by straight lines and constitutes the basis of the spatial organisation of modern cities. Therefore, the paradox of a dirty city populated by clean inhabitants arises in part from this fundamental contradiction between two historical-cultural conceptions of inhabited space which results in the daily confrontation between at least two normative logics that regulate the way people live together: i.e. the modern norms in relation to housing, the use of public space and the cleanliness of public space as promoted by municipal authorities since the colonial period, on the one hand, and the norms of urbanity, sociability and activity as practised by the inhabitants and the users of the city, on the other.

In fact, the observation of the behaviour of city dwellers and their use of public space and the analysis of their explanation thereof reveals that the functional specialisation of public spaces in the city (e.g. market squares, pavements, roads, parks etc.) is neither recognised as such nor accepted by the vast majority of the urban population. Thus, popular everyday practices attempt divert their use as much as possible. The research revealed that the functional specialisation of public space was not recognised because the public nature a space (or a good in general) was not understood. Indeed, like elsewhere, most Bobolese regard any “public” space as a “free” space. Thus, Yveline Deverain-Kouanda’s comment on the way in which a passageway is perceived in Ouagadougou is also applicable in Bobo-Dioulasso:

...it is above all an unattributed space, and therefore one that is not built on. It is not governed by any particular authority, it does not belong to anybody (Deverain-Kouanda 1991: 94).

Thus, in accordance with the popular *habitus*, the primary characteristic of urban public space is that it does not belong to a family. This does not mean, however, that it is perceived as belonging to everyone; in this case it would be a good that is common to all inhabitants, i.e. a public good. In fact, the concept of a public good that would be the joint property of all the city's families, irrespective of their status, does not exist. On the contrary, if an urban public space does not belong to a family, then it is thought as customarily accessible to all, i.e. available to be appropriated by any individual who is in a position to take it and make private use of it.

Therefore, it is possible to observe numerous attempts involving the more or less permanent appropriation of public space throughout the city. Fields of millet cultivated on the premises of the ministries, schools and university are particularly visible during the winter season. Throughout the year, the areas bordering residential courtyards are used for the erection of retail stalls (*tabliers*), the deposit of disused awkward objects (bricks and other construction materials, vehicle bodies etc.) or the erection of flimsy shelters for small retail businesses. All objections to this overflow of private commercial activity into the public space meets with the same response: "this road is not your father's!" This simple phrase, which is heard repeatedly, is indicative of a significant relationship: it means that the right to speak about the state of a good (in this case urban space) is associated with the right of ownership to this good. It is regarded as improper to be concerned about the goods of others; indeed, such behaviour is usually interpreted as indicative of a desire to seize the goods in question, or harm their user. Thus, some people consider the exercise of municipal authority over the urban territory to be an abuse of power:

The city does not belong to the Mayor! Why is he trying to impose his order here? It is not for him, or for his family! (Resident)

This is all consistent with the local conception of customary law which only serves and protects the members of a given group. In a tribal context, the effective exercise of a right to a good is usually guaranteed by nothing more than the threat of mystical sanctions, e.g. grigris, amulets, fetishes, marabout spells, threats of ancestral revenge etc. However, these are only effective if the belief in their effectiveness is shared. Beyond the frontiers of the community group, beliefs are no longer shared and the norms of solidarity are no longer applicable. Traditionally, relationships outside the community are regulated in a pragmatic and

opportunistic way. They are based, in part, on power struggles and on the outcomes of earlier disputes and conflicts. The interaction with an outsider is generally regulated by competition and the personal ethics of honour. In this case, an outsider's right of ownership of a land (or any other good) is only really recognised if its holder is able to defend it. This concept of ownership associated with variable obligations is known and recognised by everyone.

However, the city is, above all, the kingdom of otherness. The inhabitants of neighbourhoods characterised by heterogeneous settlement have different cultural habits and the level of solidarity within these neighbourhoods is often minimal. This problem is further aggravated by the economic crisis which constitutes a threat to solidarity in general. All over Bobo-Dioulasso, there are unoccupied, unemployed young people and a poor illiterate population which is vulnerable to difficulties that it does not understand and cannot overcome. The dramatic reduction in disposable income due to the deterioration in the local economy results in the exclusion of the city's poorest inhabitants from social exchange. This is followed by a process of social disaffiliation, leading to fatalism and withdrawal. As if this were not enough, they feel that the elected officials have left them to rot in mud and mire. As a result, they are quite indifferent to the dirtiness of the city and often contribute to the perpetuation of this situation.

The illiterate non-native neo-urban dwellers, who originate from rural contexts, are not familiar with urban practices and customs, and make very little effort to get to know and respect them. They have not inherited any historical memory of the city, and the day-to-day struggle for survival prevents them from nurturing any plans to set down roots in the neighbourhoods in which they live. The municipal officials who refer this urban phenomenon, speak of "cultural intermixing":

It must also be said that 'cultural intermixing' has assumed greater significance of late. On the one hand, we have those who lived here and had clean habits and, on the other hand, there are the migrants who arrived here recently and did not have such habits. Furthermore, there was no control or checking. As a result, those who were initially inclined to sweep in front of the yards and do the weeding were influenced by the others. Thus, you see cultural intermixing is a factor in this sanitation problem. (B. A. S., Deputy Mayor of Bobo)

Their indifference to the dirt of their living environment is indicative of their desire not to reproduce their social relationship within this environment:

The surplus of waste is proportional to the weakness of the social bonds between the new occupants. The social emptiness is expressed through an entire series of indicators of abandonment and attitudes of rejection. (Lesbet 1999: 147)

With regard to the city's powerful and influential residents, it is clear that the cleanliness of urban public space is not a focus of their concern, otherwise this would be noticeable. This lax attitude is characteristic of the Bobolese industrialists, in particular, who have been discharging their pollutant waste into an open canal that crosses a part of the city and releases a foul smell for a very long time now:

When Koussoubé (the current municipal mayor) was a district mayor, he told us that he did not have anything to do with the municipal budget. But, now that he is the main mayor, what is he waiting for? If he does not do anything, we will have an expert issue a certificate of nuisance and we will go to court. The situation is simply intolerable the way it is! Our visitors do not even want to come to visit us. The smells are too strong! All of the factories—RAN, CITEC, and SOFIB—discharge effluent here and the mosquitoes are so numerous that in the evening, you can take a rifle to kill them. (Residents of the Brakina canal area of Kónsa)

Official complaints made by the Sanitation Service or the health services never succeed because the industrialists practise a system of permanent blackmail with the local councillors. They complain that they are making a loss and that if they forced to pay heavy fines or make significant investments, they threaten the Town Hall that they will be forced to lay off staff or close down. The Town Hall usually backs down. (Y. Official at the Centre d'Éducation pour la Santé et l'Assainissement (CRESA), study 2001)

The city's other worthies, i.e. major traders, politicians and local councillors, are primarily interested in obtaining immediate gain for their personal businesses from their offices or mandates. Their relative wealth makes it possible for them to get away from the dirtiest locations and live in the cleaner residential neighbourhoods. They do not care about urban cleanliness and the collective living environment.

The problem with the elected officials and the politicians is as follows: they do not have the political courage to take the legal or technical decisions suggested by qualified technicians because, on the one hand, their own sanitary facilities do not conform to the legally required standards and, on the other, such measures would be unpopular and their electoral 'customers' would react negatively. (Y. Official at the Centre d'Éducation pour la Santé et l'Assainissement (CRESA), study 2001)

In this context, the marking of the boundary of a living space with refuse has multiple meanings. Depending on the circumstances, it can

act as a marker of individual territory and as a means of violating another territory that belongs to a neighbour or to the city. It can also be indicative of ignorance or negligence or constitute an act of provocative disorder.

The marking of urban space with refuse

The only space, on which the urban dwellers believe they have an influence today, is “their” yard, the dwelling built on the plot of land they own. Thus, the Bobolese have a very narrow concept of their living environment and most of them consider problems that arise outside of their yard as being beyond their scope. Their sociability is still largely based on bonds or group membership and is expressed in the form of a ceremonial network connecting several yards spread throughout the town. As opposed to this, neighbourhood sociability is very formal and neighbourhood relationships generally remain undeveloped. In this context, the relationship to the space outside the yard, i.e. the “*devanture*” or front of the house as they call it, becomes the fundamental issue in these neighbourhood relationships.

These relationships are established “starting from the definition of the space which should be protected from refuse, and, inevitably, the space that must by necessity accommodate it” (Jolé 1991: 36) and the issues at stake are the protection of the private territory and its borders from the adjacent properties. The conceptions surrounding this issue are heterogeneous. Some canal-bank residents consider that the marking of cleanliness must stop on the threshold of their yard while others believe that, on the contrary, this marking must also incorporate the space bordering the yard or even all of the shared street space. These two irreconcilable conceptions generate tension and a logic of hostility which are expressed in situations of incivility between neighbours:

Djeneba, a widow, inherited the yard after her husband died. In this yard, which is located in Accart-ville, the septic tank used for the collection of domestic waste water outside the plot, was full. The widow asked the operators to drain it and the contents were emptied onto the public road. This upset one of the woman’s neighbours. He lodged a complaint because it was not the first time that it had occurred. They argued verbally at first, and then they almost came to blows. The woman told her neighbour that he could complain wherever he wanted because she is not the only one in Bobo to empty her septic tank in the street. When the neighbour came to see us, we summonsed the woman. She came with one of her sons. She acknowledged the facts she was accused

of, but said she did not know that it was forbidden to empty septic tanks onto the street. She said that she did it because she thought that it was going to rain and that the rain water would carry the waste away. We fined her XOF 5000 which she was unable to pay in full. She was in tears. She explained to us that the tenants do not pay their rent regularly and that she found it difficult to provide food for her children every day. We sympathised and told her to do her best to pay XOF 2400 within the two following weeks. We spoke to her about the dangers of emptying a septic tank onto the street. She promised to have a septic tank made in compliance with the rules in place of the fine. We encouraged her to do this, whereupon she stopped crying. An official from the Sanitation Service (study 2001)

Neighbourhood discourtesy: from marking with refuse to giving offence

Refuse can be seen everywhere around the dwelling yards. However, as we have just seen, the area around the yard does not belong to the yard, it is public space. When this space is not involved in a process of “unofficial” privatisation, it is regarded as socially useless and therefore suitable for dumping and tipping. All manner of dirty jobs are carried out there: refuse is deposited there as is the sewage produced from household activities such as washing up, showering, urinating, defecating and, during winter, the contents of septic tanks. “Everyone does there what they do not want to do in their own yard.” (Deverain-Kouanda 1991: 94)

In these circumstances, the neighbour’s mud and sewage often appear to constitute an discourtesy, a marker of expansion into private territory or an act of violation of neighbouring territory. The marking of a territorial boundary with refuse is perceived by the others as an intrusion, a kind of hypocritical contempt. In such a context often characterised by unshared codes of civility and urbanity, when all possible amicable resolutions have been attempted, the only solution that remains is to complain to the Municipal Sanitation Service. Two logics prevail in this instance: one which does not advocate complaining or alerting the authorities and one which does. The first reaction is based on social solidarity recognised within the framework of a proximity of bonds (as was the case in the rural village and remains the case in the historical villages of the native city neighbourhoods).

This standpoint considers the exorbitant social cost of an open conflict between relatives—it is often more difficult to move away from somebody than to approach them. As keeping someone at a distance is perceived as an offence, it is a problem to stand one’s ground without

causing the opposing party to lose face. In this situation, if they insist on asserting their view, the protagonists risk exposing themselves to the imposition of all kinds of sanctions by the neighbourhood (e.g. contempt, discredit, curses, spells and sorcery) which inflict considerable damage on the social bond. The prevailing standard of neighbourhood sociability requires the maintenance of the *modus vivendi* which stresses the primacy of the principle of coexistence and, above all, its continuity:

It is necessary to curb problems with neighbours. My neighbour emptied his toilets at night. It ran up to here. I got a strong smell, went out and did not miss him. We almost fought. I warned him that this must be the last time. I have small children and they play in dirt, but there are diseases. People act during the night, unseen and unidentified. People do not dare speak because it is not nice to quarrel with the neighbours. This is what we call 'Africa', you have to deal with it. My wife spreads out her flour in the sun and the neighbour's sheep comes to gobble it up. If you complain, you're told that what's done is done. It is the same with the refuse; for example, people started to dump refuse here, and when I saw that it was piling up, I woke up on a Sunday morning, I cleaned all of it and I waited for the first one who was going to start, nobody came. If I had closed my eyes, they would have continued. K., resident of sector 17, Bobo-Dioulasso, 22 August 2001.

The other logic, which supports the lodging of complaints, is based on the feeling of intrusion or on the fear of contagion and is also associated with the absence of any neighbourhood social bond and, therefore, solidarity:

Mr T. A., a tenant living in sector 4 (Koko), came to complain about his landlord on account of the state of the toilets in the yard. He refused to leave his name, so as not to aggravate the already tense relationship with him. The problem is that the toilets are full, they are overflowing on to the floor and the owner refuses to drain the tank on the pretext that being retired, he cannot afford it. However, the owner and his family use toilets which are locked and inaccessible to the other inhabitants of the yard. As his own toilets are not full, the landlord refuses to have those of the tenants drained. The tenants decided to club together to help the landlord to pay for draining the toilets. He agreed to accept the money, but used it for something else and the toilets are still not drained. What's worse, he threatens to evict any tenant who gets them drained without his knowledge! The landlord was summonsed to the Sanitation Service where he apologised for not having checked the state of his toilet. He promised to have them drained at the end of the week and invited the Sanitation Service to check. His fine of XOF 25,000 was payable by 5 October 2001. The Sanitation Service went to check the work on

2 October and was met with a very unpleasant surprise. The situation had deteriorated because nothing had been done. We looked in vain for something to seize from him because there was nothing of value at his place. Thus, to force him to drain the toilets, we dismantled the doors and took them back to the Service; they will only be returned to him when he has drained the tanks and paid the fine. . . . “Some people view a complaint made by honest citizens as a declaration of war!” Official of the Sanitation Service in Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001)

These urban dwellers find themselves in a situation of close proximity, to which their cultural *habitus* cannot provide any answers. In such a context, the defence of “one’s own” space, “one’s own” *devanture* against contamination from the neighbour’s mud and faecal waste is at the centre of most disputes between neighbours:

He said that his neighbour’s toilet waste bothers him because water runs out to the tree under which he works. He wanted us to report it. Afterwards, there was a summons to which the neighbour in question came. He said that he produces waste water, but that his neighbours do worse than him. He wanted the other neighbours to be summonsed as well and asked for another official from the service to be sent to confirm the run-off of waste water produced by the neighbours. I went there with him. There is, indeed, waste-water at their place, but it is less than he told us. They have indoor showers, the outdoor shower is used by only 3 people—he said there are 25 in the complex. He agreed to install a septic tank in the yard but demanded that his neighbours do the same. Every time there is a complaint about a neighbour, we are aware that there is something else at the root of it besides the question of hygiene. Official of the Sanitation Service (study 2001)

This imam complained about his Catholic neighbour, whose waste water and excrement was flowing in front of the mosque of which he is in charge. The complainant states that he initially wanted to resolve the problem amicably with the neighbour. But the latter did not want to know anything about it. He simply told the imam that he is a tenant and that any complaint should be addressed to the landlord. The imam reacted to this with the following remark: ‘but it is not the proprietor of the yard who washes inside, it is not he who relieves himself there! I am a tenant, myself but I put the yard in order. You cannot wait until the landlord comes to clean a yard when you live there!’ After the first complaint, the Sanitation Service summonsed the neighbour. He was asked to have his septic tank emptied by a professional. When he failed to do anything about this, the Muslims from the mosque decided to empty the entire tank into the middle of the street, so the sewage stopped running to the entrance of the mosque and producing unpleasant smells for a time. However, because it was the rainy season, the pit filled up and it became necessary to act. The complainant will still have to wait, the

technician says that the service vehicle is always broken down. As soon as it has been repaired, they will go out and report the neighbour. The vehicle has been broken down since May. For a while, we managed with the vehicle belonging to the Town Hall of Dafra. Since August, we've had nothing... If you take your motorcycle to make home visits, you will get your face smashed and you will have asked for it. Official of the Sanitation Service (study 2001)

The situation in Bobo-Dioulasso is very similar to that described by Djaffar Lesbet (1999) in relation to the dirt of the Casbah of Algiers. He wondered why the people there were indifferent to the obvious presence of stagnant water and refuse in public places. According to him, the proliferation of refuse in public spaces is indicative of a rupture of the social bond in a general context of significant change and, therefore, uncertainty. Social cohesion, which previously compensated for the failures of the municipal refuse collection service, has declined. Thus, there is no hope of keeping urban spaces clean without the active help of the inhabitants, particularly in view of the fact that they play an active part in the degradation of their own environment by dumping their waste there:

Even an old and poor residential dwelling will endure as long as the collective management of its maintenance remains in place, "but any brutal and significant change results in the expiration of the existing mode of operation and inevitably involves the rapid degradation of the environment" (Lesbet 1999: 150). External space was not appropriated historically or symbolically, "it is not regarded as an essential extension of the house." (idem: 136)

The new inhabitants of the neighbourhoods of Bobo-Dioulasso consider themselves as transient residents; they do not yet identify with this place or with its traditions of sociability and solidarity. This issue of identifying with a place is a complex one and one in which the sharing of its history plays an important role. According to Djaffar Lesbet, the scale of dirt and disorder in a place is proportional to the ignorance of its history which is no longer transmitted:

"(...) the space no longer evokes the shared memories and values which shaped the attachment to this place" (Lesbet 1999: 125). The increase in the volume of refuse on the streets is regarded as proportional to the lack of knowledge of the location. This would be due to "the absence of the transmission of the history of the place and of its uses" associated with the urban way of life.

Thus, the weakening of the social bond of proximity or neighbourhood partly explains the deterioration of the relationship between the inhabitants and their city.

The resistance of the natives of Dioulassoba

The public space crosses and includes a communal space made up of a group of “native” villages, on which the foundation of the city of Bobo-Dioulasso is based and into which they became incorporated in the course of the development of the city. This kind of tribal territory is based on the principle of identity; it tends to be socio-culturally homogeneous and constitutes a shared area, a “home” that is shared by the founding Bobo community and, of course, excludes the *samara*, i.e. foreigners or outsiders. The central neighbourhoods of Bobo-Dioulasso (Kibidwé, Farakan, Tounouma, Koko in sector 1), where the descendants of the founding families (Madarê, Zara and Dioula of Bobo-Dioulasso) still live, take advantage of the historical, ritual and political prerogatives conferred on them by their status as natives to ignore the decisions of the municipal authorities:

Everyone here is tied to his honour and own interests. In terms of power, everyone remembers that African chiefs had all the privileges. The problem with the customary powers is the preservation of the privileges associated with their chieftainship. On the one hand, the heirs of the old powers continue to be jealous of each other over questions of precedence that history never quite regulated (i.e. between Koko and Dioulassoba and between Bobo and Zara). Moreover, they systematically oppose the emergence of new powers and seek to control them if they cannot destroy them. The native powers in the city of Sya have never accepted the domination of the municipal power of Bobo. The concerns of the city are not those of the chieftaincy. However, today, the Bobo are a minority group in a population mainly composed of “foreigners”—the Mossi. The people of Dioulassoba are now the problem: if the mayor of the city is not at their service, he cannot work! So, once when there was a thorny question on the agenda, people armed with knives and clubs invaded the meeting of the municipal council. Faced with this threat, the council struck the problematic issue from the agenda. B., sector 12 (Niénéta), former Municipal Councillor (General Secretary of the GDR (Groupe des Démocrates Républicain/Group of Republican Democrats)).

The village had its traditional *kodugo* police force (made up of adults of various ages) which enforced the Bobo order. Some sanctions inflicted on a particular age group were carried out over there. Now, with the cohabitation with foreigners, the system is becoming more difficult to operate. Our police force cannot sanction the Zara or the Dioula because they will

complain to the administration and we will be summoned by the police force. We do not want to have anything to do with the administration. Our traditional police force only has jurisdiction over us. The Bobo have lost their authority; the (political) reorganisation of the village is not possible, it is no longer possible to speak of a united village. Customary chief of the Bobo district in Tounouma (Timina) with his son (study 2001).

The municipal authorities are regarded as a usurpatory power established through the domination of the “whites” and interaction with them is often conflictive:

You would almost get the impression that nothing existed before. We are ‘under the sun of the white man.’ It is every man for himself. The unity of the village has disappeared. Reorganisation is no longer possible. This has contributed to the weakening of the Madarè people. Customary chief of a Bobo Madarè village (Millogo 2002: 75).

Bobo does not belong to us anymore. Everything that is beautiful is *samara* (foreign) and everything that is ugly is *kpéné kuma* (native). We have had enough! Ms S. O. (Millogo 2002: 76)

Thus, Dioulassoba, the central district of sector 1 of the city, is still not divided into plots and refuses to accept any form of urban sanitation management. The Bobo customary authorities try to resist the authority and normative control of the municipal authorities over “their” historical territory by demanding from these same authorities that they “do not touch” the sacred Bobo spaces:

We have refused to allow the digging of paths to divide the village into dwelling plots. There are places of worship in the village. If we do not keep what must be kept, many things can happen. It is an inheritance that must remain authentic, therefore it should not change. Customary Chief S. S., Kibidwé, “village” in Dioulassoba, sector 1, Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001).

Reference to tradition appears to act as a protection against any imposed external innovation that could aggravate the deteriorating economic situation and the precariousness of the domestic order. One consequence of this attitude is that it is still impossible to divide the founding villages of the central districts into plots or to install modern sanitation infrastructure there. Resistance to the urban development of the Bobo villages of the town centre is, therefore, quite a different matter to a simple rejection of progress. These refusals, rejections and various forms of opposition constitute attempts to maintain the Bobo norms governing the occupation of communal space in the city territory:

Long ago, each large family in Tounouma had its own refuse heap or *kuru* located in a specific place in the village. All refuse was dumped in this place. It was a respected place because some funerary rites took place there. Corpses were seen as becoming “refuse” which is why the funeral ceremony took place there. It was the work of the old women to sweep the internal and external yard, and the refuse was then dumped on the heap. The village had its traditional police force or *kodugo* (made up of adults of various age groups) which enforced the Bobo order. In the old days, if a woman broke the rules (by throwing her refuse somewhere other than the communal heap) her entire age group would be sanctioned collectively, i.e. they all had to pay a fine due to the action of an individual. This practice has disappeared now and refuse is thrown in the tanks, ditches or channels. The “dirty” *duma* women were sanctioned with fines (*popolo, su, pikini*) whereas men were sanctioned with the masks. Customary Chief of the Bobo village of Tounouma (Timina) with his son (study 2001).

In the past, refuse was not dumped anywhere, anyhow. But there are far more of us now and people do not know where to dump their waste any more. Before, women and men washed themselves in the river. We defecated in the bush or on the refuse heaps. There are toilets now because we there are so many of us. You cannot go in the bush anymore because people look at you. Urban expansion has eradicated this ancestral village practice. On the other hand, defecation on the refuse heaps was not allowed. There was vegetation around the village and this is where the adults defecated. (Millogo 2002: 71–72)

The nature of this confrontation between the norms of a modern urban space and those of the Bobo community territory is above all political. The reproduction of the constitutive historical identity of Bobo society is at stake here. However, examination of the public areas in the old districts immediately reveals the dirt, negligence and rubbish dumps along the banks of the Houet River, which crosses them.

We never go to Dioulassoba, there are natives there; it is useless. There are dirty neighbourhoods [there] (Dioulassoba, Tounouma, Komougou, Sikasso-cira). Changing behaviour is difficult. They think the municipality must do everything. People are not ready to pay for cleanliness—they want the municipality to pay. They even want someone to come and sweep their homes; that’s the way it is! Sanitation technician at the Municipal Sanitation Service.

The marking of public space in Dioulassoba with mud and refuse is clear evidence of the vast normative gap—both cultural and political—that divides the public powers and the city’s founders. The exposed refuse is a physical indicator of the disaffection and refusal of the “natives” to conform to the living environment imposed by the modern city (plot

divisions, cleanliness and sanitation). This refusal must be regarded as a form of passive political resistance towards the invasive presence of “outsiders” who came with the power of the “white men” and claim to manage “their” territory.

However, the “natives” are divided as to how they should resist this presence. At the time of the local elections in 2001, the chiefs of the Bobo villages were courted and manipulated by the political parties which sought to gain legitimisation through their support. On this occasion, they tore each other apart, became deeply divided and old historical resentments re-emerged.

The problem is that the Zara always play an intermediary role with the administration, claiming that they represent the traditional Bobo chieftaincy, whereas they are just Muslim tradesmen who betrayed us several times. First, by supporting the Dioula of Kong in conquering the Bobo country (part of the Bobo country was managed by the Dioula of Kong during the historical period of the Gwirisso state) and second by fooling the French invaders who entrusted them with the canton chieftaincy. Their domination was despotic; we became their slaves and they still consider us as such today. We do not get on well with the Zara or, of course, with the descendants of the Dioula of Kong. But they get along well together and the town hall listens to them, so our interests are not defended. On the other hand, as the Zara sent us and their Bobo slaves to school in the place of their sons, there are intellectuals among us, while one can count the intellectuals on the fingers of one hand among the Zara, who preferred the Qur’anic School. Customary Chief S. S. (Kibidwé, “village” in Dioulassoba) sector 1, Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001).

The resentment of the local elections is still very strong today and a large proportion of the Bobo “natives” have no confidence in the current mayor, who is not one of them:

The supreme chief of the Bobo was enthroned in May, he resides in Koko. Today, all of the Bobo are involved in resistance against the town hall. Of course, the canton chieftaincy (Zara) remains an important local political actor (it receives aeroplane tickets for the pilgrimage to Mecca each year from the Presidency of Faso. B. S. (study 2001).

Political conservatism and the resistance of the Bobo founders to the development of urban infrastructure are expressions of a thorough distrust of the public authorities which are considered as usurping the municipal power. They believe that the failure on the part of the municipal authorities to develop the sanitation infrastructure in their area is more than an expression of mere technical or organisational dysfunction. They see in this failure a lack of political consideration.

The symbolic stakes are important: it is all about their place in urban society, their hierarchical position in the city's social hierarchy and, finally, their recognition or the refusal thereof as valuable participants in the local democratic dialogue.

When sanitation emerges as one of the main symbols of the city's rulers' political authority

The following extracts from interviews would suggest that urban sanitation is a strong symbol of political legitimacy and of the effective authority of the city's rulers. They illustrate the population's idea of public policy and conditions for the implementation of public services associated with them. Indeed, the urban public space that emerges from these representations is perceived as the territory of the municipal authority, its infrastructure and its public sanitation service, and a territory, over which the local public authorities should exert effective control, through the maintenance and development of sanitary infrastructure and public services, which express their authority:

These are people who have never been asked to take care of sanitation, the state did it all, so when they are asked to do something today, they do not understand. (T. R., producer of the radio programme "*Tam-tam dans la commune*" at Radio Bobo).

The collective memory of the inhabitants goes back to two main historical periods, i.e. that of the French colonial period and that of the revolution years of 1983–87, which, in the eyes of the informants, appear to have been characterised by spectacular authoritative measures in the area of sanitation policy. Thus, the colonial period is associated with domestic hygiene measures involving water storage and the waste water disposal:

An avenue in Bobo-Dioulasso is named after François Vilain, a Frenchman born in 1906 who was a quarter master and then warrant officer in the French Army, before becoming a road maintenance official at the Town Hall of Bobo". He is said to have been devoted to the city. He died in 1991 in France, and was buried in Bobo-Dioulasso where he had a traditional Bobo funeral. He is known above all, as "the gutter man" as he was responsible for the construction of several gutters in the city. People say that when he was at the road maintenance service, discipline ruled there. (Sanou and Sanou 2002: 24)

In the past, during colonisation, the municipal road maintenance service was in charge of sanitation in our district (Tounouma) and the Sanitation

Services used to come and control the purity of our spring water (Chief of the Dioulassoba District).

There was a time when insecticide was even spread over the city to kill the mosquitoes. It is very difficult to explain to people that times have changed, that the whites left a long time ago (...). T. R., producer of the radio programme "*Tam-tam dans la commune*" at Radio Bobo.

The colonial period is also characterised in popular memory by an effective and authoritative mobilisation of the authorities that monitored the municipal technical services and thus implies that they were effective:

In the time of the whites, the city was clean; the whites did not like dirt. Since the whites have left, everyone does what they want. Nobody comes to civilise us. In the time of the whites, it was by force; everyone had to be clean. People have become dirty again. Now, people talk and talk, but they do not do anything. Assita, resident of Accart-city, Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001)

In the past, in the time of the whites, people visited the yards, they checked the cleanliness of our concessions. If the water jar was dirty, if the water was dirty, if there was waste water, they fined the head of the household. Today, nobody does that. We do nothing but eat now. In fact, the "whites" (i.e. the city) are in charge of waste management in the village of Tounouma (central district of Bobo). Since independence, the road service led the people to believe that it alone could take care of all sanitation issues. This is why it is difficult for the municipal administration to attain the desired change in behaviour. Since the 1960s, the slogan has been that the road service is in charge of waste disposal. Today, people still have this in mind and do not understand why they are required to do it again. To be in charge of waste disposal means the exercise of a power which was taken from us so we can do nothing more! (Customary chief of the Bobo village of Tounouma with his son)

Bobo used to be a clean city, cleaner than the capital city. It was a healthy city. From the colonial period up to independence, there were many people at the Sanitation Service who circulated from house to house. They carried out inspections and if your yard was dirty, if there was stagnant water somewhere, they treated it but also issued a fine! There was control and fines—it was by force! If you refused to pay, they took you to the police. Over the course of time, however, this course of action was abandoned, perhaps due to a lack of resources or follow-up and then people started to give up, to become less vigilant. (B. A. S., Manager of the R. T. B²., Deputy Mayor)

² Radiodiffusion-télévision du Burkina (Burkina's National Broadcasting).

In the same way, popular memory also associates the revolutionary period (1983–1987) with the authoritative mobilisation of the residents and users in the context of the *mana mana* operations for the clean-up of public spaces:

Under the RDP (Rassemblement Démocratique et Populaire/Democratic and Popular Rally) people participated in tasks that served the common good out of fear of the authorities, but afterwards they were pleased with the results. Thus, at the time of revolution, the cleaning of the sector three was tackled on the last Saturday of the month. (Customary chief of the Bobo village of Tounouma with his son)

During the revolution, Sankara had accustomed us to tasks that served the common good. In the sub-sectors, we organised ourselves to do it. We did it for ourselves and for Sankara. Today... Ha! We are all Burkinabese! (A user of sector 17 in Bobo-Dioulasso)

These references by the Boboese urban dwellers to earlier forms of local governance associated with different types of governments and referring back to a more or less recent historical past were obviously made rhetorically with the intention of stigmatising the current failures of the municipal authority, which is presented as the organisation responsible for the cleanliness of the city.

With regard to the Bobo “natives” who founded the city, their—both conservative and provocative—strategy of resistance to municipal projects for the definition of plots and installation of sanitation in the district is an old one. On the other hand, in the case of the new urban populations resulting from the *mossi* rural migration, incivilities concerning dirtiness are the result of the weakening of close social bonds in a context of almost complete cultural otherness. Between the lack of urbanity of one group and the incivility of the other, a “wait and see” passivity on the part of the impoverished citizens prevails; disillusioned by clientelism and corruption on the part of the local authorities, they are not very keen to commit themselves to the associative dynamics of civil society:

We still remember what we experienced under the revolution with the revolutionary committees (CDR) all sorts of humiliation. Some even grew rich on the back of the people. I will not name names, but you know what I am talking about. They are the same ones at the head of things today. How do you expect us to have the strength to work? Resident of sector 17, Bobo-Dioulasso (Millogo 2002: 86).

There was a conference recently on the topic of ‘citizens’ rights in a democracy,’ an important subject, it was fascinating. The democracy that we would like to establish is difficult to achieve due to the presence

of something and everyone agrees that it is corruption. It is organised disorder. That's the way things are; the gangrene of corruption is everywhere. But we are trying to organise ourselves. Konaté, resident of sector 17, Bobo-Dioulasso, 22 August 2001.

In a way, the dirtiness of the city expresses the decaying state of an excessively "clientelised" municipal administration.

What does the "Town Hall" do?

The most uncomfortable dirt is that which marks the loss of control over the urban public space by the local authorities. This is why the municipal authorities do not accept the idea that the dirtiness of the city is a direct consequence of their inability to resolve local political antagonism or develop urban infrastructure. However, they are more willing to acknowledge their failure with regard to the effective cleaning of the public places which they attribute, of course, to a lack of resources:

You hear people criticising the elected municipal representatives. However, cleaning the city requires resources and the Town Hall does not have adequate resources. The trucks are broken down. There is, perhaps, a problem with the management of the resources and an entire series of problems needs to be re-examined. (B. A. S., Deputy Mayor of Bobo)

However, they are particularly irritated by the provocative dirtiness of the urban dwellers which does nothing but highlight the deficits in the regulation of the control and monitoring systems:

Also, the fact is that there was no control at the level of the Sanitation Service. This may be due to the fact that there was no elected municipal power. It should be said that, for a long time, administrators were nominated at the level of the Town Hall, without [the contribution of the] municipal councillors. This also contributed to the deterioration of the sanitation situation. (B. A. S., Deputy Mayor of Bobo)

In terms of the reasons for the dirtiness of the town, the discourse of the municipal administrators always focuses on the same stereotype of the "lazy", "undisciplined" and "unpatriotic" Bobolese population which does not comply with the rules of communal life: "the populations behave in an anarchistic way!"

But it should be said, there is an issue of idleness among the population (...). When it comes to disposing of their refuse, people are too lazy to take it to the correct place. In general, the task of disposing of refuse

is given to children and even women who throw it in the gutters. As a result the gutters are blocked. Everyone disposes of waste beside the refuse tank, the children are too small to reach it and the women do not want to have to walk in the dirt to reach it. The problem is complex! (B. A. S., Deputy Mayor of Bobo)

The municipal administrators' concept for the management of the city is based on an entire set of new legal standards guaranteed by the government and rendered necessary by urban expansion and demographic growth. For the "Town Hall", i.e. the municipal authorities, ensuring the cleanliness of the town involves instituting the division of urban spaces and facilitating their legibility, ensuring their functioning, easing traffic and interaction, avoiding confusion and taint, i.e. re-establishing law and order. Thus, the municipal authorities try to re-appropriate the urban space by promoting a new urban image of "Bobo, clean city", the image it once enjoyed in an indeterminate and bygone golden age. This project draws its legitimacy from the norm of sanitation and explains the current lack of cleanliness as the consequence of the lack of understanding among "the populations" of the vital issue that is urban cleanliness. The strategy adopted hitherto consists in reaffirming in a quasi-incantatory manner the need to "raise the awareness of the populations" of the efforts made by the Town Hall. In particular, the municipal authorities would like the citizens to contribute financially to the cost of sanitation. As things stand, however, the majority of Bobo's residents reject any idea of providing additional financial support for the clean-up of their neighbourhoods:

We never know where our contributions go and we cannot keep on paying; let those who scoff do it. Retired civil servant from sector 3, Bobo-Dioulasso (Millogo 2002: 89).

We are not going to continue paying a sanitation tax so that others can fill their pockets!. Resident (study 2001)

They protest that, given that the urban territory lies within the area in which it exercises its authority and political power, the Town Hall should take the initiative and assume responsibility for the implementation of public sanitation services in the city!

People use democracy [as an excuse] for not doing anything and say that they did something during the revolution. This is not true. What they are asked to do is not for the Mayor, it is for their own good! It is not for the municipality, they're not even asked for any money... Célestin Koussoubé, Mayor of the Municipality of Bobo-Dioulasso (study 2001).

As is the case elsewhere, the diversity of local practices in Bobo-Dioulasso with respect to healthiness of an area and cleanliness of public spaces is based on the reference system of each individual. However, the effective rules of behaviour regarding the disposal of refuse and household waste are also defined as part of day-to-day routine in accordance with the reactions that may be expected in the context of the control of the immediate environment and the public authorities:

As soon as it was established, the new municipality tried to do something to raise the awareness of the populations and clean out the gutters. But this awareness raising does not bring any results. The real problem lies with sanctioning. It is not easy to report contraventions due to the 'interventions' that undermine any urge for taking action. The actors at municipal level are political people and the polluters are also their voters! They cannot do anything! Urban dwellers should not be bothered with this awareness raising and, instead, we should approach our directors and managers to ask them to let us work. General Secretary of the district of Dafra (study 2001)

An immediate reaction can hardly be expected from the public authorities in the case of Bobo-Dioulasso. The city's Sanitation Service has only one official responsible for the recording of complaints and of monitoring of offences and he does not have access to a functioning vehicle to enable him to fulfil his duties. It may be considered that the failure of the municipal authorities to establish an effective system of control is the result *inter alia* of a contradiction between the two main normative logics which coexist within the administration. The first is based on a despotic and bureaucratic conception of municipal power and is expressed in an open contempt for the users of municipal services. This logic is a direct inheritance of a long history, to which the democratic process has made little difference. The second is based on the local practices of political and partisan clientelism which account for the prevailing *laissez-faire* attitude, i.e. the failure to implement the sanitation regulations and to observe the urban norms constitute resources in the context of clientelist exchanges which those in power avail of:

Municipalities are constrained by the lack of resources and expertise. This particular problem is easier to resolve than the actual political problem, which involves the structural dysfunction between the political and the technical levels of the municipal administration. This problem involves the electoral clientelism practised by the elected representatives which prevents the managers of the municipal engineering services from

taking legal action against business people and individuals who break the law. All they have to do is make one telephone call and the General Manager will request that the case in progress be dropped. As a result, the people in charge of the engineering services—i.e. health, sanitation, urban environment, environment—are completely discouraged. Director of Municipal Engineering Services (study 2001)

The dirtiness of the city challenges the legitimacy of the public authorities in terms of passing laws that are known to be broken first and foremost by their representatives, i.e. elected officials and others, through unpaid water, electricity and telephone bills, the granting of privileges to members of their personal clienteles and the illegal accumulation of residential plots etc. This also highlights the complete absurdity of the legal system and raises the question as to the point of official norms and regulations if their transgression is not sanctioned.

The dirtiness of the city as a political issue, or how to demonstrate the “authorities’” loss of control over the “public space”

If the public authorities are considered responsible for the cleanliness of the city, it is because they have controlled, ordered and regulated public space since time immemorial. Thus, the control of space and public places would appear to be one of the strong symbols of their power and authority. It is this symbol of local power that was under attack from the protesting population. Indeed, in the past, the authoritative and despotic character of the public authority prevented direct political opposition to the city’s rulers. The only means that remained open to the urban dwellers to contest the fate inflicted on them by the local political order and demonstrate the contempt in which they held the dignitaries of the Town Hall was to gradually transform the city’s public space into a place where mud and refuse is openly displayed.

The discredit heaped on the municipal public service in general and the municipal technical services, in particular due to the abandonment of human waste and refuse in the urban public space, is indicative of the loss of credibility of the political system in place:

Bobo was a clean city from 1965 to 1987 until the end of the revolution. There was a change in 1987 when the city started to be dirty. With the revolution and the *mana-mana* sanitation operations, the city became clean again. Now people are dirty, but it is impossible to talk about the dirt without talking about political life. People keep their yards clean but they

do not install septic tanks, therefore they are not clean people. They are people who are uninterested in the lives of others. I do not think that people think of hygiene and cleanliness together. There is some confusion—people think that it is sufficient to tidy their inner courtyard and the area outside is the concern of the government. Beyond my wall, it is up to the government. All of these problems are related to political life. Why has it spread? In my opinion, people have become embittered and what made them become embittered is that the lucky ones benefited from the public good by adopting an attitude of “me, my family and my close relations.” Sidiki, a resident of Sarfalao, active militant of the ADF-RDA (*Alliance pour la Démocratie et la Fédération—Rassemblement Démocratique Africain/Alliance for Democracy and Federation—African Democratic Rally*) (study 2001).

Thus “the refuse resistance” expresses the rejection of a corrupt municipal administration. The dirtiness of the city is a form of—clearly informal, but real—political opposition aimed directly at the concrete symbols close to the municipal power and its representatives. The reasoning—already applied in different places and in different times—is that if refuse creates dirt, then “one can make use of it to dirty” (Knaebel 1991: 28). The dirtiness of the urban public space appears to be both the cheapest means that the city’s poor and displaced populations have found to express how unbearable their socio-economic marginalisation has become, and is also the only offence at their disposal to convey to the dominant, the powerful and the rich that their law and order, is complete rubbish. The acts that contravene the health and hygiene norms and result in the contamination of public places are acts that are carried out to be seen by others. Whether demonstrated implicitly or overtly, they basically express a relationship of alienation: “this urban space is not ours, it does not come from us and it is not made for us.” Because they take place in the public space, these acts seek recognition of their validity: they call for collective complicity in subverting the functioning of the standards relating to the public space.

From this point of view, which could be described as proto-political, the act of contaminating public space is conceived as a challenge to law and order. The political challenge is to show that the “authorities” have lost control of the “public space”, that the Mayor is unable to impose “his order” (that of standards of urban cleanliness) at the cost of the popular order that prevails almost throughout the entire city. In brief, it is very much the legitimacy of the municipal authority in the control of the urban public space that is being challenged here:

Mud and refuse perpetuate “the dialogue between the ‘deaf’ governors, who mask their illegitimacy and incapacity when they repeatedly state that ‘people are dirty’ and a society reduced to silence, on whose behalf the authorities ‘are not even capable of disposing of refuse. This is how the ‘dumb’ speak to ‘deaf’ ones by the intermediary of refuse.” (Lesbet 1999: 150).

However, this form of collective reaction, the political nature of which is undeniable, is above all an indicator of the political helplessness of the “dumb men” and their incapacity for democratic expression. This acquired conviction that “nothing can be done anyway” expresses *de facto* helplessness and major frustration which prompt the reactions that contravene the legal norms: the regulations in force are completely ignored and nobody pays any attention to the awareness-raising slogans and campaigns.

Thus, the “powerful” are shown that even if they have the power to practise preferential treatment on a systematic level, they are not the only ones who can transgress their own laws and regulations. By pouring their sewage onto the public roads, by draining and discharging their septic tanks in the middle of the street at night, by blocking the rainwater gutters and using them as bins or sewers for their own waste, the urban dwellers show that they can ignore the regulations in force, and that they have no interest in campaigns to raise public awareness of hygiene and cleanliness.

However, they also show their despair at being unable to change the political situation (because it is doubtful that this noxious form of violent protest will prompt any real progress with regard to the real causes of the opposition), and of political coercion (*cf.* Jeudy 1991: 83). This form of subversive, disorganised and “thoughtless” reaction is not capable of budging a municipal power that is clearly incapable of fulfilling its basic tasks but, conversely, entirely capable of enduring this passive protest and neutralising the resistance and abuses perpetrated by its defiant citizens.

An major strategic plan for the clean-up of the city of Bobo-Dioulasso (PSAB) has recently been financed and implemented through international co-operation. It will undoubtedly contribute to the resolution of the many technical problems that exist in relation to individual and collective sanitation in the city. However, if it neglects to take this political dimension of the urban dirt problem into account that has been analysed here, it is highly likely that its main development objectives will never reach fulfilment.

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MA-SLAAN-PA DOCKETS:¹
NEGOTIATIONS AT THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN
THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC

Julia C. Hornberger²

Mother Courage: Courage is the name they gave me because I was scared of going broke, sergeant, so I drove me cart right through the bombardment of Riga with fifty loaves of bread aboard. They were going mouldy, it was high time, hadn't any choice really (Brecht 1980: 19).

Introduction

It was eleven o'clock at night in Johannesburg. Three unmarked police cars from Sophiatown police station were making their way along the bumpy roads of Westbury. The police had been on their monthly night raid since eight o'clock. They had a list of 20 or 30 addresses of suspects whom they wanted to arrest. They stopped in front of a block of flats not far away from the police station, near the main road which divided the former coloured township of Westbury from the former white working-class and lower-middle-class areas of Newlands and Triumf. Police detectives in civilian clothes moved into the dark passages where light bulbs had long ceased to function. The light-fingers of torches rushed over walls and doors searching for an address.

Finally one detective found the right number. "Bang, bang!" One of the detectives knocked on the door. "*Polisie, maak oop*" [Police, open up]. There was silence, and the detective knocked again. Finally they could hear a voice inside: "*Wag net, ek's besig om oop te maak. Net 'n oomblik.*" [Wait, I am opening. One moment.] Then we could hear the key turning in the lock, and the door was partially opened. The face of a young woman appeared. Hesitantly she allowed the police

¹ *Ma-slaan-pa* literally means "mother-beats-father". See later section for a discussion of this phrase.

² Julia C. Hornberger is a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand's Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), Johannesburg

officers to enter. While four of the detectives ventured into the room, the woman went back to the bed to sit beside another woman. The television was on, and a stove was turned up to heat the room, chilled by its concrete floor.

One of the detectives informed the women that they were looking for Daniel Jacobs³ in a case of domestic violence. It appeared that the woman who had opened the door was the complainant in the case. The detective asked her if she knew where her boyfriend was. She explained that he sometimes came to her apartment but insisted that she had not seen him in the last few weeks. The other detectives were already leaving the room when one of them decided to look in the wardrobe. And there the boyfriend was standing, pressed against the backboard and holding his breath. The detective immediately took him by the arm, pulled him out and pushed him forward to the bed. The detective was angry. He started swearing; however, it was at the young woman that he directed his verbal abuse. He even threatened her with arrest and said he would charge her with defeating the ends of justice. She tried to defend herself, explaining that she could not give away the boyfriend in his presence. But the detective showed no sympathy and, treating both of them as if there were conspiring criminals, told them to get dressed in the bathroom without closing the door.

Outside the block of flats the man was pushed into the back of one police car while the woman ended up sitting next to me in another. She tried to get the police officer's attention to tell him that she regretted that she had opened the case in the first place, and that she wanted to withdraw the case. The detectives responded rudely: "You better should have thought about this before. Now we teach you what happens when you are not serious, and when you think that you can fool us around." At the station, after hours of letting her sit in uncertainty in the reception area, the detective in charge of the case allowed her to leave, but not without making another disparaging remark.

The next morning the woman returned to the police station and withdrew the case.

The scene provides an example of the "new routine" of the detectives of Sophiatown police station—dealing with cases related to domestic violence. Arrests, taking statements and, poignantly, dealing with the withdrawal of the cases or the obstruction of arrests by the

³ All names used in this account are fictional.

complainants themselves was what characterised the detectives' routine with regard to domestic violence cases. On this particular night, the detectives arrested 15 people—one was a suspect in a murder case, three others were arrested for theft and housebreaking, and at least seven were arrested for domestic violence. Four of these seven cases were withdrawn the next day, and two others after the suspect's first appearance in court. National statistics point to the massive increase of cases opened for domestic violence; however, they fail to capture the number of withdrawals.⁴

The scene also gives a glimpse into what the police officers' response was towards the withdrawal and the obstruction of arrest. They reacted with anger and resentment. It even triggered in them the urge to "teach the woman a lesson". The victim of domestic violence ended up being threatened and intimidated even more than the suspect.

It is these two aspects, and the wider reality to which they point, that I would like to discuss in this chapter. The introduction of the Domestic Violence Act in January 1999 represented a drastic challenge to police practice, and meant that local police officers as well the local population were confronted with something quite novel. This is both because of the public attention and the relative seriousness with which police management looked on the introduction of the Act, and the wide definitions and the special obligations for the police contained in the Act's formulation. The Domestic Violence Act embodied the very liberal notion in which the state expands its purview through a regime of rights claiming to create autonomy and freedom for the individual—in this case even into the private sphere. However, as I will show in the following, the aspects of withdrawals highlights on the one hand that the presumed ameliorative nature of state intervention through human rights fails the so-called victims—in this case—of domestic violence; here a refusal to take on the subjectivity as described by the rights regime is at play. Nevertheless, through an assertion of a more socially—thus also imbedded in violence—local agency, the domestic violence legislation brings about spaces of new, though unpredicted, social manoeuvring connected to a tacit and tactical renegotiation of violent social relationships. This forges the redirection of new forms of state power into the private and

⁴ "The increase in assault Gross Bodily Harm and common assault of respectively 4,6% and 9,9% between 1999 and 2000 could be expected as all indications are there that this was a direct result of the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act at the end of 1999" (Crime Information Analysis Centre 2001).

informal realm through a form of informal privatisation and appropriation of police intervention.

The second aspect, the issue of police abuse of the complainant/victim of domestic violence, points to the fact that the legislation of domestic violence has a significant restructuring effect on everyday policing practice which—to put it colloquially—does not go down very well with most police officers. In fact, by the police officers attempting to reverse the effect, it produces violence—physical as well as emotional. In this chapter, it will become clear how the complainants' practice of withdrawing cases, the legislation's rootedness in the international human rights agenda, and its expansionist and interventionist nature into the gendered and private realm produce a policing practice which leaves police officers hugely challenged. It undermines their gendered and social relationship to the policed subject, and leaves officers beleaguered by administrative efforts that usurp their sense of adequacy for the job.

In addition, it is the particularity of the area of Westbury, with its very own history of state and subject relationship, which exacerbates and therefore highlights some of the restructuring effects of the legislation. The particular habitual relationship between the police and people from Westbury—a relationship grounded in a *long durée*—contributes to a relentlessness and predictable familiarity suffused with unequal power. Deviation from the established norm, in the sense of a new practice and a relocation of state power, becomes crucially visible and often painfully tangible for the police. At the same time, there is a “tradition” in Westbury of people relying on the state. This means that there is a certain readiness to engage with the state, which in this case strongly drives the appropriation and redesign/redirection of police intervention. It also contributes to that practices of local justice are acted out in close proximity to the state and not, as often argued, in opposition to or in the void left by the state.

However, before I begin to discuss the reaction of police officers towards the domestic violence legislation, I will introduce an even more poignant police-citizen encounter, and use this to discuss how the appropriation and redirection of state power takes place in the case of domestic violence legislation in Westbury. I will try to create an understanding of the meaning behind the increase of domestic violence cases opened on the one hand, and the practice of withdrawal and obstruction of arrest on the other. What happens in the moment in which a woman allows the involvement of the state (the police) in

her domestic matters by opening a case at the police station but then consequently refuses to deliver the husband (or boyfriend) to the full process of the criminal justice system? To answer this question, I discuss in more detail the history and the mandatory provisions and scope of the domestic violence legislation, as well as the particular aspect of Westbury with regard to its state and subject relationship. This will create an understanding of how the appropriation of the legislation fits into wider practices of local and private justice.

I then concentrate on the productive effect that the legislation (and its new practice) in particular, and human rights in general, have for police officers, discussing the collision of these effects with both the organisational culture and the gendered and social relationship between police and people from Westbury.

Making sense of the withdrawal of cases

The scene described in the Introduction of this chapter makes one wonder why the young woman opened the case in the first place. What is it that the woman wanted from the police when she made the effort to go to the police station to lay a charge against her boyfriend? Did she not know that the police would come to arrest him? Did she make a mistake or was it a misunderstanding? Most studies on domestic violence (Binney, Herkell and Nixon 1981; Bowker 1983; Pagelow 1981) would probably argue that the young woman *wanted* the boyfriend arrested. She *wanted* to make use of the legislation but she was afraid of retaliation by the boyfriend. Functionalistic rationalisations about economic dependency, cultural coyness and overriding patriarchal family pressure, as well as disabling traumatisation, are standard explanations for women's lack of persistence in pursuing the legal process. But if fear, shame and cultural taboos are so prevalent, why are so many cases of domestic violence being opened in the first place? Opening a case is, after all, not only about making an emergency call to the police.⁵

⁵ Many studies of domestic violence have stressed that calling the police in a moment of violent attack by the partner is often the true cry for help. It is afterwards that other considerations, such as family and economics, quell the sense of wanting to get out of the relationship. However, in Westbury, most cases detective have to deal with are not cases opened at the scene after an emergency call, but are cases opened by women coming to the police station. Thus one would expect that moments of discouraging consideration would take place before the opening of a case.

It means physically going to the police station and going through the bureaucratic procedure of giving a statement. And why is it that on my trips through the area I have witnessed women threatening their boyfriends, husbands and sometimes other family members face to face and with little apprehension or restraint “*Wag jy maar, ek sal polisie toe gaan en ‘n saak van Domestic Violence teen jou maak!*” [You just wait, I will go to the police and open a case of domestic violence against you!].

Looking at the regularity with which cases are opened and withdrawn, such functionalistic and deterministic answers seem to miss the point of the women’s purposefulness and the agency at play in withdrawing the cases. Permitting purposefulness and agency to enter the picture would allow us to read better the practices of local justice in the field of domestic gendered micro politics. It will allow for an understanding that, even in an environment in which both men and women are caught up in gendered relationships that are deeply imbued with notions of violence, practices persist which seem to be about negotiating the boundary of violence within a local imagining of relationships. While this does not challenge overall patriarchal structures, it does engage the local complexities of mutually constitutive gender roles. The following scene, which took place during the same night-raid, undermines simplistic explanations about both “empowerment” and “disempowerment” of women—two terms which are used in an apparently self-explanatory way in the advocacy literature about gender violence and human rights.

We arrived at another address, looking for a suspect in yet another case of domestic violence. The same procedure repeated itself: One officer knocked at the door and called, “*Polisie, maak oop...*”, and after a short while a woman opened the door. She immediately knew why the police had come. However, this time the husband in question was not hiding but sitting on the couch watching television. He did not seem to be very surprised to see the police coming into their apartment in the middle of the night. Without any resistance he followed the orders of one detective to get dressed. The only thing he did was to quietly mutter some angry imprecations at his wife—why did she have to do this again? She was standing on the other side of the living room. While she was showing one of the detectives some knife wounds on her back, which her husband had allegedly inflicted on her, she responded to her husband calmly as to a child that she had had enough of his brutality and that he needed a lesson. To the detective who asked her if she had received a letter from the doctor so that the stab wounds could be used as evidence in the case, she said that it had not been so bad and that she had not considered it necessary to get such a letter. The detective, clearly

annoyed with the answer, turned away from her and made sure that the suspect was getting ready. The woman, unperturbed, kept on talking, telling the detectives that she had had enough and that she wanted her husband to stop behaving like he did. In between, however, she turned to her husband and caringly reminded him to take a warm jacket along since it could become cold in the police cell overnight. A little boy, most probably their son, was clinging to her legs and watching the scene, more in surprise than in fear. Then, asking the husband to accompany them, the detectives left the scene. The woman, obviously satisfied with the procedure, wished him and the detectives farewell.

The next day she came to the station to withdraw the case and to take the husband home with her again.

What struck me that night was the calmness with which the woman handled the situation, clearly on her terms. She had quite serious stab wounds on the back, but she did not want to get a doctor's letter as evidence to strengthen the case. She had opened the case at the police station, she welcomed the detectives when they came in the middle of the night, but she was concerned that her husband could suffer from the cold in the police cells, and she came to the station the next day to withdraw the case. Categories of fear and intimidation or even trauma do not seem to be adequate to explain the process of withdrawal here. Rather, as much as the woman wanted the police to intervene she also wanted the husband out of the cells the next day to resume their relationship. Instead of having the husband prosecuted, sentenced and sent to prison, she only wanted him sent to the police cells for one night. She did not want to end the relationship, but she chose to teach him a lesson—that he could not treat her violently without consequences. In this she displayed a remarkable skill in dealing with the police. She was not distracted by their suggestion about the letter and she knew about the condition of the cells as if it was familiar ground.

Using the police to intervene in domestic conflict is made possible by engaging the Domestic Violence Act. It is the Act's inclusive definition of what constitutes domestic violence and the pressure which has been put on the police to intervene which makes the legislation such an attractive recourse for women involved in domestic disputes. The Act provides a definition of domestic relationship which stretches beyond the traditional matrimonial relationship and includes one-night-stands and relationships with various family members. Cases can be opened that deal with trespassing, stalking, rape or gross bodily harm (GBH). Psychological and economic deprivation as well as intimidation were included in the formulation of the legislation. The Act stipulates that

police officers are obliged to explain to the complainant her rights,⁶ help her find a place of safety, obtain medical treatment and accompany her to collect her belongings. In many ways the act is meant to enable victims, and actually envisages a break-up of the violent relationship, especially if the violence seems to be endemic. Most importantly, under the Act police officers can be charged with misconduct if they fail to comply with its terms. This further enforces the obligation of police officers to effect an immediate arrest.⁷

The sudden availability of a tool of such decisive intervention into the private sphere by the state warrants an explanation. The modern state has played an important role in creating the differentiation between the private and public spheres; a line which had been drawn exactly by the restraint of the state to intervene in the public sphere. However, through changes in legislation, matters which were restricted to the private and domestic sphere can be brought forward into the public sphere, or can be exposed to intervention by the state. Veena Das (1995) analyses how the state of India asserted a responsibility for the repatriation of women who had been abducted during the violent period of the partition between India and Pakistan and forced into non-Muslim or non-Hindu-relationships. Legal tools had been created for the state to facilitate the break-up of these relationships and the repatriation of the women. Through the legislation, the state could develop its role as *parens patriae*. Das (1995: 62) states that in this process “a new kind of disciplinary power over the population” had been played out. This disciplinary power is critically contested by Das. She argues that “once the problem [of the abducted women] came into the domain of state legislation, it took away the freedom of women to make their own choices” (Das 1995: 67). Das discusses the realm of “practical kinship” (a concept she takes from Bourdieu), in which women—despite abduction and despite codes of honour of official kinship—had found ways

⁶ In principle, the legislation is not only accessible to women, although domestic violence is mostly seen as women suffering under the violence inflicted on them by men. However, as we will see below, the domestic violence legislation can also be used in reverse or in other possible constellations such as among two brothers. In terms of the language of this chapter, I use “her” and “she” when summarising the legislation, reflecting the conceptual bias in the legislation.

⁷ Many cases are only opened a day or two after the event. In this case, “immediate” means as soon as the case has been opened. In the practice of Sophiatown police officers, this meant “as soon as possible”—for example, during a night raid where high arrest numbers would be positively remarked. Those raids were carried out biweekly.

and compromises that made living in an “unpure” marriage possible. Meanwhile the legislation even permitted force in cases where women did not want to be repatriated. Das (1995) remarks that the legal tools had not been developed without so called legitimacy and that the interventions had been represented in the national discourse as being in the best interest of the abducted women. Popular outcries about the suffering of the women forced the state to take action. At a later stage, social workers disqualified the refusal of the women to be repatriated by saying that they had a fear complex; with this, they defused possible criticism.

Das’s analysis is instructive in at least three ways. Firstly, it points to practical [kinship] relationships. Even if they come to be dominantly seen by the public as untenable because of their “impure”—and therefore violent and humiliating—nature, they can still be preferred by those apparently suffering from them. Secondly, it shows that legislation supposedly in the interest of the subject can superimpose and prescribe what women want, the kind of relationship they should live and what the “right” choice should be. Thirdly, it shows how a government can be compelled into action when it feels that its legitimacy is being undermined by what is happening in the private sphere. The government needs the family, as the classic locus of the private sphere, to reflect the values of the nation state.⁸ Distortions or crises in the family are considered to reflect negatively on the nation state and therefore on the government’s ability to guarantee the order of the nation state. The “religious and national impurity” of Das’s families clearly posed a challenge to the two states of India and Pakistan, because religious nationalism was at the core of their coming into existence as separate states.

While the first two aspects are discussed further below, there is a particularly interesting parallel with the South African situation with regard to the third aspect. The legitimacy of the new ANC government as the achiever of liberation from oppression and violence was threatened by a discourse of crisis with regard to domestic and sexual violence. This discourse was represented by the constant quoting of statistics such as “one rape in 17 seconds” (Ginwall 1999), broadly reported incidents of child rape (Posel 2005a: 21–22), and vivid sketches of the extent of domestic violence. Posel (2005b) argues that while

⁸ This is of course a reversal of the fact that the nation state has been tailored in many ways in the image of the patriarchal family (Anderson 1991).

the new government could make moral claims to a sweeping victory in the realm of the political and the public, it was taken off guard by the level of private violence, penetrating the inner core—the private and intimate sphere—of the South African family and thus the nation. What should have been a complete victory for the new government was overshadowed by a sense of an enemy within in the form of moral decay and the inability of the government to assert its monopoly on violence over the population. This threatened to render the victory into a partial one, if not to undo it altogether. In light of this, the government was compelled to find a form of intervention which would make it look competent to overcome the challenge.

While this explains the governments willingness to react, in order to understand why the answer to the crisis was a legal and law-enforcement tool, compelling police officers to protect women's rights, we have to take a look at international developments in the field of gender violence.

Gender issues as (human) rights issues

Legal Human rights offered themselves as a state-of-the-art resource from which to build the state intervention. Internationally, gender issues had been established as human rights, as confirmed in the Beijing Declaration of Women in 1995, which had been the “culmination of a period of vigorous international action to promote the rights and interest of women” (Morrell 2001: 4). Considerable international attention had contributed to the convergence of South African national concerns with international legal standards. For example, a visit in 1996 of a United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur to South Africa clearly highlighted the issue of violence against women as a legal matter and as a matter to be dealt with through law enforcement. Also, at a Southern African regional conference, it was reiterated that “violence against women constitutes a serious violation of fundamental human rights...” (Meintjes 2003: 152).⁹ As such gender issues underwent a national process of being recast in legal terms during the constitution-writing process. This also led away from gender issues being dealt with by grassroots-level activists to becoming the prerogative of professionals and experts, particularly those with a legal background (Meintjes 2003).

⁹ Merry (2003: 344) also mentions a decisive shift with regard to the articulation of gender issues as human rights.

From welfare to rights—shifting intervention in the private sphere

Still, even if internationally and within national activist circles the domestic violence legislation was widely heralded as an adequate intervention, direct police intervention in the private and intimate sphere presented a significant incision, not only for the police but also for the people from Westbury.

During the apartheid years, Westbury constituted one of the most disadvantaged areas of the Sophiatown policing district. Disadvantage, however, took a particular form with regard to the coloured population in South Africa, which can best be described as a panoptic (in the Foucauldian sense), paternalistic subjugation. Westbury had been declared a coloured township under the Group Areas Act of 1950. As Johannesburg grew, the Western Native Township (as Westbury was formerly called) and Sophiatown, situated across the main road, emerged as places of racially mixed lower-class housing. However, forced removals in 1954 (to implement the Group Areas Act), in conjunction with the Population Registration Act of 1950, put an end to this by resettling the African dwellers to the areas of Soweto. On the ruins of Sophiatown a new neighbourhood, conceitedly named Triumpf, was erected for mainly white, lower-to-middle-class Afrikaners. Residents who had been registered as coloured were settled in the Western Native Township, then renamed as Western Coloured Township, and later Westbury.

While the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act were leading to brutalising legal apartheid measures (at least for the urban areas), forming the pillars of the apartheid ideology of separate development, it was the Department of Coloured Affairs (DCA) which was responsible for the everyday administration and governance of the coloured population. This included a whole range of patronising state interventions along the lines of social welfare, upliftment programmes and institutionalisation in reformatories and prisons. These interventions were particularly directed at the coloured lower class which was assumed “to embody the weakness of coloureds caused by their inferiority vis-à-vis white supremacy and African savageness” (Wicocks Commission 1937 in Jensen 2001: 45). Jensen describes how, although both groups had been disenfranchised, apartheid impacted differently on coloureds than on Africans.

Africans had to bear the brunt of overt apartheid repression. They had significantly less material resources than coloureds, with the consequence that their poverty was and is much more grinding than coloureds. On the

other hand apartheid practices penetrated the everyday life of coloureds in more structural ways. Whereas the violence against Africans manifested in the unequal encounter between grotesquely racist police force and activists, the violence against coloureds was located in social welfare offices and prisons (Jensen 2001: 82).¹⁰

Jensen further argues that the range of state interventions did not just substantiate coloureds as a distinct racial group with distinct problems, but that it split the coloured lower class along gender lines. It did this through a stereotypical construction where the “the burden of ‘colouredness’ fell squarely with the coloured men, weakened physically, indulging in alcohol and always on the brink of falling into crime” (Jensen 2001: 62–3). The police, significantly complicit in producing the stereotype, “most often went out looking for a particular coloured disorder which was organized around alcohol” (Jensen 2001: 59) as well as gang activities such as theft, assaults and (attempted) murders. Coloured men consequently could be attributed with the highest imprisonment rate in the world and with a South African average of the longest prison stays (Jensen 2001: 77). With regard to family life, the stereotypical coloured man was either an absent father because of imprisonment, alcoholism and abandonment, or, if present, a danger to “healthy family life”. “Woman therefore became the state’s most prominent allies in the intervention against the decay of the lower class” (Jensen 2001: 78). While they were targeted by a moral machinery of courses and visits by social workers, teaching them to become good mothers and homemakers, they were also the main recipients of state financial assistance through the state’s maintenance grant for which they qualified because of the absence and “inherent irresponsibility” of the fathers (Jensen 2001: 81).

Apartheid state governance of coloureds thus did not just produce a history of close and patronising engagement with the state through welfare intervention in the domestic sphere and over-policing of particular crimes, it also contributed to a particular gender landscape. In this landscape lower-class men appeared as very destabilised and

¹⁰ Jensen’s (2001) study deals mainly with coloured areas as created in Cape Town. Cape Town had been turned into a coloured labour preference area and was the place where the majority of coloured people lived. This meant that apartheid’s governance of coloured people was most pronounced and distinct there compared to Johannesburg, where coloured people were a small minority in relation to the African population. Nevertheless, coloured people in Johannesburg were submitted to a similar discriminatory regime as in Cape Town.

racially emasculated. Women, on the other hand, were ascribed a form of burdensome matriarchy which arose from the moral responsibility for upholding respectability and making a good home. This sort of role emerged from sheer necessity, arising from the periodical if not continued absence of men and strengthened by privileged access to material benefits and social security. While this shift in gender relations did not mean in any way the erasure of violence from relationships, it shows that a simplistic imagination of women as victims does not hold. It reminds us, rather, that violence by men has to be understood within their emasculation and marginalisation (Connel 1995).

It is against this societal and historical background that we have to understand the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act and the complex matrix of continuities and shifts that it produces. The domestic violence legislation means a shift of state interventions in the domestic sphere, from a patronising welfare-based framework to a rights-based framework. On an overall level, thus the introduction of the domestic violence act in has Westbury meant a continuation of the close engagement of the state with the people of Westbury and the shaping of a particular gendered relationship. The support from the legislation for women fits into the pattern of burdensome matriarchal power, while for men it could easily mean an element of further emasculation. This also explains why women weren't shy to involve the state in the form of the police in their private matters.

The difference on the other hand was that by then domestic violence had been constituted as a object of public discourse and was no longer muted and confined to silent interventions in the private sphere. By criminalising the domestic violence no longer the soft and feminine tools of social work are applied which reproduce the private sphere but the hard and masculine tools of law enforcement which bring the issues for into the public realm and constitute the victims of violence as citizens of the state. It is here where also the claim of the human rights approach is rooted that through the assertion of rights by those victims equality and social justice can be produced for them.

For the police, this translates into a dislocation of control in the sense that they now receive their directions from a new locus—from the private sphere in general and from women in particular. Previously, their discretion to arrest lay more with them, or at least was grounded in the more public sphere and in the idea of non-intimate crimes. Thus while the police consider the domestic violence legislation to result in a “welfare-isation” of their work, the population could see familial issues as

matters of law enforcement and police intervention, with very tangible consequences such as incarceration and the possible use of force.

Bound to this legislative bestowing of new forms of state power was of course the assumption and the expectancy that women would use the legislation to liberate themselves from violence. To avert domestic violence would mean either getting rid of the husband or forcing the husband to behave in a fundamentally different manner. In either case, dealing with violence was to be achieved by following the envisioned path through the criminal justice institutions. It was this particular expectancy which was rejected by women from Westbury when they withdrew their complaints. By withdrawing, they seemed to express a different preference and clear ambivalence towards what was offered to them by the state.

Ludsin and Vetten (2005: 17) remark that “abused women do not make decisions about their lives in the abstract or according to fixed rules. Rather, their choices are made within contexts shaped by social beliefs and values, personal circumstances and access to resources. Competing obligations and responsibilities to others may also form part of this context”. The challenge here is to conceptualise and describe such a context in a way which does not downplay that women are caught up in situations which make it difficult, even impossible, for them to move beyond them, while simultaneously allowing for women in such contexts to have room to manoeuvre and to make decisions.

However, more illuminating in understanding women’s practice would be to look at what it entails to engage the law and to live up to its expectations. This is often neglected by activists who strongly rely on a woman “redefine[ing] her problem as an offence that violates her rights rather than a burden of everyday married life” (Merry 2003: 346). Merry (2003: 349) argues that to engage the law means to take on “a new subject position, defined in the discourses and social practices of law”. I have remarked earlier that the recasting of gender issues in terms of human rights has meant that they have become the prerogative of legal professionals and experts instead of grassroots activists.¹¹ This

¹¹ Dezaly and Garth (2002) describe how grassroots NGOs feel disempowered by recasting gender issues as rights issues. The shift means they must exceed their skills, as well as their class and educational background, in order to adequately and proficiently express their demands and to participate skillfully and thus effectively in

“expertisation” of gender issues clearly indicates the class shift which is related to such a move. It highlights that the idea of gender issues as human rights is clearly rooted in a more middle-class outlook onto the world. The material conditions enabling the skills and the development of a subject position are “shaped by the discourse of autonomy, choice, and reasonable behaviour. . . .” (Merry 2003: 350). It also entails an idea of gender relationship which is defined by the authority of men over “property”, and where women can have more control over their own lives. Such conjuncture of material conditions, gender relations and subject position are necessary to engage the law, persist with it, envision and enable an alternative life, and allow the man to make the transition to where he can do away with a masculinity whose authority is rooted in physical violence. It is the last of these three aspects which means that a break-up of the relationship would not be necessary.

However, such conjuncture and subject position are not simply available. Actually, with regard to autonomy, for example, it can seem frightening and alienating, or even unimaginable, to someone whose subject position and sense of self is grounded in what Merry calls the “relational” realm. With this she indicates a subjectivity which is overwhelmingly rooted in the relationship with and recognition by family and neighbourhood (Merry 2003: 345). To engage with the law means to break with the environment; while it is the site of the abuse, it is also the habitual site of self-esteem, responsibility and protection.

As mentioned earlier, the role of the women in Westbury is quite closely connected with a particular idea of matriarchy. There is a history of men being removed, while women had to upkeep the family. Matriarchy here refers to a sense of being in charge, but also means a great responsibility and burden in upholding the respectability of the family in the light of a emasculated and violent masculinity. In addition, with a high level of unemployment and school drop-out rates, the social and economic conditions are such that a middle-class life (especially for men) is more the material of dreams and elusive exit fantasies than of actual options. Thus, because of the lack of material as well as social capital, the women engaging with the law would relinquish themselves to the state for protection, although without having the adequate resources

the public (national or international) arena where their claims are played out, heard and judged.

to uphold and realise the new subject position. This would mean that instead of gaining control over her life, she would lose control over it, this time to the state. At the same time she would also lose whatever ambivalent self-esteem and sense of self, rooted in where she comes from, she might have. It thus often appears as safer and more reasonable to remain within the realm of the relational, defined by the immediate and familiar environment and the relationships it produces. Here the relational agency of women did simply not fit the political and legal subjectivity which was offered to them.

However, this does not mean that within this realm women do not attempt to ameliorate their situation. The prevalence of dreams of a better life clearly shows that women are constantly concerned with improving their lives, even if their attempts are constricted by material and social conditions. It is here where the “offer” of the state to involve the police and means of law enforcement is nevertheless recognised as attractive resource. By opening a case in the first place but by then refusing to take on the necessary subject position that underlies engaging with the law police power is confined to the realm of the women’s local, lower-class relational realm, defined by local ideas about relationship and gender relations. The police intervention is thus disengaged from the wider legal system and appropriated for a tacit social manoeuvre. Because of the police power’s tangibility and its affinity with physical violence (such as the use of force and arrest), it lends itself squarely to be translated into new means of recognisable punishment and heavy-handed persuasion to (momentarily and provisionally) stop the relational violence. The intervening police officer is assigned to play a particular localised role in a situation of local and private circumstances.

The powers of domestic violence policy “estranged”

The process of translating the police force into locally applied punishment, physical disciplining, and heavy-handed persuasion clearly points to broader practice of local justice. The disconnecting (and consequent localisation) of police intervention from the wider criminal justice system also helps to explain how and why the domestic violence legislation is used in other cases, which only partly fit into the legal definition of what constitutes domestic violence.

In Westbury cases have been opened in the name of domestic violence by inventing or twisting the story so that the police would accept it as

a “serious” case, thus making the intervention of the police possible. In terms of evidence, these cases have little chance to succeed in court, but that was often not their intention. The following incident gives an idea of how the powers provided by the Domestic Violence Act are applied beyond the definitional boundaries and how the Act is used within other kind of conflicts.

A young woman had laid a complaint against her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend. However, she failed to appear in court after she had been subpoenaed as a witness. Later, she came to the police station to withdraw the case, whereupon she was arrested for not appearing in court. She was released the next day with a fine for defying the ends of justice. The case was dropped. Her sister, who had accompanied her to the station to withdraw the case, was not very moved by the fact that her sister was arrested since, as she said:

“She deserves it. She should not have opened the case against him and the girl in the first place, because they did not do anything to her. Yes, he is a gangster and he dropped her and the girl was after him already for a long while but they did not do anything to her. And she knew it. That’s why she did not come to the court. She thought if she would stay away, they would just drop the case and that she had gotten back at him and the girl. But I am sorry for her that she has to spend the night now in a cell.”

The motivation of the young woman from Westbury for opening the case of domestic violence was revenge—to “get back” at her boyfriend because of jealousy and, as she said, because she felt deeply hurt. She must have been partly aware that the legislation did not actually fit her case because she made up a complaint. At the same time, the idea of police intervention and of some tangible treatment of the former boyfriend must have been very attractive. The case backfired for her, though, since she had underestimated the role of the state once the case went beyond the initial arrest. Through this she actually got an idea that involving the state could mean a loss of control. Involving the police was also a precarious undertaking and needed a certain skill. Nevertheless, she had succeeded in that her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend were locked up for one night in the station cells before they could be released on bail.

A more successful case involving the police for a different purpose than strictly domestic violence is revealed in the following scene:

I was driving with the detectives through Westbury. As they stopped in front of a house they ran into a man who was the complainant in one of the detectives’ domestic violence cases. The man had opened a case of

common assault against his brother-in-law. He recognised the detective who was dealing with his case and told him: "I will come to the station later to withdraw the case. He has paid me the money he owed me; I gave him 24 hours and I told him otherwise I would go to the station again, but now he said he has the money. I am on my way to get it from him, and then I will come and drop the case." It appeared that the man had opened a case of domestic violence to put pressure on his brother-in-law (who had not assaulted him) to pay him his money back. Tellingly, the man was not even secretive about his manoeuvre, obviously not aware of or not fearing that it could have consequences for him. The detectives were not very impressed, however. They shook their heads and told him off. Back in the car the one detectives said to me: "You think this is unusual? No, no, this is the usual way. They open cases for whatever they want, and then we have to go out and take the complaint seriously, otherwise we get into trouble, and then they just come and withdraw the case when it suits them. That is the way they run their business, and we are wasting our time and energy, but I tell you why, because our service is the only thing in this world for which you don't have to pay."

Again it is the police's intervention, or the threat of it by invoking the powers of the Domestic Violence Act, which is used here to gain an advantage and to solve a private conflict. One could even argue that there is an element of popular justice, with its irreverence towards the differentiation between criminal and civil cases, in this estrangement of the powers provided by the legislation. In general, popular justice and its elements of retribution, material restitution and arbitration, often through the means of physical violence, are considered to be carried out by community members or community organisations themselves (Oomen 2004, Merten and Ntabazalila 1999). However, here we find that the police are made to execute power for individual or local ideas and modes of justice. Police are included on the basis of their ability to carry out punishment and threats and the authority they hold by virtue of this type of force.

It is telling that in the literature on domestic violence legislation, if a woman opens and withdraws a case of domestic violence in which she clearly has been the victim of a violent assault, the woman is presented as over-burdened by her social context. However, I argue that the deterministic explanation of why she does not persist with the law appears to be an excuse to safeguard the legislation and its usefulness and to conceal that the law actually requires a particular and exclusive subject. Very poignantly, for example, in a report entitled *Magistrates and the Domestic Violence Act*, compiled by the Consortium on Violence

Against Women¹² (Artz 2003)—probably the most outstanding and professional advocacy-cum-research coalition on gender violence issues in the country—the first thing which is mentioned in the paragraph on withdrawals is that trauma, similar to that experienced in hostage situations, can lead women to come to see their captors as their saviours (Artz 2003: 42). The motivation for withdrawing is thus put on a par with an extremely self-denying and masochistic psychological distortion. While I am not denying that such a phenomenon can occur through repeated or particularly violent abuse, it has to be noted that this interpretation may deny women their claim to common sense and discretion when resorting to withdrawal. It basically erases reasonable agency from the act of withdrawal.¹³

In contrast, when the legislation is used for purposes outside the definition of the legislation—such as in the above examples, or in cases about “maintenance” and “jealousy” as mentioned in another report on domestic violence (Moult 2003: 60)—then suddenly women are ascribed with a wilfulness which is highlighted through depicting them as shrewd and manipulative or of bad faith. Thus, a distinction is being made between those “disempowered but deserving women” (women as victims), and the empowered and shrewd women (women as manipulators).

In this light, I would like to argue that if we forget for a moment the expectation of the legislation, and its broader mission of restoring the legitimacy of the government, these actions appear rather as an expression of the social manoeuvring within a field limited by a lack of social and economic resources. From the perspective of this realm—disconnected from the wider working of the law—it is the appeal of the access to discretion over the use of the tangible and persuasive police force which leads to the practice. In both cases—the one seemingly more legitimate than the other, but both situated in an environment of few resources to advance living conditions and a history of state

¹² The Consortium on Violence Against Women is made up of the Institute of Criminology at the University Cape Town, the Gender Project and the Community Law Centre based at the University of the Western Cape, Rape Crisis Cape Town, and the Health Sector and Gender Violence Project.

¹³ One could even go so far as to say the pathologising of their act of rejecting the legislation limits their claims to be full citizen, since they do not act as good citizens which would be to embrace the legislation and reconfirm the legitimacy of the government.

reliance—the police force is dislocated and localised. It also shows how (men and) women can be bound by local entrapments and simultaneously be manoeuvring to ameliorate their situation, be it the shifting of the line of violence in relationships, the recovery of self-respect after being dropped or the recovery of material resources.

Retaliate, resist, abide—new police practice

For the police, the practice of men and particularly women from Westbury of using the legislation as a particular resource of heavy-handed persuasion and authority in local conflict is a source of frustration and provocation. The chapter's introductory scene, in which the victim of domestic violence was threatened with arrest, clearly shows the police officers' perceived need to restore order which has been challenged by the complainant's behaviour. I am arguing here that their aggravation has to be understood as a reaction to the state's attempt to expand its purview through a legislation whose legitimacy is based on the human rights claim to protection and creating individual autonomy in the private sphere. This situation makes itself manifest in changing gender and social relations between police and the women of the area, as well as in the organisational realm with regard to particular administrative practices.

I begin this section by analysing the gender aspect, which is closely related to the issue of being drawn into the domestic sphere. I then turn to the aspect of an increased case load, which is exemplified by seemingly insurmountable piles of dockets. As the bureaucratic manifestation of the state's expansion into the private sphere, dockets [case files] provide a poignant site of humiliation for the officer on the one hand and loss of control for the withdrawing complainant on the other. Together, these aspects form the matrix through which the practice of the people from Westbury, enabled through the domestic violence legislation, is interpreted and perceived by the police.

“Strong women—weak men”

Many police officers strongly and explicitly express their objection to the task of intervening in the private sphere. This is based on the belief that violence is a legitimate and necessary means of communication within the relationship between men and women, and that private matters should be dealt with within the private sphere, without outside

intervention. The following extracts from conversations with two police officers—one North-Sotho-speaking and one Zulu-speaking—illustrate their moral logic on the role of private violence and their lack of support for the legislation. The first police officer commented:

...and then this domestic violence legislation. It is necessary that a man has to give a woman a slap from time to time. If she does something bad, she has to be told that she can't do it like this. You can really excuse such a behaviour. Yes, if the man has planned it, then it is bad, but when it was a mistake... you can't just leave him, he is your lover. And a woman, she can slap a man, too. When he comes home drunk, she slaps him, throws him on the bed, pulls off his clothes and then she turns to the wall. That's what woman do, isn't it, like this? And the next day she apologises and he apologises. They don't need the police to sort things out.

The other officer, who works in the charge office and often has to open cases of domestic violence, commented:

I think they must reverse this legislation. This legislation brings a third party into a relation which is only about the man and the woman who have committed to each other. Now, the woman comes running to the station and she wants to open a case against her husband because she is angry with him, but the moment they come to put him in a cell she wants to withdraw the case, because all that what was important to her before the fight comes back into her mind and she does not want the one she loves behind bars. I think the legislation mixes into family matters. How can a man tell a woman that he does not like that, for example, she is not home when he comes home. You [speaking to the researcher] listen through the ears, but some people they don't listen through the ears; you have to touch them so they can listen; they listen through the skin. The woman is subject to the man. Isn't it like that, that universally the woman is subject to the man? I don't know, maybe with white people it is different. There the women are like men, and men are like women. There a woman gives the man a slap and the man just turns away, and holds his cheek. But I think men and women who fight most, they love each other most. When she sobs, like this: 'Snief, snief', then she calls your name and then you love her even more and she calls you in deep love. I have seen women who have scars in their face, at their arms... but they still love their men. I think that people who fight most, love most. People who are like Desmond Tutu, who talk like him, they don't love. And it is not right that the women can run now to the police.

Black male police officers were particularly outspoken about the fact that the legislation would bring a foreign element into relationships, and that they were not convinced about their ability to carry it out. While clearly underplaying the severity of the violence which is

inflicted in such relationship, they displayed a clear perception of how gender relationships are embedded in a certain socio-cultural context; in this context, they consider violence to be normal and meaningful. In the first comment, violence in a relationship is contrasted with the “premeditated violence” that underlies an unambiguous crime such as armed robbery—“If the man has planned it, it is bad.” By virtue of this contrast, “impulsive” violence is redeemed from its association with crime—that is, it is not considered to be criminal. The comments also suggests that a man’s authority can be dependent on the ability to inflict violence. Without that, he is powerless. The link between listening and talking reasonably (like Desmond Tutu) and whiteness (as embodied in the European researcher) is contrasted to the ability to imagine love and passion. In the familiar realm (the private sphere), violence is seen as part of communicating. This evokes an awareness as much of cultural as of class differences. Both officers paint women as far from powerless, and insist that there is equilibrium (but not equality) between men and women. They believe that this balance becomes distorted if women have the possibility “to run to the police”—an outside resource of power. They clearly see it as weakening men, rather than strengthening disadvantaged women.

Police officers at Sophiatown police station, especially those who were Afrikaans-speaking, popularly called domestic violence cases “*ma slaan pa docket*”—that is, “mother beats father docket”. While obviously so named with the impropriety and crudeness innate to police slang—which like humour can work cathartically through the expression of politically incorrect or other forms of verbal transgression or inversions—it nevertheless shows the contempt for domestic violence cases. It points to the prevalence of the idea that women are equally involved in violence at home. In its acerbic way it goes even further. It alludes to the idea that the woman is the dominant person in the household, and that she has the means to abuse the man. Such views are dismissed by the domestic violence policy makers as a misjudgement of police officers: police officers, due to their own patriarchal ideas, fail to recognise domestic violence (Paranee 2001; Artz 2003).

While the prevalence of patriarchal ideas certainly exists, as the above comments by the two officers confirm, I would like to explore how police officers come to see themselves confirmed in their stance in their everyday practice. I would like to suggest that there is a certain reverberation with a social reality which becomes magnified for police officers through their close involvement with the populace of Westbury.

This reality relates to the matriarchal role taken up by women in Westbury. Police officers often experience women in charge of households. Due to their responsibility for men and family, women are often either decisively delivering the men to the police (as in the case of domestic violence) or, when it seems opportune, defending them fiercely—especially when the crime concerned does not impinge on the family or even materially supports it. Women, as they obstruct arrests or direct the involvement of police by the withdrawal of cases, appear to be taking on a very assertive role vis-à-vis the police officers. Often an exuberant outspokenness—which is not confined to the private sphere but which ‘trespasses’ into the public and the police station, and which often makes police officers the target of verbal abuse or mockery—further influences police officers’ understanding of women in the area. Thus the woman appears more as an agent in charge of her decisions and someone who is standing up for herself than as a disadvantaged victim. Police officers then resist what they see as a situation in which women already have superior strength and are allowed, through the domestic violence legislation, to accumulate even more strength.

In this sense, the so-called “abuse of the legislation” through withdrawing complaints is only partly about that women estrange the law. To a great degree, it is about women who appear to be in charge *and* who engage the law on their terms, which provokes the idea of abuse. It is the double bind which is important here. Given the prevalence of such perceptions and evaluation of experience, it “makes sense” that police officers feel unconstrained, and even encouraged, to take corrective action:

Arriving at the station in the afternoon, one of the detectives comes up to me with a big smile on his face and tells me: “You should have been with us today. We only arrested women. We taught them a lesson, that they can’t just run to the police station and open a case against their men when it suits them. Today they learned that they can also be arrested. The next time they think twice before they open a case because a man can also open a case of domestic violence.”

The revengeful action takes the form of correcting what is seen as an unwarranted bias of the legislation. The police officers’ defence of what they think gender relationships should be features prominently in this.

However the satisfaction deriving from revenge cannot be explained merely by the police officers’ concern about what is happening between

men and women in Westbury. The fact that stories about abuse of the legislation proliferate, and that these stories often play a part in longer tirades of dissatisfaction with police work, indicates that police officers are in fact *personally* impaired by the new practice. The police officer is not only forced to become complicit in what he sees as a domination of women over men, but is implicated in that the legislation shifts the gendered nature of police work in general and encounters between police and subjects in particular.

The police officers of Sophiatown police station constantly complained about that women calling for the police and then withdrawing the case mistake them for social workers. Over and over again, the officers stressed the distinction between a social worker and a police officer, with the later having more difficult responsibilities, while it is up to the social worker to deal with the “petty and irritating” social matters of the people and especially of the women from Westbury. These concerns clearly point towards the classic binary opposition between the law enforcement side as masculine and the welfare side as feminine. This division finds its resonance in a whole set of meanings and practices rooted in the binary opposition of public and private, and society and state. However, the state, while generally connoted as male, exemplified by its executive arms such the military and police, can be subdivided according to the nature of control and intervention. Intervention into the private sphere, traditionally the role of welfare, is then the feminine side of the overall masculine state. This means that if the new police practice constitutes a welfarisation in the sense that police officers now have to be responsible for what they considered to be the prerogative of social workers, it also amounts to a feminisation of their work.

This conflicts to a great extent with their identification of their work as masculine. Joan Wardrop (2001), in her study of the Soweto Flying Squad, makes the point that police do not simply display a pointless machismo or “essentialised or undifferentiated toughness”. However, their sense of what they consider the essential quality—namely, being in control and level-headed in dangerous situations—is still ultimately rooted in ideas of dominant masculinity. Their relationship with the public is held up as male superiority—either in the role of protector or by virtue of their exposure to danger, physical challenge and the rationality involved in investigations. The introduction of the domestic violence legislation upsets the order and reverses some of the binary oppositions which traditionally allowed police officers to ignore what they did not consider as crime but as “petty and irritating matters”.

“Domestic mess”

What can also be picked up from the comments of police officers about social work is the difficulties police officers face, when being drawn into the domestic sphere, with what they regard as the “messy” nature of this sphere. “Messy” here applies in both senses of the word—as cluttered and unintelligible, as well as dirty.

With regard to the first notion: It has been noted that one of police work’s daily challenges when applying the law is to interpret an ambiguous and complex reality to fit the delineated categories of the law (Skolnick 1966). For police officers, this challenge is exacerbated when they become involved in the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere resists being conclusively fitted into a picture of victim and perpetrator. Because of the intimate nature of the private sphere, the police officer is confronted with mutual implications and a spiral of justifications and blaming, which often go back much further than the immediate violent incidence. This creates for the police officer an often impermeable moral haze. It also has been noted that police officers, in order to get motivated about their work, make practical judgements about guilt or non-guilt (ignoring the legal principle which states that a person is innocent until proven guilty, and which ascribes judgement to the courts). The situation is complicated by the moral ambiguities of the domestic sphere. Interventions in the domestic sphere thus undermine and destabilise the masculine ideal of remaining in control. It also means that if the police officer follows through with the intervention he has to apply a concentrated understanding to the intricate matters of the relationship.

It is with regard to understanding the intricate matters of the relationship that the notion of “messy” as “dirty” comes into play. A concentrated understanding holds the potential for social proximity, which is experienced as forced transgression and contagion. Even by taking a statement, or by trying to make sense of the case by carrying out further investigations, the police officer has to engage with some of the complexities of the case. Social proximity and distance are constantly being renegotiated. The patent urge to undo proximity can only be explained by the fact that a marked distance between police officers and the people from Westbury is considered by police officers to be the norm. Social proximity, on the other hand, is experienced as transgression and contagion.

This distance found a clear expression in police officers response to a survey question which asked them if they were familiar with Westbury

through their own social context or through the neighbourhood in which they grew up. Only one officer interviewed during the research period said that he had been exposed to such a conflict-ridden society as Westbury or that it had any similarity to what he knew in the area where he grew up. While a handful stressed that it was a learning process and that they understood the people better now, the majority answered to the question of exposure with a definite and slightly scandalised “No”, as if the question itself was abhorrent or offensive. This was equally valid for white Afrikaans-speaking officers and for black officers.

Most black officers evoked tradition and culture as the main factors which set them apart from the people in Westbury. They claimed that where they came from there was a lot of respect for people, especially for elders and traditional hierarchies. Some of them also told me that when they went back home they were treated as authorities and with great respect due to their status as police officers and civil servants. They were often seen as members of the community who had “made it” and who could provide for the whole family. The fact that they had a regular income, that they could buy houses (with the help of police housing subsidies), that they even lived in racially mixed areas in Johannesburg, gave them elevated status, especially among their village folks and families.¹⁴ They therefore often stressed their disgust about the way in which the Westbury community acted out their social conflicts, such as the excessive use of alcohol which led to violence and social destruction. Their narrative allowed them to consider themselves as standing on higher ground socially and culturally. The apartheid idea that Africans had at least their culture and tradition, while coloured people had nothing but their inferior status because they were the product of miscegenation clearly reverberates in these narratives.

The distancing of white Afrikaans-speaking officers from the mainly coloured people of Westbury has an additional historical and spatial

¹⁴ To a certain extent this has always been the case. It would be a mistake to think because in the past members of the police force were seen as the long arm of apartheid and as the enforcers of injustice against blacks, that a black policeman would have been seen as a perpetrator by his community. This was mainly the case in urban areas, where there was a politicised anti-apartheid movement. In most areas, however, especially in rural areas from where black police officers were mainly recruited, to be a civil servant was seen as a great success and was the ambition of many young men. For an authentic account of this historical aspect see N.R. Mandela's (2000) *Long Walk to Freedom* and John Miles' (1996) *Deafening Silence*.

dimension. Most Afrikaner police officers working at Sophiatown police station come from the urban areas of Johannesburg. Some of them grew up and still live in Newlands and Triumf one of the (former purely) white lower middle to working-class areas of their policing district situated just opposite of Westbury. Their disrespect for the people of Westbury is a combination of classism and racism which has been shaped by the apartheid history of the country, especially with regard to poor whites. In his study of police transformation in Cape Town, Jensen (2001) argues that the urge of coloured police officers to explicitly distance themselves from the working-class coloured community comes from the racial proximity. With white working-class officers, it is the symbolic geographical proximity that creates such an urge. It reminds them that there is only a fragile border between them and the coloured townships, which also implies that there must be some social and economic proximity between them and Westbury.

One of apartheid's rationales was that the white under-class was in "danger" of becoming poorer than certain black and coloured people. With the formalised introduction of race-based preferential policies under apartheid, this socio-economic proximity was obliterated—or at least held at bay. However, with the end of apartheid and the changes taking place in South Africa, the reliability of race as an economic and social buffer declined. This threat of proximity and the challenge to the white working-class officer's social position is reason enough to feel an urge to constantly position himself as aloof to the coloured "neighbours". Transgression has to be avoided. White police officers are easily provoked by any attempt from the working-class coloured community to claim equality, service and rights. Each entitlement by the Westbury community is perceived as contributing to the demolition of the race-class border.

When police officers work in groups, their reputation is most at stake and they tend to reinforce their image of what policing is about. It is especially in such situations that social distance is acted out in the form of displays of physical disgust, denigrating and racist attitudes, and humiliating treatment of the local population of Westbury. During night-raids police officers from Sophiatown police station would enter the houses of people with open disgust for the smell in the houses and make provoking comments about the living conditions. They would make jokes and intimidate people, whether they were suspects or not. With each of these acts the racialised divide was reproduced. The detectives would again and again say about the complainants: "It is

their own fault; if they would not drink so much they would not have these problems.” One detective said on the occasion of going into the Westbury area to make an arrest: “These things over there, they don’t know manners.” While it is common for police to dehumanise criminals and hold them personally accountable for their deeds, in the case of Westbury many officers hardly distinguish between victims and perpetrators due to a general aversion. They justified their attitude by saying, “Each complainant we get here at the police station is a perpetrator of another case”. With this attitude, any claim to entitlement to respectful treatment by the police can be nullified.

Given this situation, any practice which compels police officers to lessen the social distance between them and their subjects upsets a complex and historically rooted relationship, and leaves them caught up in an uncomfortable and despised state, with the need to restore order. Ironically, it is with semblance to the image of the police as superior physical discipliner, and with the authority derived from rudeness and distancing, that women and men draw the police into their private and local conflicts.

“Administrative onslaught”

As the final aspect in which the practice of police officers is transformed by the domestic violence legislation, I would like to come to the issue of increased workload. The work load is reflected in the piles of brown paper files, called dockets, which are the administrative form of a criminal case investigated by a detectives. The practice around the piles of dockets assumes the form of a *docket culture* forming a dense network of meaning. Dockets are a source of anxiety and humiliation. Seniors use the measure of how many dockets have been closed—no matter with a successful prosecution or not—as a surrogate performance control for “good work”. Failure to close sufficient dockets can result in serious reprimand. Other work related wrong doings or neglects are informally punished with being given an extra load of dockets. As a disciplinary pressure point, dockets provoke subversion and strategies of coping by detectives. In addition, dockets are a source of embarrassment and can provoke feelings of inadequacy. Administrative tasks are often seen as being part of a more female sort of education and work, confounding the masculine work identity of (detective) police officers. Also, tasks such as detailed writing confront police officers with their lack of skills as produced by their low educational and class standards. As such,

docket culture structures police officers' routines in a fundamental way. It is through the lens of sensitivities which emerge from the meaning and practice of the docket culture that domestic violence legislation translates for detective into an "administrative onslaught".

Dockets speak of crime in the sense that they are the prime bureaucratic manifestation of the state's dealings with crime. They represent the primary charting and recoding of crime. Based on these dockets, statistics are compiled and conclusions drawn about the state of crime in the country. They categorise crime, and they shape and accumulate the administrative narratives of complainants, witnesses, suspects and experts. They produce knowledge and facts for and by police officers, prosecutors and judges.

As argued before, the government's willingness to pass the domestic violence legislation can be understood as the state's attempt to assert its monopoly on violence over its population. This takes the form of promoting a human rights culture which aims at regulating violence not just with regard to the state-subject relation, but—on a so called horizontal level—*among* subjects in the private sphere. The form of governance applied is the disciplinary expansion of the state into the private sphere and the conferring of liberal autonomy unto women. It is an institutional expansion in the sense that the police service (and the courts) are assigned with regulating additional forms of violence.

With the expansion, the violent intimate relationship becomes a new object of knowledge by the state. As such, it can be brought forward into the public sphere and altered by the intervention of the state. Dockets, as a primary interface between state and population—with their qualities of charting knowledge and defining the qualities of crime—are the initial instruments of objectification and, hence, governance which is applied to bring the relationship forward into the public sphere.

The documentation captured by dockets might be utterly inadequate. Activists and researchers have complained extensively and publicly about the lack of central records; they also complain that, until today, the extent of domestic violence can still not be established because of the inadequacy of sources. While this means that the instruments of governance are fallible, and while it speaks of the limited capacity of the state to expand its disciplinary powers, it nevertheless shows the concern for recording. It also illustrates how these activist are very much complementary and, in terms of legitimacy, instrumental to the state's expansive and disciplinary undertaking. This does not change the fact that even incomplete recoding results in an augmentation of administrative

work for the police in the form of the increase in docket numbers. Each case opened under the domestic violence legislation means that the police officer has to carry out the necessary administrative tasks such as taking of statements and keeping track of the number of dockets on hand. Considering the discomfort which is associated with this task and the anxiety which is provoked by each docket, each extra docket, as Sergeant Bothma makes indirectly clear, will be felt:

One day, Sergeant Bothma, was rubbing his hands in great satisfaction when I joined him in his office. With a sense of malicious pleasure he told me that a Westbury woman had just come to him to request the withdrawal of the case of domestic violence which he had opened the other day. Sergeant Bothma explained to me that he first had played hard to get and had kept the woman on tenterhooks, eventually sending her to the prosecutor with her request. At least, so Sergeant Bothma said, the woman also had to make an extra effort: "I will let her feel that all the time I spent sitting at my desk was not nothing. She will have to do her share now."

To refuse the woman's request and send her on to the prosecutor is just another form of revenge and an attempt to correct a certain order. In this case, however, it is around the issue of the administrative record—the docket—that the revenge is lodged; at stake is the time and effort spent on the docket.

The detective's revenge takes the form of turning the disciplinary power, with which the administrative act is imbued, against the women. The disciplinary power emanates from her case being charted in the docket; she, by allowing this to be done, has commissioned the state as a protector, which has shifted some of her discretion to decide towards the state.

For the police officers, the act of withdrawing exacerbates the challenge they face in domestic violence cases. For them the act by women of opening and then withdrawing a case represents carelessness and light-heartedness in the light of what for the police officer is a hugely sensitive matter, namely the receiving of dockets. Each extra docket can be thought of as an extra threat and as a source of anxiety, humiliation and inadequacy. As such, light-heartedness and carelessness double as disrespect and disregard for the police officer's plight. It further reminds the detective of the discretion and power the woman exerts over him by opening a case of domestic violence. It puts her into the position to inflict punishment and humiliation on the police officer. To first open and then to withdraw a case is felt as a double assertion of this

discretion and as a unnecessary, thus arbitrary, infliction of punishment and humiliation.

Hence, the effect of the expansion of the state into the private and domestic realm is not just a simple augmentation in workload represented by a numerical increase in dockets. The increase in workload in the form of increased dockets means an increase in humiliation and punishment, and therefore anxiety. It also means the increase of the administrative task, and thus of the feminine and the educationally more demanding load. And as if this was not enough, with the shift of discretion and through women's assertion and apparently arbitrary application of discretion, it means that power is placed into the hands of some of the Westbury populace to inflict punishment and humiliation onto the police, and so to reverse what has been a long-ingrained relationship based on the police inflicting humiliation onto the populace.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the domestic violence legislation as a specific although exemplary case of the introduction of human rights and as a form of the expansion of the purview of the state. The Domestic Violence Act is a exemplary case of human rights, in the sense that it is aimed at the protection of the weak, vulnerable, disempowered and disadvantaged, reflecting explicitly human rights' credo of creating equality and justice.

In its broad definition and its stipulation of mandatory duties for the police, the legislation reflects the early post-apartheid attitude of the government and its disposition towards the regime of international human rights and civil society activism. It also embodies the liberal notion of creating autonomous and responsible subjects through holding the state accountable and by the subjects engaging the law. In reverse, it exemplifies the expansion of the state which takes the form of the state resuming increased responsibility for its subjects through law enforcement, even in the private sphere. Within the South African context, it is one of the most clearly delineated and innovative legal changes effecting law enforcement.

However, the withdrawal of domestic violence cases represents a decisive practice which reveals a gap if not an impasse between the subjectivity prescribed by the legislation and a form of local agency rooted in a practice of local justice. As such it points to the limits of

the good governance paradigm's encompassingness of which human rights are a part of. The legislation is based on the dismantling of the muting division between private and public, by making the issue of domestic violence a public concern. Simultaneously, through the victim of violence asserting her right to inviolability, and restructuring her (his) life accordingly she or he is envisaged to take up the public role of the kind of citizen which the state asserting its monopoly on violence has delimited. More concretely, the legislation entails notion of clear-cut victimhood, the accessibility of gender relations which presuppose the availability of a more middleclass kind of masculinity and the ability to simply replace or chose a social context. These notions clash with the more ingrained local agency emerging from, in the case of women, the ambiguous role of burdensome patriarchy which combines dominance with powerlessness, from an already undermined and emasculated masculinity, and a lack of resources which disallows social mobility.

But the impasse is not an absolute one. The engagement of the state in the private sphere has a long history in Westbury and the resources of law enforcement offered by the state are far too attractive in an environment of lack. The boundary between private and public gets renegotiated in the light of the domestic violence legislation albeit not in the way it has been envisaged. It is from the perspective of local agency that the domestic violence legislation is engaged and disengage resulting in the withdrawal of cases. In this process, police officers are dislodge from the rest of the criminal justice system. Instead, their role is re-inscribed with a form of authority which is sited in power over transitory arrest in local(!) cells and the threat or the actual use of violence. This interpretation of police intervention produces a physically persuasive discipline which is directly tangible in the local realm. Ironically, it is an interpretation of authority which resembles the terrific ability of the police in the past, rather than the benign and soft authority into which human rights, according to the populace, can translate. Through this state power is localised by the women in the area and used for shifting and negotiating boundaries of violence, rather than erasing violence from relationships.

The expansion into the private sphere and the mandatory compulsion for police officers to intervene are conducive to the appropriation of the powers of the police officers. The legal encroachment of the private sphere is conducive in the sense that it already means a move away from a more clearly delineated moral realm into the morally more messy realm of domestic violence, in the sense that it is the realm of

close social interaction and where often civil liabilities are concerned. This also makes it conducive to the appropriation of policing powers to be used for issues of local popular justice which are outside the legislation's definition of relationships. Such 'misappropriation' is based on a an pertinence and prevalence of social practice by local people of making use of state resources to the advancement of their situation under conditions of blockage and limited resources.

This also shows where the challenge lies for police officers and points towards an answer to how we can understand police officers' need for retaliation and revenge, why they are frustrated, and why they do not embrace the task of enforcement of the domestic violence legislation. The introduction of the domestic violence legislation makes them vulnerable to being disengaged from the criminal justice system and compels them towards the informal realm. Welfarisation and feminisation can undermine their more masculine work identity which stresses a sense of being in control and getting directives from a clearly delaminated public realm. The challenge is further exacerbated because the role prescribed for police by the legislation for the victim is mismatched with their experience of the women complainants. Also, the legislation compels them towards a social proximity which can violate highly guarded and symbolically important racial boundaries. This can mean that police officers are directed to act against their sense of self which can partly be so threatening that it erupts in forms of violence aimed at re-establishing order and authority on which such self is built.

Finally, part of the expansion of the state's purview and the alteration of the domestic violence into an object of public concern and intervention is its administrative chartering as a crime. For the police officers this becomes concrete through an increase of dockets. This increase of dockets however does not just means a simple increase in work; it is loaded with meaning due to a matrix of sensibilities drawn from a *docket culture*. Also the administrative work related to the work on dockets such a writing tasks demand—in order for them to be carried out with ease—a certain educational level which is not always available to police officers. As such the increase in dockets can translate to the police officer as potentially humiliation and disabling experience.

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LIQUID WASTE MANAGEMENT IN URBAN AND RURAL GHANA: PRIVATISATION AS GOVERNANCE?¹

Sjaak van der Geest and² Nelson Obirih-Opareh³

Introduction: governance and the politics of sanitation

In a chapter on the politics of public sanitation between 1920 and 1940 in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, Gewalt (2000: 125–144) tries to find an explanation for the fact that “after years of consistent protest and demand on the part of location residents, there was no improvement in public sanitation facilities”. The author leads us through a series of graphic quotes from official reports, letters and newspaper clippings about the horrible state of sanitation in the town. In one report from 1925 we read:

In Windhoek proper, there are trenches, but these have developed onto cesspools and the stench coming from them is unbearable. Some of these trenches have been in use (open) for more than a year and the natives complain bitterly of their filthy conditions. In an experience of 25 years I have never seen anything worse (Gewald 2000: 133).

A few years later, in 1929, a German newspaper reports:

... everyone can imagine what odours there are emanating during the hot and rainy season. It is simply unbearable. But it must be endured... Some of these WCs stand in the middle of the location. Is it surprising that the mortality was so high of late? Shall we only pay our taxes or should we not also be allowed to elect people to our liking who are concerned about our welfare? (Gewald 2000: 136).

Township inhabitants used this situation to protest against the South African colonial administration and those who cooperated with the administration, with only limited success. Gewalt concludes by listing

¹ A slightly different version of this text was published in a special issue on “The governance of daily life in Africa” (Van der Geest & Obirih-Opareh 2002).

² Medical Anthropology & Sociology Unit, ASSR and AMIDSt, University of Amsterdam., The Netherlands.

³ Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Accra, Ghana.

four reasons for the authorities' lack of concern about public sanitation. One reason was the "squeamish unease in talking about and dealing with an issue which was generally felt to be below the level of suitable discussion". The second reason referred to the costs involved. The third was that the authorities wanted to discourage the African inhabitants from settling permanently in the town and the last was that they regarded the inhabitants as uncivilised, and not deserving of decent sanitary facilities (Gewald 2000: 144).

Visiting some of the poor neighbourhoods of Accra in the beginning of the 21st century one would imagine oneself walking through Windhoek in 1925. It happened to the two authors of this paper when they went to 'inspect' two public toilets in Nima, which is one of the most densely populated suburbs of Accra. The toilets were located in an open space between the houses and the road. Women and children were selling foodstuffs only a few yards away. The same space held two containers for solid waste disposal, which were overflowing. Goats were searching for food in the rubbish on the ground near the containers.

Both toilets had 16 squatting holes, eight for each sex. People visiting the toilet had to pay a small amount to the caretaker. In one toilet the pit was completely full and the faeces came up to and over the brim of the holes. Used toilet papers were lying about or had been deposited in large baskets, which were almost blocking the passage. The stench was as enormous as the physical and visual filth. For one not used to it, it seemed a miracle that people managed to relieve themselves in such conditions and reappear from the toilet totally spotless.

Close to one of the toilets, in the open air, was a huge container in which night-soil collectors emptied their buckets containing faeces from private houses. The buckets, which they used for their work, were standing next to the container. Little children often did not enter the toilet but defecated behind the toilet in the open space. Apparently they could not spend the money or they preferred the 'fresh air'.

While we were inspecting the place, taking some pictures and discussing the procedures with the caretaker, a group of people assembled around us and expressed their anger and dismay about the sordid sanitation conditions in their neighbourhood. They talked about unfulfilled promises of the city authorities and accused them of total lack of concern and of stealing the money allotted to the construction of proper sanitation facilities.

Toilets and governance

If 'governance' can be taken to mean, as Stoker (1998) suggests, the successful management of community affairs through a mixing of public, private and voluntary actors, sanitation is an excellent case to test the workings and adequacy of governance. In the area of sanitation public and private concerns and manners of addressing them come together. Defecation, which is a private and intimate activity, constitutes a public problem both in terms of health risk and environmental pollution. It may, therefore, be expected that the "blurring of boundaries and responsibilities" and the importance of "self-governing networks of actors", which Stoker (1998: 18) mentions as key elements of governance, will manifest themselves in the management of human waste.

Governance, with its emphasis on (governmental support of) autonomy of actors, reminds one of a concept, which was popular a few decades ago in the domain of health policy: Primary Health Care (PHC). The term is no longer used in health policy plans as it conjures up a too-optimistic picture of people's ability and determination to solve their problems by their own means. The term also assumes an overly positive image of the determination of governments to contribute to sustainable improvement at the level of local communities.

Almost two decades ago, one of us argued that PHC meant different things to different stakeholders with different (often conflicting) interests at different levels of social and political organisation (Van der Geest et al. 1990). For representatives of international agencies, PHC was a—somewhat utopian—ideal to realise "Health for all by the year 2000", a prescription for health—and overall—development from below. For national governments in developing countries, PHC was first of all a strategic term and buzzword to increase foreign financial aid and reduce spending on local health care. For local inhabitants, PHC meant a cut in government support, 'second-hand health care', and 'forced self-reliance'.

In this paper we raise the question what governance of public sanitation means to different people at different levels of social organisation or to different parties in the sanitation management. What interests us most is how the daily failure of governance—the absence of an efficient sanitation policy—can be understood taking into account the interests that different parties have in waste removal. We will present and discuss two cases of sanitation in Ghana, one rural, one urban, and suggest

that the poor management of human waste epitomises the limitations and failures of governance in present-day Ghana.

Toilet research

Doing research in and around toilets is not popular among anthropologists and other social scientists. Ethnographic studies focusing on toilet use and cultural habits of defecation hardly exist. One conspicuous exception is a study by Ndonko (1993) describing the resistance of local inhabitants to government-imposed toilets in Cameroon. There are many reasons, however, why anthropologists *should* devote attention to the topic, its mundane character, for example (are anthropologists not interested in everyday life?). Another reason could be their own experiences with toilets during fieldwork. It is well known that many anthropologists (figures are not known) feel rather uncomfortable about toilet use in the field and develop nasty problems with their defecation. It could not move them, however, to turn this into a research topic. Yet, many anthropological interests are believed to have an autobiographical origin.

The most likely explanation for the scarcity of anthropological studies of defecation is the nearly universal disgust to human waste, which prevents them from taking it up as an issue to be researched (cf. Van der Geest 2007).

That very neglect of one of the most basic facts of life (biologically and socially) prompted the authors of this study to direct their attention to the social, cultural and political implications of toilet use in two Ghanaian locations.

The first author stumbled on the topic while doing research on meanings of growing old and care of older people in a rural town in Ghana. The problems and paradoxes around toilet use presented themselves spontaneously when conversations turned towards care of older people and the importance of respect. Toilet use proved a crucial issue in the older people's views on good care and dignity (cf. Van der Geest 1998, 2002a). His research consisted of lengthy—often animated—conversations on the topic and occasional visits to their public and private toilets. Once, he and his assistant briefly accompanied the nightsoil collector on his nocturnal tour (Van der Geest 2002b).

The second author carried out an extensive study on solid waste collection in the capital city of Accra (Obirih-Opareh 2002). His interest was on the impact of Ghana's policy of decentralisation and

privatisation on the practice and performance of service delivery in solid waste removal. Alongside this research he also carried out some investigation into liquid waste management. He interviewed consumers, service providers and policymakers, studied administrative documents, conducted a questionnaire-based research among consumers and visited public toilets and disposal sites.

Public and private toilets in Accra

Policy-makers of the Accra Metropolitan Area (AMA) responsible for liquid waste management face a dilemma: should they promote and improve public toilet facilities in the city or should they encourage and assist inhabitants to have their own toilet in the house? Many homes in Accra do not have their own toilet. Toilets and bathrooms in houses in the central business areas have sometimes been converted into rooms and stores. As a result, the residents of such homes rely on public toilets, which may be inadequate and face serious maintenance problems. According to the metropolitan authority, public toilets are meant for visitors to the city and not for residents. The opposite is the 'rule' however. Public toilets have become permanent features for many residents in Accra as places to ease themselves. Accra faces acute sanitation problems and severe pressure on the few public toilet facilities available. These are manifested in unsanitary conditions in and around most of the public toilets, poor and dilapidated infrastructure for liquid waste management, inadequate funding for maintenance, poor sanitary habits, deficient management of existing toilet facilities, indiscriminate defecation in open spaces, into water bodies and drains, irregular collection of liquid waste from septic and other storage tanks, as well as from pan latrines, and limited connections from houses to the central sewage system.

Existing facilities

The existing toilet facilities in Accra, both private and public, include pan (or bucket) latrines, pit latrines, septic tank latrines, KVIPs (a particular type of storage tank), and water closets (WCs) with or without connection to the central sewage system. There are two types of public toilet ownership, namely (i) those built by the local authority, and (ii) those built by private firms and individuals for commercial purposes. Privately built public toilets are few in number. The public toilet facilities

are inadequate compared to the size of the population lacking toilet facilities in their houses and the demand for them. Long queues could be observed during early morning and evening rush hours. According to residents, some people defecate in empty spaces because of (i) the cost of a visit to a public toilet, (ii) a lack of toilets in the vicinity, (iii) long distances between public toilets and their houses, and (iv) the untidiness of the toilet facilities.

The infrastructure of the Accra central sewage system is inadequate. In 1999, there were less than 1,000 units connected to the central sewage system (GW&SC 1999). In most places, the infrastructure for waste management is either non-existent or in a deplorable state. As Akuffo (1999) noted, there are about 18 sewage systems and sewage treatment plants in Accra, but none of them is operating according to plan. The system that was built for Central Accra in the early 1970s by the Busia government is no longer adequate. There are few connections and insufficient links to water to enable flushing. In Accra, liquid waste management has broken down due to a lack of human, logistic and financial resources. The present approach based on harangue, sermonising and clean-up campaigns is not helpful. There is a need for injection of capital into the system, including strengthening existing institutions. Investments in plants and equipment in the present circumstances of complete institutional breakdown are clearly not the right approach.

If availability of toilet facilities and the method of removal and disposal are indications of level of development, the city of Accra cannot be rated high on the scale of development. A survey of toilet facilities in Accra by the AMA in 1992 showed that:

- 40% of the population had access to private toilets discharging into septic tanks or cesspools (and a small number into the sewage system);
- 25% used public toilets where a fee is charged per visit. There were about 127 public toilets in Accra;
- 20% still used private pan (or bucket) latrines;
- 5% had access to private Kumasi Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines (KVIPs) (explained further below) and
- 10% of the population had no access to any toilet facility and defecated in open spaces or made use of ‘flying toilets’ (see below).

Private (household) toilets are owned, maintained and used by individuals while public toilets are operated on a commercial basis. Toilet

facilities with connections to the central sewage system pay connection fees. This includes registration fees and monthly charges. Owners of toilet facilities without connections to the central sewage system pay fees for removal and transportation of their liquid waste to designated sites for treatment. Service providers are periodically engaged to remove the waste from toilets with septic storage tanks. Various fees are paid to the service providers depending on the type and capacity of the facility.

The KVIP is a traditional latrine to which a vent pipe, covered with a screen, is added to minimise odour and fly problems and with alternating sludge holding compartments. The twin-pit concept enables the contents of one pit (once filled) to decompose while the other is in use, provided that sufficient time is allowed (two years or more). Afterwards, the decomposed materials can be dug out by hand without any serious health risks (Post 2001: 33). The KVIPs were supposed to be built in areas with porous soil so that the liquid found in the toilet could be absorbed by the soil, leaving the scum to be scooped out for use as manure in gardening and agriculture. Unfortunately however, the soil in Accra is clayish and as a result cannot absorb the liquid from the toilet as expected. The toilet is therefore always wet and needs dislodgement by suction pumps.

Bucket or pan latrines are emptied during the night, usually by workers from the northern part of the country. This 'night soil' collection from buckets or pan latrines has been fully privatised since December 1987. The Waste Management Department (WMD) provides surface and underground storage facilities and collection vehicles to empty the tanks. New pan latrines are not allowed. Houses with buckets or pan latrines have been ordered to convert them to KVIP latrines or use available public toilets.

Removal and transportation of waste

The type of toilet facility determines the way the waste is removed and transported to disposal sites. Liquid waste from toilet facilities with sewage connections is transported automatically to the disposal point through the sewage system. Night-soil collectors empty pan latrines and carry the waste to central collection points (cesspools). The big containers are normally lifted at night and emptied at a treatment plant or approved disposal sites.

Toilets with septic storage tanks are emptied by service providers i.e. WMD of the AMA, private agencies or in the case of Labadi, by

a community-based organisation (La Mansaamoo Kpee). Quasi-public organisations such as SSNIT, the University of Ghana, (Legon), and the security services; (army, police, prisons, etc.) have their own liquid waste collection and transportation services to designated sites.

Institutional arrangements for collection and removal of liquid waste in the metropolitan area differ and can be summarised as follows: (i) cesspit emptying service for private households with a water carriage latrine system, (ii) public toilets' dislodgement for septic tank latrines, KVIPs, and WCs, (iii) surface containers for pan latrines, and (iv) the central sewage system. Each type of household facility has its own specific arrangement for removal.

The frequency of waste removal is directly linked to the type of facility and its capacity. Pan latrines are emptied twice or thrice a week to a central cesspit surface container, which in turn is removed every night, hence the name 'night-soil'. However, irregular liquid waste collection is the rule rather than the exception. Toilet facilities without a connection to the central sewage system (WCs, KVIPs, and septic tank latrines) are emptied when they are full, varying from once in six months to once in three years, depending upon their sizes and the number of people using them, as well as the frequency of visits

Who have an interest in toilets?

There are three types of stakeholders in the world of toilets: service providers, consumers and policy-makers. Our survey showed that service providers are satisfied with the present functioning of the institutional arrangements, but that 87% of the consumers prefer WCs connected to the sewage system. The position of policy-makers, as we will see, is ambivalent.

Service providers

There are three main types of service providers in Accra, namely (i) providers of toilet facilities, (ii) managers of toilet facilities, and (iii) those who remove and transport liquid waste (i.e. night-soil collectors and suction truck operators). Each of these has its own interests, depending on how much it gains from the service.

Public toilet service providers want more public patronage in order to make more profits. Public toilet operators are content with the institutional arrangement for provision, utilisation and payment, cost recovery, and cost-sharing arrangement, even though there is room for

improvement. The housing code requires every household to have its own toilet, but taking into account the profits earned from the operation of public toilets and the lucrative payments of user-fees for removal services, the discontinuation of public toilets is unlikely to occur in the near future. Suction truck operators want households to continue using septic storage tanks and public toilet operators want residents to continue relying on their facilities.

Consumers

Owners of toilets with a sewage connection pay fees and monthly charges to the Ghana Water and Sewage Corporation (GW&SC). For all other categories of toilet facilities without connection to the central sewage system, suction truck operators empty the storage tanks periodically. The removal of liquid waste is carried out by either the Waste Management Department (WMD) of the AMA or by private contractors. However, well-to-do households prefer WCs connected to the central sewage system to spare them the inconvenience and agony of searching for service providers to empty their septic storage tank whenever it is full. Besides, when the toilet is removed or dislodged, it leaves a terrible stench in the area for hours, if not days. Pan latrines need emptying twice or thrice a week. Irregular collection poses a severe sanitation problem, including stench. Flies are always abundant in the place. Besides, pan latrines have outlived their usefulness in the city and are a nuisance, particularly to the immediate neighbours. If toilet facilities are not emptied regularly, they pose health hazards and become breeding grounds for vectors of disease.

Though service consumers are relatively satisfied with the functioning of the institutional arrangements for provision and management of toilets, more suction trucks must be provided to prevent long queues for waste removal. Owners of public toilet facilities think the institutional arrangements for the provision, utilisation and payment (cost recovery, cost-sharing arrangements, etc.) are good. Users of public toilets, however, want cleaner and more pleasant toilets at affordable prices. The households prefer WCs connected to the sewage system. In their absence, they want efficient and affordable suction truck services. Pan latrine owners want efficient services from night-soil operators.

Policy-makers

Policy-makers would prefer central sewage facilities covering the entire metropolitan area. However, in the present economic situation, this

seems almost impossible. Although WCs connected to the central sewage system are preferred by all residents, poverty prevents most households from having their own toilet. For them, the public toilet remains the only choice. Policy-makers also acknowledge the high propensity for increased demand for public toilets as more and more houses spring up without their own toilet facilities. Besides, the growing number of homeless people will further increase the reliance on public toilets. To combat this problem, policy-makers search for better institutional arrangements for liquid waste management.

Policy-makers consider the institutional arrangements for provision, utilisation and payment (cost-recovery, cost-sharing arrangements, etc.) for liquid waste management as functioning well, even though they acknowledge that there is room for improvement.

Future policy dilemmas

Most respondents agreed that decentralisation in itself does not solve the problems of waste management unless it is backed with fiscal transfers to enable lower government structures to manage the responsibilities entrusted to them. Some residents want wider coverage by the central sewage system whilst others expect more from strict enforcement of housing regulations: new houses should have their own private toilets. At the same time, more and decent public toilets with neat and pleasant surroundings must be developed to take care of those without access to private toilets. As the operation of public toilets becomes more lucrative, so will the corruption in its revenue management. Ghana has a poor maintenance culture. The situation is worst in the waste management sector. The majority of the people think that the decision to lease or contract out the management of government-owned public toilets is the best policy so far. This has indeed led to improvements in the conditions of most of the public toilets. Privatisation has led to competition in the management of public toilets and suction truck service provision. This will improve even further, of course, if revenues for their maintenance are handled properly. Contract awards should therefore be made in terms of efficiency, transparency and capability.

The best policy for AMA seems a two-pronged one. Obviously, an overall policy of 'one house, one toilet' is not realistic for the time being. Financial constraints, both public and private, would not permit such a programme. Therefore, in the meantime, and for the poorer areas of the metropolis, the local government should embark on a thorough

improvement of public toilet facilities. 'Improvement' includes among other things: cleaner sanitary conditions, better management, easier access and more privacy. Privatisation and external contracting, if executed in a 'humane' and reasonable manner, can help to achieve this objective.

Public and private toilets in a rural community

Defective toilet facilities are particularly depressing in densely populated places such as the townships of Accra. The lack of facilities in rural places causes less direct inconvenience if 'nature' is near and mercifully hides and 'digests' the traces of human pollution. Moreover, many of the inhabitants are—at least part-time—farmers and have the possibility to relieve themselves on their way to the farm or on their farm. Cofie et al. (2005), in a study of peri-urban agriculture in Northern Ghana, found that most farmers (64% of a sample of ninety) welcomed human waste and used it as fertiliser on their land. Timmer et al. (1999) made similar observations in Mali. But in rural areas too, inefficient human waste removal may cause problems and irritation.

The small town of Kwahu-Tafo (in Southern Ghana), where one of the authors carried out anthropological fieldwork, may serve as an example of rural coping—and lack of coping—with inadequate liquid waste management.

In 1996, there were two public toilets, each with twelve squatting holes (six for each sex), in Kwahu-Tafo. This means there were just 24 public facilities for the entire town of about 5,000 inhabitants. Some people had to walk about ten minutes to reach a public toilet (to and fro twenty minutes). In addition there were semi-public toilets in two schools, which could be used by both teachers and pupils. The number of private latrines (almost all bucket latrines) was unknown. The sanitary inspector estimated their number at sixty. Finally, there were about ten private pit latrines and ten WCs, one in the chief's house, the others in the Catholic mission and the teachers' bungalows of the Technical School.

In and around public toilets

It is impossible to say how many people were in fact using the public toilets. Estimates varied from one-third to eighty percent of the population, which in absolute figures would be 1,000 to more than 4,000

people. Unknown is also the number of people who did not use toilets at all but eased themselves in the 'bush' at the edge of town or on the way to their farm. Some people defecated into a plastic bag and dumped the bag behind the public toilet or somewhere out of sight (so-called 'flying toilets').

The combination of plastic and human faeces is no doubt the most appalling form of pollution taking place in Ghana. Apparently some people view the plastic bag as a handy, portable and disposable, private toilet. It seems an attractive compromise: one can defecate at home and yet one is not stuck with the unpleasant presence of a permanent toilet in the home.

If we take a conservative estimate of forty percent of the people visiting the public toilet, it means that every day, about 2,000 people used 24 holes, that is almost ninety per hole, per day. Taking into account that both toilets were closed from about 9 pm until 5 am, one can conclude that the holes were occupied every five minutes. On the average both public latrines would receive about 1,000 visitors per day. When we discussed this with the caretaker of one of the latrines, however, he estimated a number of only about 200–300. He based his calculation on his daily income. Whatever the exact number, it is not surprising that there are queues early in the morning as most people prefer to ease themselves before they start the day.

For elderly people the way to the public toilet seems particularly uncomfortable. It may be far and the conditions do not befit their status of respected elder. Most elders therefore used a private latrine, either in their own house or in that of a kind neighbour. They were also likely to avoid the morning rush hour if they had to go to the public toilet (cf. Van der Geest 2002a).

Visiting a public toilet is not 'free'. The caretaker of the toilet (who is also responsible for cleaning the place) took twenty cedis (about US\$ 0.01) from each visitor. In that way the old coins, which have lost nearly all their value, were still useful (the same amount was charged for a bucket of water from the public tap). The caretaker of one public toilet was observed sitting in a small kiosk with a pile of cut newspapers in front of him. He handed each customer one sheet and received twenty cedis. If customers brought their own paper, he said, they only had to pay ten cedis. Each day he had to pay 3,000 cedis to the sanitary inspector. He could keep whatever he earned above that amount. Funerals and other busy days were golden times for him.

The privatisation of public toilet management has certainly improved conditions. The squalor that the author noticed about two decades earlier, when the public toilets were free and under the responsibility of the local authority had disappeared. The place was relatively clean but the immediate surroundings had become a dumping place for all kinds of dirt. First there was the town's official refuse dump (*sumina*), which was about fifty meters away from the toilet. Between 6 and 7 in the morning there is a constant traffic of children and women carrying the waste they swept from their compound and dumping it on the *sumina*. Right behind the toilet another 'sumina' had come into existence: town inhabitants emptied their chamber pots there, the labourers who cleaned the KVIP put its contents there, and—worst of all—some people brought their faeces in plastic bags and deposited them at the same spot. They did this usually at night when no one could see them. As we mentioned before, the combination of plastic with faeces is particularly pernicious as it prevents the faeces from decomposing.

Private bucket latrines

The sanitary and cultural conditions surrounding the private bucket toilet also deserve our attention, although no one has ever conducted a systematic survey of them. In 1994 the buckets were emptied every week for 800 cedis a month. That sometimes buckets overflowed may be due to the fact that the owner failed to pay his monthly dues or that the work force could not cope with their task. A man, who is referred to as *Kruni*,⁴ emptied the buckets in the night. *Krufòò* earned 50,000 cedis per month, according to the sanitary inspector. I suspect that they got some extra rewards from the different houses they serve.

Natives of the town would never think of performing this kind of dirty work "...even if they paid me ten times as much", as one man stated. The work is extremely unpleasant. The *Kruni* carries a container on his head in which he empties the bucket. He has a broom to clean the bucket and a lantern to find his way. The bucket is behind a small door on the outside of the house. He has to carry the container for a long distance to a dumping place on the outskirts of the town.

The *Krufòò* are literally 'people of the night'. They are the personification of the local horror of shit and have to make themselves and

⁴ A *Kruni* (plural: *Krufòò*) was originally someone from Sierra Leone, but presently most night-soil collectors are from Northern Ghana or Burkina Faso.

their load invisible. Just opposite the window of the room where I was staying was the bucket of the neighbour. Once a week I woke up when the *Krumi* came to empty the bucket, not because of the noise he made—he moved as silently as a mouse—but because of the stench drifting into my room.

It is unlikely that there will be any *Krufò* in the near future. Those who are doing the work are getting old and no one wants the job anymore. Their children attend school and have other ambitions. In 1998 there was only one *Krumi* in Kwahu-Tafo. The man was getting old and could hardly cope with the work. He had no successor. Two years later we held some interviews with him and observed his style of working and his way of protecting himself against the stench and the dangers of his job. By then he was sharing the work with another *Krumi* (Van der Geest 2002b). It is unlikely that all bucket latrines will have been replaced by pit or KVIP latrines (as the official policy stipulates) by the time these two men stop their work as night-soil collectors.

Discussion and conclusion: Governance of daily life

There is hardly any activity, which involves so directly governance of daily life, as the daily visit to a toilet. Defecation should take place everyday in Ghana. One 'missed day' constitutes a health risk in the popular cultural perception (Osei 1987; Van der Geest 2003). If we accept human 'well-being' as the best criterion of good governance, sanitation presents itself as a crucial test of governance. In the quality of toilet facilities we discern medical as well as social and political indicators of welfare. Toilets are significant markers of social status (Jenkins 1999; Jenkins & Curtis 2005) and political power. Various authors, from Douglas (1966) to Curtis (1998), Lea (1999), Green (1999) and Gunawan (2005), have argued that experiences of dirt and cleanliness have far-reaching consequences for self-esteem, social identity and physical and mental health. What conclusions can be drawn from the two cases in this paper?

Our observations on the management of human waste in Accra as well as in the rural community of Kwahu-Tafo show a lack of concern and initiative with regard to sanitation both from the government and the local community. It is mainly the 'invisible hand' of small entrepreneurs that succeeds in bringing about modest improvements in the quality of sanitation. Let us briefly look at the different actors.

Proper sanitation, one would expect, is one of the most convincing legitimisations of politics. Individual initiative can hardly achieve building effective infrastructural facilities to dispose of human waste, but state resources can. Public authorities have the 'chance' to prove their concern about the well-being of their citizens by providing sanitary amenities and thus strengthening their political support in the community. That 'chance', however, is hardly utilised. Local authorities, both in urban and rural areas, have a poor record when it comes to the building and maintenance of sanitary facilities.

Three of the four reasons suggested by Gewald (2000: 144) to account for the lack of political will to improve sanitary conditions in Windhoek almost one hundred years ago, still apply to Ghana today. Financial constraints are obvious factors—or excuses—to explain the government's inertia in sanitary matters. Most shocking is the fact that the racist attitude of the South African government towards the Herero population in the 1920s can still be detected in the discriminatory behaviour of Ghanaian politicians to the poor members of their society. Having access to their own clean private toilets, they close their eyes to the squalor of public facilities on which their less fortunate co-citizens rely. "Squeamish unease" and outright discrimination conveniently merge into politics of neglect (see also Frantzen & Post 1999).

Surprisingly, local inhabitants and users of public facilities also do little to improve the situation. If good governance involves both 'governors' and ordinary citizens, we may conclude that both sides lack initiative in this respect. We call this lack of initiative 'surprising' because it seems to contradict a strong cultural concern about cleanliness as a physical and moral state. During our visit to the public toilets in Accra people complained bitterly about the authorities' lack of concern and their failure to improve sanitary conditions, but they themselves showed no initiative to do something about it either. Their concern about cleanliness did not motivate them to take sanitary governance into their own hands; it rather seemed to discourage them from doing anything. Elsewhere one of us (Van der Geest 1998) has proposed that cultural rules of cleanliness have led to the paradoxical situation that people cope with the daily confrontation with dirt by keeping defecation at bay, both geographically and mentally. Governance of sanitation is mainly a matter of not thinking about it. Ironically, this applies to political authorities as well as to local inhabitants.

Entrepreneurs who are able to make a profit out of the management of public toilets and the collection of human waste from private bucket

latrines provide the best 'governance'. The slight improvements, which have been achieved in the management of liquid waste, seem to be mainly the result of the incentives of privatisation. Private caretakers of public toilets have tried to make the visit to the toilet less unpleasant by keeping the place relatively tidy. In densely populated areas ownership of toilet services has now become an attractive asset and may lead to strong entrepreneurial and political competition (Ayee & Crook 2003). Examples of this entrepreneurial development have been reported from Accra (Obirih-Opareh 2001), the rural town of Kwahu-Tafo (this article) and from the city of Kumase (Frantzen & Post 1999; Post 2001).

The performance of the night-soil collector (van der Geest, 2002b) is another example of private enterprise. Ironically, it is the inadequacy of public services responsible for the further disposal of human waste, which thwarts the good performance of the toilet manager. In Accra failure to empty the storage tanks in time causes an overflowing of the toilet holes. In Kwahu-Tafo they deposit the contents of the KVIP tank right behind the toilet turning the place into a mess.

From the limited evidence of our observations in Accra and Kwahu-Tafo we are inclined to conclude that both policy-makers and users of public toilet facilities have their 'reasons' to remain inactive with regard to the improvement of public toilets but that some effect may be expected from the privatisation of public toilets. Privatisation should not be restricted to the management of the facility, however, but also include the further removal of liquid waste.

Organising the use of human waste for compost/fertiliser seems an interesting option that serves two purposes: waste disposal and manure, provided it is carried out without causing harm to human health. Unfortunately, the mere idea—though widely accepted in East Asian countries—is disgusting to the Ghanaian population. Ironically, it is already practised surreptitiously in many places, apparently without the knowledge of consumers and authorities. Good governance of daily life in both urban and rural Ghana could thus lead to both better sanitation and agricultural production, if politicians *and* the general public are able to 'change' their minds.

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RECLAIMING POLITICS IN THE BUREAUCRATIC SPACE OF A BURUNDIAN REFUGEE CAMP IN TANZANIA

Simon Turner*

Refugee camps are carefully governed spaces, marked by the humanitarian imperative to help what is conceived as the helpless victims of war. In this managed, secluded and bureaucratic space politics is perceived by the humanitarian agencies in charge as divisive and destructive of the social fabric of the refugee community which is considered volatile in the first place.¹ In this paper I argue that despite these attempts to stamp out politics, camp life is highly politicised. If one goes beyond the surface of apparent order and homogenised space, one finds a place that is teeming with conflict, power hierarchies and violence, as refugees seek to recreate political subjectivities. Politics creates divisions and ruptures but it also creates order and meaning for the refugees as they attempt to come to terms with life in the bureaucratic non-place that relief agencies have created for them.

I argue that due to its clandestine nature, political opinion is expressed mainly through rumour mongering and closely linked to criminal activities and violence. In the following I explore how violent events in the camp are interpreted through rumours that differentiate the camp into hierarchically ordered spaces; hot spots and cool places, places of mobility and action and places of docility and stagnation, safe havens and dangerous territory, areas for friends and for enemies. In this way, the camp is recaptured and begins to be a place that can be interpreted and understood. This is a highly politicised process.

The setting is Lukole Refugee Camp in Northwestern Tanzania where roughly 100,000 Burundian Hutu refugees had lived for up to five years at the time of my fieldwork (1997–98). UNHCR was in charge of running the camp, assisted by ‘implementing partner’ NGOs. In many ways, Lukole is a prime example of state-of-the art humanitarian relief work. Not only did the relief agencies supply the

* The author is Senior Researcher and Head of the Research Unit ‘Migration: Management, Development and Conflict’ at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen.

¹ See also Turner, Simon (2001).

refugees with food, clean water and health facilities against all logistical odds. They also were keen on implementing the latest policies that had been hatched in Geneva, Brussels and Oxford; sustainability, refugee participation, women's empowerment and community development. As I have argued elsewhere (Turner 2001), such attempts at empowering the refugee community may be understood as biopolitical ways of governing the camp. The governmental techniques of UNHCR are similar to other modern biopolitical regimes, usually associated with the liberal welfare state, as has been so aptly explored by the Foucauldian governmentality school (Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999; Foucault 1978; Hindess 2001). This mode of governing through self-government is also an anti-politics machine, not only in the sense proposed by Ferguson (Ferguson 1990), relying on technical solutions such as efficient health care, head counts, water and sanitation planning and so forth.² It also relies on strengthening 'the community' without politicising it. In this paper I show how such attempts at empowering the community while voiding it of political subjectivity fail as refugees repoliticise the camp in diverse, clandestine ways.

The death of a wealthy refugee

On March 26th 1998 I attended a meeting with street leaders, NGOs and UNHCR in Lukole A,³ in which the issue of security was being taken up by UNHCR's protection officer. He was telling them that important people; leaders; 'some of you sitting here' were hosting Burundians from Burundi who were not officially registered in the camp. 'Please tell these people to go to Mbuba⁴ to be scanned and registered. Some of these people that you are hosting have been caught for making an illegal training facility, abduction and torture'. He was clearly hinting at political activities in the camp and at the rumour that camps in Tanzania were being used as bases for the rebels in Burundi. But he also linked it to a general deterioration of security in the camp.

² Jennifer Hyndman (2000) has some very illustrative accounts of such systems in the refugee camps in northern Kenya.

³ The camp is administratively split in Lukole A and B. As we shall see, these two sections have very different histories and therefore also different politics.

⁴ Registration site for new arrivals.

Crime levels during the past three weeks had been as high as they had in April the previous year.

The night between the 24th and the 25th March a man was shot dead in his blindé and robbed of 375 000 shillings.⁵ The same night the wealthy refugee was killed, another shooting had taken place a few hours earlier in the same area of the camp. Burundians from the camp must have been involved, the protection officer said. They knew that this man had money (Field notes 26.03.98).

The murder happened close to where my assistant lived, and he had been up half the night trying to help. We discussed what it was all about. The facts were that he was shot dead at two o'clock in the morning of the 25th of March. He was a farmer, not a businessman, and was known to be very wealthy. He left two widows. Apart from these basic facts, things got very blurred and it became difficult to understand why he was actually killed. The event was frightening for neighbours and others in the camp. They asked themselves what it meant, whether it could happen to them next and how to avoid it. In order to find some kind of certainty, in order to determine the risk of being the next target and apply strategies to reduce it, people in the camp tried to fill in the gaps wherever the facts stopped short of providing answers. This was done through rumours.⁶

This is not just a question of inadequate factual knowledge about the event. Rumour mongering cannot be prevented by providing sufficient objective knowledge, as UNHCR seems to presume. In rumour mongering, meaning is given to an event that perhaps never had a meaning. The rumours try to uncover patterns of violence, even if these patterns may not exist. In this way the meaninglessness and the arbitrary nature of violence is made sense of, harnessed and made manageable.

The UNHCR protection officer made the first connection—hence laying the ground for local theories and rumours—by mentioning another shooting earlier the same night. Secondly, by mentioning political activity, he opened up the possibility that it might be a politically motivated murder. This was further accentuated by mentioning the

⁵ Roughly 600 USD.

⁶ Feldman argues that rumours occur when the taken for granted order of things break down. They do not only try to make sense of the past but also be prognostic about the future (Feldman 1995).

crime levels of April 1997, when violence was the result of political rivalry between the two main political parties in the camp; Palipehutu (Partie pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu) and CNDD (Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie).

Rumours began to circulate that it was a politically motivated murder that had been disguised to look like a simple robbery. UNHCR's security officer claimed at an interagency meeting that the recent violence was due to Palipehutu killing and robbing CNDD members (Field notes, 08.05.98). This conviction was shared by many CNDD sympathisers in the camp (e.g. Jean-Claude 19.05.98). Others claimed that it was Rwandans hiding in the bush who were stealing and robbing (Field notes 21.05.98).⁷ A third theory held that the farmer was the victim of a jealous husband, as explained by the two young men below.

His second wife is Rwandan and had been married to a Rwandan soldier. When the Rwandans were told to leave, the soldiers hid in the bush. They did not want to return. So this rich Burundian "married" the soldier's wife. Now the soldier has been sending messages that he wants his wife back. Perhaps it was him that killed the rich Burundian farmer. (Steven and Mousa 27.03.98)

Discussing the security situation almost two months later with two CNDD supporters who lived in the same area as the killing, I realised the complexity of the issue.

Someone has been robbed in street 7. They heard gunshots. Fifteen goats were stolen off an old man. They agree that streets 1–9 in Lukole A are the worst hit by the recent violence. Apart from the police and the security guards, the refugees themselves have also begun to do *urundo* (night watches). One of them has moved his massive ghetto blaster to another part of the camp. Other wealthy refugees have chosen to leave the area, and stay with friends elsewhere, they say.

I ask whether it is somehow linked to politics. 'Oh yes', they say. 'It is only CNDD members that are targeted. These Palipehutu members are never robbed, not even the rich ones. They have not left the area and they do not take part in *urundo*. They just stay in bed at night.' (Diary 19.05.98)

As with the earlier murder of the wealthy farmer, these events triggered intense speculation and rumours. They were linked to the first murder and interpreted in terms of space, politics and crime. The rumours were

⁷ When the Tanzanian authorities forced the Rwandans out of the country in late 1996, an unknown number of them went into hiding in the surrounding bush.

attempts to explain what had happened but they were also prognostic, as Feldman (1995) claims is a characteristic of rumour. They try to predict whether it could happen again and to whom it could happen. The rumour was that Streets 1–9 were insecure, so people living there took their precautions and did night watches. Rumour also had it that the man had been murdered by thieves, so the wealthy left the area or moved their valuables (such as ghetto blasters). Yet other rumours held that he was shot for political reasons by Palipehutu, so CNDD sympathisers would take extra care. Finally, a rumour circulated claiming that he was shot by a jealous husband. This rumour relegates the event to the realm of the personal, the unique and the exceptional. In this way, it is of little concern for other refugees and is unlikely to happen again. However, with the continued violence two months later, this interpretation lost its relevance.

The rumours that emerged in relation to this event attempted to stabilise the world for the refugees, and to cover the gap that the murder had created.⁸ But they were not just ‘wide awake dreaming’ (Feldman 1995). The phantasmic attempts to cover the traumatic event were mediated by the structuring principles of the symbolic order; in other words the rumours fit into larger interpretative schemes concerning the role of politics, the position of Rwandans and ideas of safe spaces in the camp. In short, the murder of a wealthy refugee temporarily destabilised the taken-for-granted order of things and the subsequent rumours, which were attempts to stabilise it again, drew on a number of already known understandings of society. But the outcome of these interpretations was not given *a priori*. The interpretations of violence and space were politically structured and hence part of intense struggles to define the truth. In other words, rumours about singular events were incorporated into larger discourses that attempted to hegemonise the political field and structure the camp.

Often the three dimensions—politics, crime and space—would intermingle in people’s understandings of the event. For instance, the CNDD sympathiser who saw it as Palipehutu’s deed, also disclaimed

⁸ It is increasingly acknowledged in social theory that violence is to be treated as integral to the social rather than as an aberration, and can thus be explored like any other social phenomenon. However, as Balibar has argued (Balibar 1998), violence always contains an ‘excess’—what he terms cruelty—something that cannot be contained within the power-violence nexus. I argue that it is this excess that jolts the symbolic order and needs patching up through rumour.

Palipehutu as a political party and called its supporters a bunch of gangsters. So, although CNDD members were allegedly targeted, the motive of the killers was more about personal enrichment than political disagreement, he claims. In this sense, he is questioning the political commitment of his opponents and reducing them to someone who lives 'off' politics rather than 'for' politics.⁹ Similarly, they reflect on the spatial distribution of violence and safety in the camp, claiming some areas to be safer than others and linking this to the area's exposure to Palipehutu elements. Thus the political, social and spatial structures of the camp are actually reified through these rumours about a specific event. However, the event also causes them to readjust the symbolic order; the taken-for-granted structures in society. Lukole A used to be considered safe in this order of things. Previously, violence was associated with Lukole B. However, the robberies and murders in Streets 1–9 in March and April 1998 disturbed this pattern and made it necessary to come up with new explanations about violence. It is to this spatial differentiation that we now turn.

The political history of the camp

The rumours around the event of the wealthy farmer's death illustrate that the event was interpreted according to certain spatial hierarchies. Very soon the whole security issue became a question of where it was safe to be and where the troublemakers came from. The concept of trouble and danger is interpreted spatially and there is a constant struggle to define which part of the camp is the most violent and/or what the cause of the violence is. The internal differentiation of the camp into safe havens and no-go areas has a history that is closely linked to political rivalry.

Lukole A was established in January 1994 in response to the first wave of refugees that fled after the assassination of president Ndadaye in October, 1993. It is told in the camp that this first wave came from all parts of the country and consisted of people who had reason to fear persecution due to their positions in society and in political life.

⁹ Bourdieu comments on Weber's classic distinction between living *for* and living *off* politics, by claiming that the two are in fact inseparable (Bourdieu 1991). However, for the political entrepreneur it is important to present himself as living *for* politics while his opponent is living *off* politics.

This is why CNDD is strong in Lukole A. A strong kernel of active politicians from Ndadaye's moderate Hutu party, Frodebu (Front des forces Démocratiques du Burundi) managed to more or less monopolise the camp.¹⁰

Most of the refugees in Lukole B had come from Kitali Hills camp¹¹ in January 1997. These refugees had typically fled Burundi later than those in Lukole A had. They had fled when civil war broke out in their commune, Giteranyi, close to the Tanzanian border.¹² As opposed to the first 'influx' of refugees, these had not been politically active; neither did they hold any prominent positions in the administration. They were mostly peasants fleeing *en masse* from a general state of violence and insecurity.

While the CNDD leadership in Lukole A was quick to establish something like a hegemonic position in the camp, with its interpretation of events becoming the only official one, the organised CNDD elite was less conspicuous in Kitali, leaving the field more open for alternative interpretations and discourses. Political infighting between Palipehutu and CNDD broke out in Kitali as both parties attempted to become 'the' party in the camp, representing the refugees and defining the truth about the conflict in Burundi. This culminated in late December 1996 when around 10 people were killed and another 10 went missing.

Once moved to Lukole B, the violence continued at a lower intensity and caused individuals to move from one part of the camp to another, thus homogenising the different spaces in terms of political affiliation. Large-scale violence was no longer needed. The fear and anticipation of violence, kept alive by rumours about violence, was enough to cause people to act accordingly and move from Lukole B to Lukole A of their own accord.

It was generally held that CNDD supporters were moving from Lukole B to A in order to avoid threats of violence and avoid being compelled to pay contributions to Palipehutu. As with the murder case in Street 9, there were a number of divergent interpretations of this

¹⁰ When a more radical faction of FRODEBU in exile, led by Leonard Nyangoma, broke away and created CNDD, they followed suit

¹¹ A refugee camp some 60 km away. Kitali Hills was closed when the Rwandan refugees were repatriated in December 1996.

¹² My survey of 464 adult refugees supports this theory, as do UNHCR census figures UNHCR Sub-office Ngara 1997 Preliminary Registration and Demography Report.

movement as well. Many NGO employees¹³ would claim that they were not political but had been threatened by bandits from Palipehutu—‘men with long coats (hiding knives)’ as they would say—to pay taxes.

By June 1997, the security situation had stabilised, with fewer refugees moving from Lukole B to A and fewer repatriating to Burundi. This relative peace lasted until late March 1998, the time when the wealthy farmer was shot in Street 9 and new rumours of violence emerged.

This brief account of the shaping of Lukole A and B as two separate spaces, shows a picture of relatively high levels of conflict and violence and of struggles to define what the violence is about. Furthermore, these rumours of violence were conceived in spatial terms, accusing this or that part of the camp for being behind all the trouble.

Creating and challenging the political field

As can be seen from the account above, party politics plays a large role in the spatial ordering of the camp. However, politics is not a fixed term either and much of the struggles taking place are not only about dominating the political field but also about defining it.¹⁴ They are struggles over who has the right to represent the community.

There appeared to be a group of young, semi-educated men that occupied a central position in the camp.¹⁵ They were centred around the market place, NGOs and UNHCR, and had privileged access to and control over flows of resources and information in and out of the camp. However, they were not bound together by their positions as NGO employees or as street leaders or businessmen. Networks of individuals appeared to transgress these categories and make up large networks of ‘big men’. These networks were built up around the two main political parties in the camp.

There is no doubt that these young men are ‘in it for the money’. The windfalls of being part of the ‘in crowd’ are not negligible. In this way claiming allegiance to a party is about establishing alliances, finding protection and establishing patron-client relations. In Lukole A it

¹³ My survey of 123 NGO employees show that there are relatively more NGO employees living in Lukole A than in Lukole B.

¹⁴ This analysis leans heavily on Bourdieu’s concept of the political field.

¹⁵ See Turner (1999).

made sense to ally oneself with a 'big man' from CNDD, in Lukole B with a 'big man' from Palipehutu. In this sense, it appears at first sight that the ideological content of the parties plays a minor role. However, being active in politics is about more than material gains.

The politicians are attempting to combat the sense of loss of social stability that they experience in the camp. They claim that they are fighting for the future of the nation and for the common future of the Hutu people rather than just sitting around doing nothing. In this manner, they achieve a sense of purpose and direction in a crumbling social and moral space. Although they defy the rules of UNHCR and the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) by organising clandestinely, they obey far more powerful laws; the rightful struggle of the Hutu people.

It would be beside the point to attempt to estimate to what degree these political networks are about personal gains or about 'true political ideologies' since the two are inseparable, as Bourdieu argues (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991). Politics is a mixture of both, with the political field in any given situation defining the positions that the parties may occupy. In Lukole, political rivalry—leading to people being killed or forced back to Burundi—was the irritation of relief agencies, Tanzanian authorities and refugees alike. Especially the latter would have preferred a unified front against the common enemy rather than this internal strife among Hutu. However, this political rivalry or competition is an important element of defining the political field and hence of defining the political parties. Through this competition and mutual positioning they manage to present themselves as the true political idealists and representatives of the people's interests as opposed to their opponents who are presented as mere selfish troublemakers. Rumours about rivals are about finding a position in the political field and about defining the field itself—defining the limits between 'good' and 'bad' politics—in the fragmented reality of the camp.

Delegitimising political opponents through rumour and slander

The most common accusation levelled against Palipehutu was that they were merely criminals, collecting taxes from poor refugees for their own consumption rather than the struggle, or that they were simply robbing people. A more sophisticated version goes that Palipehutu used to be better when Remy Gahutu, founding father of the party, was alive. He also allowed Tutsi membership, and the party enjoyed considerable support in the camps in Tanzania (Steven and Jean, 20.05.98). Refu-

gees used to gladly pay taxes to Palipehutu. However, after Gahutu died the party lost its popularity. Several reasons are given as to why this stopped. One is that the Hutu began supporting FRODEBU and later CNDD. Some say it was because Palipehutu became increasingly 'extremist'.¹⁶ Yet others claim that the refugees began to realise that the party leadership was misappropriating funds for themselves, and that the 'taxes' were not going to the cause but into the pockets of the leadership in the camp (SDA pastor 20.08.97).

These theories mostly came to me in the shape of rumours about specific events or persons rather than full-blown theories or explanations. For instance, Jean-Claude may ask rhetorically how 'certain Palipehutu leaders' can afford a car, several wives and cattle when they have no job and no shop (Jean-Claude 19.05.98). Obviously, he is referring to the camp chairman in Lukole B—a renowned Palipehutiste whom we had been talking about earlier in the interview. However, he has the prudence not to mention names. He goes on to explain that Palipehutu has found it increasingly difficult to levy taxes and has therefore gone into theft and robbery. In this way it is clear that Palipehutu politicians, in his opinion, are construed as not living *for* politics but merely living *off* politics. They cynically misuse the uneducated refugees' naivety to promote self-interests. Needless to say, Jean-Claude is a staunch CNDD supporter.

Rumours the other way—about CNDD—are of a slightly different character, presumably due to the fact that CNDD is actually dominant in Lukole. These rumours go more along the lines of CNDD being elitist without any connection to the masses. CNDD members are seen to promote their own interests through deceiving the outside world. This underdog ideology of Palipehutu tries to explain away the success of CNDD through a number of conspiracy theories. One persistent conspiracy theory holds that CNDD was actually the brainchild of Buyoya,¹⁷ and was created in order to split the Hutu. As the chairman

¹⁶ In Lukole the term vaguely implies that an extremist is excessive in his use of violence and is not willing to compromise. However, it also has a number of other negative connotations and has become an empty signifier that is used to delegitimise political opponents. It also relates to the conception that all Hutu are under suspicion from the international community as potential *génocidaires* (Turner 2002).

¹⁷ Burundi's (Tutsi) president 1986–1993 and 1996–2003. He was not the president at the time of CNDD's creation.

of Palipehutu, based in Denmark, Etienne Karatase, explained to me, the Tutsi president Buyoya gave Nyangoma (leader of CNDD at the time) weapons and money. In this way, it was possible for Nyangoma to buy good officers from Palipehutu (Karatase, July 1997). So although Nyangoma may have a lot of firepower and soldiers, he has been corrupted by Tutsi money and has sold his soul to the Tutsi, according to this conspiracy theory. Palipehutu, on the other hand, may have fewer weapons and fewer soldiers but the soldiers that are left have resisted the temptations of money and have managed to remain morally 'clean'. 'Nyangoma has no ideology' says Karatase.¹⁸

This theme of CNDD being morally corrupted by Tutsi power exists in other rumours as well. While CNDD members would pride themselves of being tolerant by having Tutsi members, Palipehutu supporters saw this as a big mistake, as these Tutsi infiltrated the party and sabotaged it from within. The same goes for the Hutu in the CNDD leadership who marry Tutsi women. This rumour plays on the age old stereotypes of beautiful Tutsi women, using their beauty to seduce Hutu into bondage.¹⁹ Again Palipehutu remains ethnically pure. By remaining pure, they may not have so much power at the moment but what they have is genuine. This relates to broader ethnic stereotypes. Palipehutu is conceived as the honest, salt-of-the-earth, people's party—the true Hutu. They may be losing out because of their honesty and simple manners. But they retain their Hutu values and remain true to their Hutu identity—rendering them pure. CNDD members on the other hand are cunning and speculative—apart from being educated and wealthy. All these traits are associated with Tutsi stereotypes.

Common to rumours about both parties is the idea that someone is pulling the strings and making the Hutu refugees fight among themselves instead of uniting against the common enemy. In other words, there is a sense of a master plan, a conspiracy against the Hutu in general

¹⁸ Ironically, it was rumoured in the camp that Karatase had sided with Nyangoma. First, some CNDD supporters used this rumour as 'evidence' that Palipehutu no longer existed (Diary 18.06.97). Later a Palipehutu supporter used it to prove that Kosani was the true leader who knew the harsh realities on the ground and who had managed to remain 'clean' while Karatase had been bought by CNDD (Diary 03.04.98).

¹⁹ Images of Tutsi women seducing Belgian UNAMIR soldiers appeared in the Rwandan media propaganda leading up to the genocide in 1994 (Chrétien 1995). This is also in line with the rumour that the Tutsi sent beautiful women to seduce president Clinton in the White House.

and the refugees in particular. Conspiracy theories about Tutsi empires and international plots thrive in the camp (Turner 2002; Turner 2004). The accusations against the other party in the camp are linked to these conspiracy theories in the sense that they try to show that the opponent is, willingly or not, a tool in the Tutsi's quest to divide and dominate (even eliminate) the Hutu.

Rumours about opponents are means of delegitimising the other and of manoeuvring in the political field, as both parties claim to represent the refugees. The effect of this manoeuvring is twofold: firstly it produces a political field, and secondly it helps to differentiate political space in the camp. This political space is closely interwoven with struggles about access to power and resources in the camp.

Good politics, bad politics and 'the community'

On May 2nd 1997 a population meeting was called by UNHCR with the participation of the camp commandant from the Ministry of Home Affairs, UNHCR, NGOs and refugees in Lukole A. This particular meeting had been called due to a deterioration in the security situation and to a petition submitted by the leaders, asking for the removal of the chief security guard for alleged misuse of authority.²⁰ This accusation was based on the fact that the chief security guard belonged to a different party from the majority of street leaders in Lukole A.

It was decided by UNHCR and the camp commandant before the meeting that the security guards should be phased out and new ones recruited. Similarly, elections for new leaders would be held. These decisions were to be conveyed to the population at the meeting. What is interesting for our purposes, is how the problem of political activity is construed in the discourse of the camp commandant and the UNHCR field officer. The camp commandant addressed the issue of criminal and political activity, as both were perceived to affect security. According to a UNHCR memorandum,²¹ he warned that the time for taking action on involvement in political activity was coming. UNHCR's field officer then relayed UNHCR's concern with security issues. She advised the

²⁰ Security guards are employed by UNHCR to assist the Tanzanian police in keeping law and order in the camp.

²¹ As these are internal 'Notes for the File', I cannot quote them directly.

refugees to refrain from activities that disrupt security and endanger 'harmonious social life' among the 'great majority of the refugee community' who fled their country 'in search of peace and security'.

She also advised the refugees to assess the political involvement of candidates so as to avoid election of individuals who would like to use the forum for furthering their political interest 'at the expense of innocent people.' She perceives politics as sordid, and political activity as disrupting the harmonious community. Politicians are driven by selfish interests rather than the interests of the common good, and if they are given the chance, a few such selfish individuals will destroy the life of the great majority of refugees who are 'innocent people'. She went on to give advice to the leader candidates. They should be ready to serve the people who entrust them with the responsibility of representing them on any forum. They should be ready to put aside their individual interests for providing service to the people they lead.

In her view, refugee participation in camp leadership is obviously supposed to be apolitical, with the leaders 'providing service to the people'. Street leaders are service providers who seek to comply with the common interests of the community as a whole rather than any particular interests of any specific group. Being void of politics, participation is also void of power relations and is merely a question of finding the optimal solution to the 'true interests' of the community. 'The community' is evoked as a counterweight to selfish political activity. To work for the community is to be self-sacrificing and disinterested, devoting oneself to the common good. It is assumed that empowering 'the community' will automatically serve the interests of the community as a whole.

Making community and fighting the evil of politics

How then do refugees relate to this perception of politics and the community and how does it affect the spatio-political differentiation of the camp?

At one level politics was seen by the camp population to be the source of evil, since it caused so much trouble, preventing ordinary people from getting on with life. At another level, it was the politics of the opponent that was seen to be the problem, paradoxically because it was not political enough. The politics of one's own party was about unselfish loyalty to 'the cause' and to the people. Thus politics is split between the sordid politics of the opponent and the benign politics of one's own party.

The camp chairman of Lukole B claims that he has banned all political activity in Lukole B, in order to 'get on with things'. He cooperates with the Tanzanian authorities, the security guards, the street leaders and the night watches in fighting crime, he says, and laments that the chairman in Lukole A is not keen on catching criminals or on cooperating with Lukole B. He claims to have banned all political activity in Lukole B, and that Palipehutu and CNDD help each other in combating crime instead of quarrelling. In other words, it is the others—those from Lukole A—who want to divide the people by introducing politics. He just wants the refugees to be safe, to cooperate and to combat troublemakers (Camp Chairman, Lukole B, 10.05.98). He is in other words claiming merely to want to serve 'the community' and supports UNHCR's perception that politics is selfish and divisive. This is, however, merely his own self-representation, and it was widely known that he supported Palipehutu. A CNDD supporter commented that it was true that the chairman had stopped political rivalry, but only by banning CNDD activity. People living in Lukole A and working in Lukole B, would take off their Ndadaye badges and their red, white and green caps (CNDD party colours) when they crossed the river that divides the two camps, while Palipehutu supporters would freely wear *kofias* (allegedly signalling Palipehutu support).

In Lukole A where CNDD dominated, the term 'extremist' was used about opponents. There was a sense that the politics of CNDD was more moderate, reasonable and more in line with international conventions. Thus it was perceived to be more justified and less problematic than the violent, extremist and marginalised politics of Palipehutu. So although both parties share a perception that the other party is the troublemaker, they do so in slightly different ways, positioning themselves differently in relation to the discourse of UNHCR.

The spatiality of lost Gemeinschaft

Generally speaking, people in Lukole A perceived those from Lukole B with a certain amount of disdain. The refugees in Lukole B were seen as uneducated peasants supporting what at best could be termed an extremist and racist party, run by a handful of criminals with guns. In spite of its violent reputation, Lukole B was perceived to be rather rural and stagnant. The fact that the people living there came from Giteranyi—a poor, underdeveloped commune on the frontier—probably only added to these stereotypes.

Along with this understanding, the refugees in Lukole A saw themselves as more in touch with modern life. Because Lukole A was closer to the road and Tanzanian villages, it had become the main centre for trade; also, most of the offices of international agencies were there. The educated elite, working for NGOs, tended to live in Lukole A as well. CNDD made use of this privileged access to the international agencies and its proximity to 'the action'. On the one hand, the educated young men who worked for the NGOs were able to present the NGOs with their version of events.²² On the other hand, the fact that they were working so closely with the international agencies caused these young partisans to adjust their political rhetoric—not in the sense that they were convinced by the sensibility of the relief agencies but because they sought recognition from them and from the international community as such. Thus they would talk of human rights, reconciliation, women's empowerment, etc. and would avoid talking about ethnicity.

In Lukole B the stereotypical portrait of Lukole A and B was not directly dismissed but rather turned upside down. The refugees in Lukole A were seen to be wealthy—'they live like *wazungu*' (white people)—and arrogant—'how do they know our problems when they only speak English and French?' The sweet and easy life in Lukole A, having access to jobs and business, had spoiled them and made them oblivious to the suffering of the masses, it was said in Lukole B. They were forgetting their Hutu-ness and their commitment due to wealth.

This ideology appealed to a certain sense of disgruntlement in a population that felt it was losing out in relation to the more established Lukole A population. In Lukole B people often complained that they were very poor and attributed this to the number of times they had been forced to move. Their plastic sheeting was worn down, and they had never had time to establish a business, start farming or find jobs with Tanzanian farmers or international agencies. Palipehutu clearly played on this sense of being underprivileged. In fact, a number of refugees from Kitali managed to get good jobs with NGOs in Lukole. But due to the prevalence of this ideology in Lukole B, they mostly moved to Lukole A. In this way, the underdog ideology became a self-fulfilling prophecy—ideology creates reality.

²² An international relief worker did admit to me that she probably had been biased in her interpretation of the violent events in Kitali December 1996. Most international staff were not aware of this, however, and simply believed the CNDD version.

In the perception of Lukole A as arrogant and wealthy lies also an idea that refugees in Lukole A have lost their true Hutu identity (the theme of purity is a leitmotif in much of Palipehutu's political ideology). Being rural and backward, people in Lukole B also have a sense of community, it is argued. The camp chairman in Lukole B describes how everyone here cooperates against crime, insinuating that the elite in Lukole A is too busy accumulating wealth and power and ingratiating itself with the international NGOs to bother with ordinary people. 'They'—the elite in Lukole A—clearly lack *Gemeinschaft*, in spite of (or because of) a successful *Gesellschaft*.

The market and the NGO offices are spaces of action, mobility and change, challenging the stigmatising and immobilising space of the camp. On the other hand, these spaces represent danger, a threat towards tradition, Burundi customs and the natural order of things. It is in line with this latter understanding that Palipehutu ideology positions itself and Lukole B as protectors of Hutuness.

UNHCR, NGOs and the Tanzanian authorities apparently also use these spatial stereotypes of the camp. In a meeting called by the Camp Commandant for influential refugees from Lukole A, UNHCR, MHA and the police in August 1997, the head of police was reprimanding them for continuing to fight with Lukole B. He told them that they should stop having these differences with Lukole B. *You think you are in the town while Lukole B is in the bush,*' he says. *'But in Lukole B they know how to co-operate and help with catching thieves. You could learn from them.'* (Field notes 13.08.97).

By using Lukole B as an example of community participation, he is trying to get the refugee leadership to forget their selfishness and individualism and sacrifice some of their pride for 'the community'. Lukole B is conceived as being less urban and civilised while having what they lack in Lukole A; namely a sense of 'community'. In other words, the population in Lukole A and B as well as the camp authorities operate with perceptions of 'the community'. This is related in different and often ambiguous ways to perceptions of good and bad politics. The politics of CNDD is seen as less bad than Palipehutu because it is perceived to be less archaic. On the other hand Lukole B, which houses Palipehutu, is seen to have more of a community spirit, exactly due to its reputation of being 'backward'. While the camp authorities waver between these perceptions, the refugees on both sides do their best to manoeuvre and present their own politics as benign and the opponents' as sordid.

Concluding remarks

In the fragmented, liminal space of Lukole, all refugees are assumed to be equal, constituting a homogeneous mass. However, historical circumstances around their time of flight and their itinerary, their social background and political developments shaped these people very differently. This is reflected in the various spaces of the camp where levels of wealth, health, education and safety vary dramatically from place to place. Other mechanisms of differentiation are, however, also at play.

In the political field, two parties claim to represent the true interests of the refugees, using rumours and defamation of character to delegitimise the opponent's claims. The struggle between CNDD and Palipehutu took the shape of a mixture of political struggles, criminal networks and personal feuds. These confrontations were violent at times. Violence was interpreted through rumours that linked it to space. In other words, the political struggles in the camp divide the refugees in bitter feuds. But they also give the camp a shape—however contested it may be—as opposed to the shapeless bureaucratic space of UNHCR governance. Rumours, politics, violence and space interface to create a differentiated and hierarchical order in the camp, thus enabling its inhabitants to start making sense of it. However, it is a precarious order that exists in Lukole. The initial shock of war and flight dislocated the taken-for-granted order of things and revealed its constructedness and inherent contradictions. The fact that even banal everyday events in the camp give rise to the most fantastic rumours and conspiracy theories, testifies to the fact that this initial shock still renders Lukole a fragile place that constantly needs re-ordering, re-stabilising and re-imagining.

While UNHCR attempts to empower the refugee community by voiding the camp of politics because politics is seen to be divisive, destroying the community spirit in the camp, the camp is teeming with political rivalry. But this is not simply about resistance to UNHCR. Many refugees also believe that political rivalry is destroying the refugee community. But whereas UNHCR's solution is to stamp out politics, the refugees paradoxically believe that the problem is that there is not enough politics. For them, true politics is not about selfishness and rivalry but about self sacrifice for the cause of the community. It is about living for politics rather than off politics. In this way, politics is sublime just as well as it is sordid.

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THE POLITICS OF TRANSFERRING AND MANAGING LAND IN THE 'NEW' SOUTH AFRICA

Wiebe Nauta¹

Introduction

This chapter aims to focus on the politics of transferring land in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In order to explore the governance issues involved in the context of such a land transfer it examines the changing relationship between a land sector NGO, called the Monti Rural Association (MRA),² the Provincial Department of Land Affairs (DLA) and members of a landless community³ in Gasela.⁴ *Governance* is understood as "...the actual practices of how interests are pursued and countered, authority exercised and challenged, and power institutionalised and undermined" (Le Meur and Lund 2003: 1). Besides the fact that this case may provide insight in local governance issues with regard to land, it may also aid us to identify more general trends in the changing relationship between civil society, the state and the market in a transforming South Africa. Incidentally, in order to understand this transformation, I would suggest to look beyond the scheme of apartheid and post-apartheid, by, instead, identifying three eras from the perspective of the progressive forces:⁵ *the struggle era* (the 1980s), *the freedom and consultation era* (1993–1996) and *the new realism era* (post-1996).⁶

¹ The author is employed by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Maastricht.

² The Monti Rural Association (MRA) is a pseudonym; also the names of staff members have been changed; the names of the communities that the organisation has been involved in have not been changed.

³ The term 'community' has problematic connotations of togetherness and solidarity. As social scientists we should be aware that 'communities' are full of contradictions, tensions and actors that may oppose each other.

⁴ This chapter is based on material from my dissertation.

⁵ Those who were initially involved in the struggle against apartheid.

⁶ In my view, the scheme 'apartheid' and 'post-apartheid' is not satisfactory when analyzing the role of the 'progressives' in recent South African history. Therefore, I propose to define three (partly overlapping) eras:

-- the struggle era (1980s): the progressive forces like NGOs and underground operatives of banned political parties were engaged in a 'struggle' against the apartheid regime;

With respect to NGOs I am especially interested in their roles as intermediaries—in this case mediating between the Gasela residents and the Department of Land Affairs—and their ability to engage in what I have termed *strategic translations*. In order to understand such translations I refer back to a classic article by Cohen and Comaroff (1976: 88) about *brokers*, in which the authors claim that “... *the management of meaning must be regarded as a fundamental property of political interaction...*”. Moreover, they assert that brokers may create a demand for their services and even provoke a sense of ‘indispensability’ (ibid.: 89) in the actors they mediate between. Since the management of meaning seems so important, an author like Nyamwaya may be right when he stated that in the field of health:

while in theory communities are supposed to play a leading role in the health-development process, the process is still largely controlled by government and NGO development “experts” who do not allow communities to play major roles (1997: 184).

In my opinion it is important to discover what shape such processes of control take in the land sector in South Africa and what the *tools of translation* are that are used by the NGOs, in order to ‘manipulate’ images that are relayed between the actors involved (Nauta 2004, 2006).

With regard to land in the South African context we have to keep in mind that, according to Mamdani (1996), the South African state should be recognised as another example of the colonial state in Africa that ruled by means of *decentralised despotism*. Apartheid and its ethnically defined Bantustans—or homelands—had a devastating effect on black land ownership. In the early nineteen nineties a population of fourteen

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- the freedom and consultation era (1993–1996): the transition period when the progressive forces enter legitimate politics and a coalition was forged between state institutions and non-governmental organisations. It begins when the parties agree on an Interim Constitution in December 1993. The leading document during this period is The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), produced by the ANC and its progressive partners;
 - the new realism era (post 1996): the Rainbow coalition falls apart as the National Party withdraws after it has accomplished negotiating the Constitution. Important element: the Property Clause. Does not want to be identified with progressive politics. The alliance realises that the time of dreaming is over and publishes a new macro-economic strategy as a result of the harsh confrontation with the world market: the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme. It is criticised by the left as being South Africa’s internal structural adjustment programme.

million black⁷ South Africans lived on 17 million hectares, or 13.7% of South Africa's land surface, while on the other hand 63% of the total South African land surface⁸ was owned by only 77,000 white farmers (Department of Land Affairs 1996 and Auerbach 1990).⁹ Not only do these figures illustrate the shocking inequalities caused by apartheid, they also demonstrate the dominance of private land ownership in the South African context. In fact, due to a fear of widespread expropriation, the entrenchment of private property rights in the new constitution became one of the major issues fought for by the National Party (NP) of F.W. de Klerk. As a result, during its two-year participation in the Government of National Unity (GNU)—headed by Nelson Mandela—, the National Party ultimately did succeed to protect these property rights of the minority in this manner. This is one of the reasons why the rhetoric of the market also penetrated the Land Reform Programme¹⁰ that was drawn up after the first democratic elections. Although, in the case of Gasela the land was formally owned by the state, market considerations still played an important role and complicated a smooth transfer of the land, as will be shown below.

The Land Reform Programme was formulated to transfer white-owned land to the black majority on a *willing-buyer willing-seller*¹¹ basis, with only very limited options for expropriation. However, as 'the poor' generally lacked the funds, an elaborate Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant scheme was set up for households. In the scheme 'a household'¹² was entitled to a maximum of R.15,000,¹³ which could be used to purchase land and, or, to realise improvements to land or housing. However, the amount was heavily criticised by progressive NGOs as it proved severely insufficient to buy white-owned land at commercial

⁷ Sadly, the apartheid history of South Africa forces us to employ terms and concepts like 'black', 'white' and 'coloured' that were crucial to the regime then, but still carry weight in present-day South Africa.

⁸ Or 77 million hectares out of a total of 122 million hectares.

⁹ Cited by Minnaar (1994).

¹⁰ The South African Land Reform Programme consisted of three pillars: Restitution, Redistribution and Tenure Reform.

¹¹ Africans could access land sold by 'white' commercial farmers, using a settlement subsidy of R.1,500 per household. As a result many Communal Property Associations (CPAs) were formed as about 100 households pooled their subsidies to buy one commercial farm.

¹² A problematic term that may hide power imbalances and can easily favour powerful—possibly male—family members.

¹³ Approximately \$ 2,400, which in 1999 was increased to R.16 000 (± \$ 2,600).

rates. One of the solutions was thought to be the establishment of Communal Property Associations (CPAs). In such CPAs—formed by a group of poor people—Land Acquisition Grants could be pooled in order to access commercial farms. Murray, for example, argued that forms of group ownership “... *perhaps, offer the best opportunity at the present time of partially bridging the chasm between the rhetoric of benefiting ‘the poor’ and the reality of practical exclusion*” (1996: 242). However, CPAs ultimately proved to be a problematic answer as group ownership and management created severe difficulties in ‘communities’. As will be shown below, similar difficulties were experienced in Gasela even before the land was actually transferred.

One of the complicating factors in the thinking about land is the fact that persistent myths about the rural population in South Africa abound. Authors like Bernstein (1996), Murray (1996) and Bank (1997) have published inspiring accounts about the post-apartheid agrarian situation and shown how such myths may cloud our understanding. In the case of Gasela, for example, the Monti Rural Association quite pragmatically adopted a political strategy that involved depicting the Gasela residents—with few agricultural skills, a lack of resources and a problematic history with managing a common resource—as potential commercial farmers. This was done to convince the Department of Land Affairs, which had adopted the idea of ‘economic viability’ as the most important criterion in the late nineteen nineties, to transfer the land to the community. However, as will be shown below it might be much more realistic to think of these rural residents as a rural proletariat (Bank 1997).

To sum up, this chapter looks at governance issues with regard to land; the role of an NGO as a broker mediating between a powerful government department and a landless community; the impact of market forces on the question of land redistribution in South Africa; and, the images about the rural population in the Eastern Cape that may cloud our understanding.

The Monti Rural Association

The establishment of the Monti Rural Association (MRA) followed the conclusion of the Surplus People Project, a countrywide South African initiative by academics, aimed to research and publicise forced

removals¹⁴ in the 70s and 80s. The organisation was set up in 1982¹⁵ by Grahamstown academics that focused on the support to the 'communities' that had been removed, or remained under threat of removal in what is now known as the Eastern Cape¹⁶ (see: Map 1). From an organisation initially mainly run by volunteers—during the *struggle era* some were shadowed, arrested and even tortured by the security forces—the NGO grew in the 1990s to become a leading actor in the Eastern Cape, specialised in land- and rural development-related issues. During the *freedom and consultation era* MRA moved to the city of East London and entered cooperative arrangements with the new government, especially aiding the newly formed government structures in (re-)formulating and implementing post-apartheid land reform policies. However, what started as exciting and fruitful cooperative arrangements, after several years turned sour. As the government seduced many staff members to leave the NGO sector in order to work for the state, a true 'brain drain' was the result.

Moreover, as the government increasingly adopted a market-oriented ideology in the *new realism era* after 1996, the MRA slowly retreated to its original civil society niche, which led to a period of mild estrangement. However, under pressure of foreign donors in the late nineties, the MRA also became more involved in market-oriented activities.

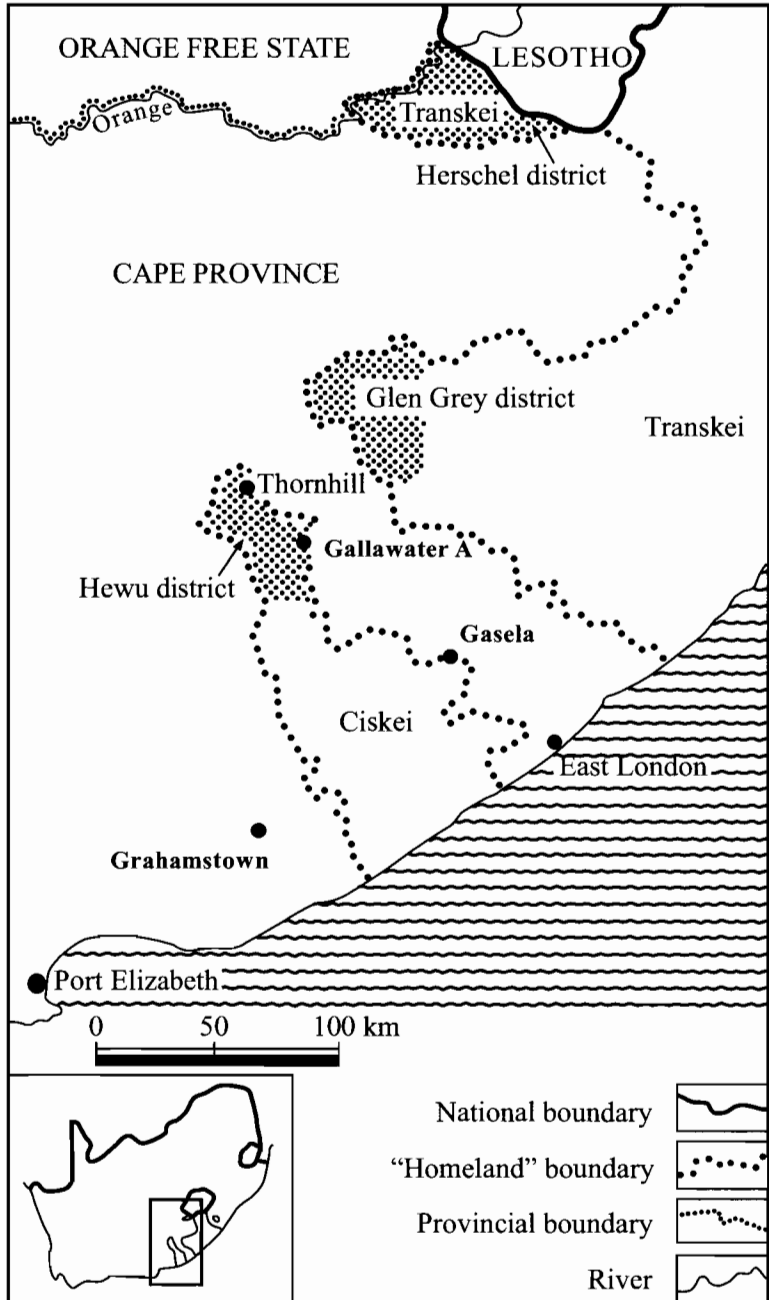
Gasela: an 'abandoned' farm

On the road from East London to Johannesburg a large signpost to the left of the road points to the Gasela railway station. A bumpy

¹⁴ The Surplus People Project (SPP) was established in February 1980. In several university towns in South Africa—Cape Town, Grahamstown, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg—concerned academics and community workers joined forces "...to co-ordinate and initiate research projects into population relocation in South Africa" (SPP, 1983, p. xix). Most importantly, the project aimed to publicise these research findings so that the world would become aware of the fact that 3,5 million people had been forcefully removed from their land since 1960 and many were still under threat. In 1983, after years of research, the project yielded a five-volume report, titled: *Forced Removals in South Africa*.

¹⁵ First under the name Albany Resettlement Association (ARA) and in 1983 under the name Albany Rural Association (ARA). In 1993 the name was changed to Monti Rural Association (all are pseudonyms).

¹⁶ In the early eighties the Eastern Cape consisted of part the Cape Province, and two Bantustans: Transkei and Ciskei, each consisting of several scattered areas.



(Source: adapted from Ramphela 1991: 40)

Map 1: The Eastern Cape during apartheid.

dirt-road not only leads to this small rural train station but also to Gasela (See: Map 1), a farm that is situated between the road and the railway and that was once called 'Mooifontein'.¹⁷ Significantly, this railway line represented, in the nineteen-eighties, not only a boundary between two parts of Mooifontein farm, but also the 'international border' between the Republic of South Africa and the Ciskei—a Bantustan with a notoriously oppressive regime (e.g. Manona 1980).

One of the most remarkable features in the morning is the quiet. One hears the traffic on the road, but the entire farm seems deserted. The colonial-style red-roofed farmhouse looks abandoned and is surrounded by a prison-like two and a half meter barbed wire fence. The roof over the braai¹⁸—area has fallen down and the garden is overgrown with high grasses and weeds. However, on closer inspection some activity can be observed in the yards of the thirty odd 'African' huts and mud houses that surround the farmhouse. A few women are hanging clothes to dry on fences, some are cooking and small children are playing in the dust. Men seem virtually absent. In the afternoons, however, Gasela seems to come to life. The many children have returned from school and usually the younger ones are playing soccer on a dusty patch in front of the barbed wire fence, while young men practice rugby on a relatively well-maintained rugby field next to the farmhouse.

What is surprising is the fact that few farming activities seem to take place. Yes, next to the huts are several small well-kept gardens with maize, beans and pumpkins—one should probably call them 'subsistence' plots. Furthermore, some cattle roam the farm during the day and a few people keep chickens and pigs. But there is no sign of intensive agriculture or stock keeping. The fields lie fallow and are partly overgrown with bushes and young trees and the cowsheds near the farmhouse are empty and look dilapidated. Moreover, apart from a broken-down tractor and an old diesel water pump, all farm implements seem to have vanished. No ploughs and harrows. Walking around one wonders whether this is the farm that the Monti Rural Association has described as a potentially thriving agri-village...

In its 1996 report, *Gasela Proposal to the Department of Land Affairs*, the MRA is very clear about the agricultural potential of the land and the wishes of the community:

¹⁷ Pretty Fountain or Spring.

¹⁸ The South African word for barbecue, and a 'white' national pass-time.

...MRA proposes that Gasela be treated as a *pilot project for the establishment of an agricultural settlement* (my emphasis) which aims to meet the food requirements of the community as well as provide a cash income which provides residents with a livelihood... (1996: 8).

and:

... The Gasela community is a stable and cohesive community who want a rural lifestyle where their main source of income is agriculture... (ibid.: 9).

therefore:

The Gasela community should be given ownership rights to the land on which they reside—Portion 1 of Mooifontein (89 ha)...(ibid.: 12).

According to figures presented by the Monti Rural Association, 218 people can be regarded as Gasela residents.¹⁹ On the farm 52 settlement sites were identified, of which 30 were actually occupied (MRA 1997: 11).

However, the Department of Land Affairs did not seem to be convinced by the arguments in the MRA report. The department was reluctant to transfer the land and demanded more detailed information concerning the agricultural potential of the people and the land in Gasela. It, therefore, contracted the MRA to undertake more thorough research, which was presented in *the Report on Gasela November 1997*. In this report the MRA also critically queried the skills available in the community:

Although there are different interests in Gasela, the majority of respondents prioritise agricultural enterprise, both as a productive option and in terms of the settlement ramifications. Although there is some level of agricultural skill in the community, especially in vegetable production and soil preparation, it should be acknowledged that there is a shortage of the range of skills that is required for a successful commercial enterprise (1997: 14).

Nevertheless, the MRA, still saw a good opportunity for farming and expected that:

...if 20 hectares is allocated to cabbages and 20 hectares to potatoes then the resulting estimated annual gross margin will be R.320,974²⁰ per annum (...). In very hard, material term, if one divides the projected

¹⁹ Some of who live in other places (like Johannesburg or Cape Town) for part of the year.

²⁰ Approximately \$ 55,000.

cash flow by the number of extended households, then each extended household will benefit by approximately R.10,000 per annum... (ibid.: 25).

Thus, the MRA remained convinced in its main recommendations, that "Gasela should be swiftly transferred to its residents" (ibid.: 28).

As a social scientist and an agricultural scientist,²¹ I felt that this image of Gasela—a potentially thriving agricultural settlement for its income mainly dependent on agricultural production—was not consistent with what I encountered on the farm during fieldwork in 1996, 1997 and 1998. Although my main focus of study was the changing role of the MRA, I spent two weeks, over a period of three months, in the Gasela community, in order to study community dynamics without the NGO being present.²² What was the background of these people? What experiences did they have with communal activities and why were they not cultivating—or 'ploughing'²³ as the people themselves would say—the land on a larger scale? In order to answer some of these questions it proved useful to go back a few years.

A short history of the Mooifontein farm

Mooifontein, or Gasela as it is referred to nowadays, was a typical white-owned farm in the sixties and seventies. The white farmer lived in the large 11-roomed house, while the black farm labourers, with their families, lived in a cluster of roundavels²⁴ and mud houses at a distance of about seventy-five meters from the main house on a rocky patch of land. The men worked as labourers while some of the women worked

²¹ The author holds a BSc in Tropical Plant Production and an MSc in Rural Development Studies.

²² During my fieldwork I realised that there was a danger of getting a distorted view of the role of land sector NGOs in the rural areas. As I had only visited communities when the NGO staff went on field trips and conducted dynamic workshops, the research could possibly suffer a dynamic bias. Pondering this dilemma I came up with the idea that in order to study the role of NGOs in these rural settings it was also important to study the absence of these organisations. For the purpose of my research I chose two very different locations: Thornhill and Gasela. Thornhill being an immense area with thousands of inhabitants and Gasela being a small farm with approximately thirty ex-farm worker households. Thus, in 1998 I spent a total of one month in these rural communities. This was very revealing as 'the silence', the general lack of NGO activity and problematic community dynamics became strikingly apparent.

²³ The isiXhosa term 'Ukulima' is usually translated by Africans into English as 'to plough'. An English term which captures the meaning more fully is 'to cultivate'.

²⁴ The round 'traditional' African mud huts with grass roofs.

as a maid or kitchen help in the main house. The *baas*²⁵ was omnipotent in those days and ruled over the workers twenty-four hours a day.

In April 1978 Ciskei Living Stock Board (CLSB) took over Mooifontein. In that period of roughly two years the CSLB expanded the territory of the farm as it was intended to be eventually incorporated into the Ciskei, the new homeland in the making. Nevertheless, in 1980, in preparation of Ciskei's independence,²⁶ it was decided that the railway line would become an 'international border'. The part of the farm that was situated on the other side of the railway track became part of the Republic of Ciskei, while the part between the main road and the railway remained in the Republic of South Africa. During this time quite a few Africans moved to the 'good side' of the farm in order to retain their South African citizenship.

In 1980 the apartheid government—by all respondents referred to as GG ('Gee Gee'), or General Government—took control over the South African part of the farm. One of the departments that arrived was Department of Development Aid. It was the start of a period of relative prosperity and an abundance of work for the Gasela dwellers, said Mr. Vuyo Yako, a Gasela resident:

...GG was very nice to us, they helped us with food and transport of sick people and the rugby team and they employed us with about 500 other people....

However, for many others in the surrounding areas it marked the onset of a period of great suffering as it was the time of homeland consolidation and forced removals. This meant that many areas were cleared of the superfluous 'blacks' to create 'all-white' areas. Those that were removed were consequently dumped in the Bantustans. These new areas of high influx were then serviced from Gasela by the South African government. It used the farm as a base in the Republic of South Africa to 'aid and develop' these areas in the Ciskei—across the railway line. It was all part of a political deal between homeland leader Lennox Sebe and the apartheid regime where the latter provided much of the infrastructure.

As mentioned above, this period of prosperity and an abundance of work on the farm and in the neighbouring areas led to a great influx

²⁵ Afrikaans for 'boss' or 'master'.

²⁶ Although the apartheid regime recognised these homelands as independent states, they were never recognised as such by the international community.

of new labourers. Some of these new arrivals eventually came to settle permanently. However, many of the 500 labourers, who were from different tribes like the amaXhosa, amaSotho, amaNdebele and amaZulu, resided temporarily. Some stayed in a camp of tin shacks that was built under the gum trees, while others stayed on neighbouring farms. During this whole period the fertile farm was cultivated to provide the labour pool with food. Crops like maize, beans and potatoes were grown and the people who lived on the farm were allowed to graze their cattle.

When, finally, in the early nineties, the winds of change began to sweep the country the General Government was no longer needed in Gasela as the era of the Bantustans was clearly coming to an end. Thus the white personnel with some of the more skilled black staff were transferred to East London and the tin shack settlement was destroyed when the labourers were sacked. The original Gasela residents—and a few new arrivals that stayed—were left to their own devices and to make matters worse, the community itself came under threat of removal. In February 1993, when the last whites left, the remaining labourers were told to leave the farm within a month. However, one of the community leaders, Mr. Jim Dabani, who had lived and worked in Gasela since 1983 as the foreman of the watchmen, decided to take action. He went to the head office of the General Government in East London to complain about the impending removal:

...I told the man who was in charge, Mr. Jung, that I had heard that he wanted to chase us off the farm. 'Where must we go?' I told him. 'I know nothing about that' he said. He then told me: 'go back and count all the houses in Gasela and phone me how many houses there are. Stay there...even if the police come to chase you, tell them they must come to me'....

The community members informed the local commissioner of police as well, who also agreed that they shouldn't move. Although the remaining Gasela residents now had oral permission to stay on the farm, it marked the beginning of a period of severe insecurity, complicated by the fact that most people were now unemployed.

In that same year, 1993, the Department of Agriculture took control of the farm and leased the farm to a white farmer, a Mr. Steen. Instead of working together with the farm labourers, or properly employing them, this farmer abused people and threatened the community. According to community members he bossed people around, prohibited grazing on the farm, used the occasional violence and threatened them with eviction. During this insecure period of threats and confusion several

residents asked a white lady from Kei Road who came to Gasela regularly to sell 'utywala' (alcohol), for advice. She subsequently contacted the MRA and passed on the request for help.

The involvement of the Monti Rural Association

When MRA fieldworkers arrived in mid-1993, they encountered a tense situation. Although two community leaders were active, there seemed to be little sense of direction. Therefore, one of the first things MRA did was to advise the people to improve their standard of organisation. Moreover, the NGO helped them to establish links with other structures to improve their capacity and strengthen their bargaining position. As a result, the Gasela Residents Association (GRA) was set up which was, subsequently, linked to the sub-regional committee of SANCO²⁷ in Stutterheim. Furthermore, the MRA attempted to mediate in the conflict between the lessee and the Gasela farm dwellers. However, MRA also formally complained to the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) about the continuous harassment of the community by the lessee.

Nevertheless, the process was slow and it took several years for the situation on the farm to reverse. One of the first victories was recorded in 1994 after Mr. Steen cut off the water supply to the residents of Gasela. When MRA was informed about the matter they took Derek Hanekom, the newly appointed Minister of Land Affairs, who was visiting the Eastern Cape in October 1994, to Gasela. Hanekom was appalled and assured the community that they would not be evicted. He also took action with regard to the water supply that was reconnected shortly afterwards. For the members of the community this was quite a victory. Not only had the Minister of Land Affairs personally visited Gasela, his support also gave them a feeling that the balance of power was tipping. They felt that they might be able to defeat Mr. Steen. And indeed, the Department of Land Affairs eventually terminated the lease of Mr. Steen. Nevertheless, he was allowed to stay on the farm as 'caretaker' until the department removed him altogether in 1996.

²⁷ South African National Civic Organisation: the 'umbrella' organisation of South African civics or residents organisations.

The fight for land

Apart from assisting and facilitating the establishment of the Gasela Residents Association (GRA), the Montu Rural Association also informed the people about the possibilities of land acquisition. In a first attempt MRA helped the GRA to submit a land claim to the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation.²⁸ One of the main arguments in the claim, in the eyes of the community (and MRA), concerned the fact that "... the community has been settling on the farm since 1960...", and "... they do not have any land to practice farming...".

After a lengthy procedure, in the course of which the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation was succeeded by the Commission on Land Allocation and eventually by the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and during which time several new laws and procedures evolved, the Gasela Residents Association received a negative response on April 10, 1996.²⁹ In short, the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights determined that the people of Gasela could not qualify for a restitution claim as it did not concern land that they had lost under racially discriminatory laws.

After the initial disappointment, MRA, in consultation with the Gasela Residents Association, decided to pursue another avenue. Instead of a restitution claim, it was now expected that the Land Redistribution Programme (Department of Land Affairs 1997) would yield the desired result. As was shown above, this programme was formulated to transfer white-owned land to the black majority on a *willing-buyer willing-seller* basis. However, as the land was already owned by the state, and no white farmer had to be compensated, MRA argued that the people of Gasela should be granted the farm, so that they could use their settlement subsidy to purchase an additional portion of land. Therefore, in its 1996 report, *Gasela Proposal to the Department of Land Affairs*, that was quoted above, the MRA concluded:

In summary, in the interests of regional stability and in line with DLA's stated priority of redistribution of state land, MRA proposes that Portion 1 of the farm Mooifontein be granted to the Gasela community and that settlement subsidies and the option of purchasing an additional portion of land be made available to them (1996: 8).

²⁸ See MRA Gasela archive. Fax dated 28.10.1993.

²⁹ See MRA Gasela archive. Letter ref: 6/2/2/d/63/0/0/6.

Following the submission of this proposal to the provincial Department of Land Affairs (DLA), it became clear that the department remained sceptical about the transfer of the land. During a meeting of Gasela stakeholders³⁰ in August 1997³¹ the director of the Provincial DLA, John Carver,³² who—until a few years earlier—had been the director of MRA, referred to two obstacles. First, he was still not convinced that the Gasela community had the actual will, the capacity, the skills, and the resources to farm the land successfully. In other words, he doubted the economic viability of the plan. Second, a Stutterheim District Plan was supposed to be formulated in order to investigate the settlement options for the wider region, and it was not at all clear whether it would leave room for small autonomous agri-villages like Gasela. Later on in the meeting he actually stated:

My personal guess is that we might have to think about three satellite settlements in the area. In the end we might have to make some hard decisions. . . .

Nevertheless, although the Department of Land Affairs was not at all convinced that the transfer of land to the Gasela residents was desirable, it postponed making a hard decision since work on the Stutterheim District Plan would take several years. Moreover, the Gasela residents had rights to stay on the land due to the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act³³ that gave them short-term tenure security. As the MRA did not share the apprehension of DLA, in regard to capacity, skills and will of the community, the department—in the meantime—awarded MRA another research contract to prove the contrary.

³⁰ This was a so-called 'stakeholder meeting' in the offices of MRA. However, no Gasela residents were present. Only the institutions that in one way or another dealt with Gasela.

³¹ Meeting at the MRA office on the 14th of August, 1997.

³² John Carver, white and progressive, grew up in the area now known as the Eastern Cape and joined the MRA in the mid-eighties, when finishing his studies at Rhodes University. In the early nineties he became the Coordinator of MRA, but by the mid-nineties he was temporarily seconded to the Department of Land Affairs. Through such arrangements the NGOs became quite influential in certain government programmes. For a while the distinction between government and NGO became rather vague. However, in a later stage the NGOs paid a price as they permanently lost many of the staff they had previously seconded. For example, in 1996 John Carver left MRA to be employed by the Provincial Department of Land Affairs. By 1998 he became the Provincial Director of that same department.

³³ Act 31 of 1996: this act protects people with informal rights to land from evictions during the period 1996–1998 when new legislation will be drafted and enacted.

That research yielded the *Report on Gasela November 1997* quoted above. Although more realistic concerning problems around agricultural skills, it still argued in favour of land transfer.

As could be expected, the Department of Land Affairs did not fundamentally alter its position after it received the report. However, it did make clear that it would not object if the community started cultivating the land in order to prove that it could exploit the resources on the farm successfully. Over and above the land on which they resided, the people of Gasela were also granted permission to make use of another portion of the farm. In this manner the Gasela residents could use the time, needed by the government to sort out all the intricacies of the Stutterheim District plan, to demonstrate their ability to farm. Subsequently, in early November 1997 the MRA informed the Gasela residents that they had permission to cultivate the land.

Consequently, rapid cultivation of the land became crucial for the people of Gasela and for MRA. Why was it then that almost a year later the land had not been cultivated? Was it a question of lack of resources, did people indeed lack the skills, or were there community dynamics that the NGO might have overlooked?

To plough or not to plough...

In August 1998, when the author was last in Gasela, the farm's large fields yet had to be cultivated. Although, as in other years, nearly every household had cultivated a 'garden',³⁴ not one of the larger fields had been ploughed, either communally or privately. Nevertheless, the 'ploughing' issue was an important issue that frequently cropped up in community meetings. Moreover, practically all the community members, who were active in one of the Gasela structures, mentioned it as a priority; not only in their conversations with outsiders. Then why was still no ploughing done?

The most frequently heard explanations by the Gasela farm dwellers had to do with the difficulty of finding a tractor for a reasonable price. For their private gardens people usually hired a tractor from the neighbouring village as Mr. Xolani Dubeni explained in an interview:

³⁴ Used in the meaning of small subsistence plot.

Sometimes when we are going to plough, we ask a tractor to plough for us from Ndakana.³⁵ A garden costs 35 Rand to plough. I sow the seeds myself by hand...

But according to Mr. Mbulelo Mfene this was not possible in November for the farm's large fields:

In November we didn't find a tractor, the Ndakana tractors were busy when MRA came to give us this place (...). We have no ox ploughs. If we have support, the government can borrow us a tractor. We did plough our gardens but that was also difficult. It took place in the evenings (...), and on Saturday and Sunday. Costs are 60 Rand for a small garden. People are waiting for their pensions. Few people work here and there is too much weeds and grass to plough by hand...

Subsequently, several community leaders went to a neighbouring white farmer who indicated that he would be willing to plough for them, but asked 5000 Rand. This clearly was an amount of cash that could not be raised by the community since the main source of income is pensions and disability grants. In a last attempt—it was now already March 1998—some of the men, who worked for the Döhne Agricultural Research Station, tried to borrow a tractor there. However, this attempt failed too and, thus, most of the farm remained uncultivated.

When analyzing these answers it becomes clear that community members view the lack of access to a tractor as most problematic. However, several factors seem to be involved in this lack of access. First, there seems to be a shortage of available cash. Although the Ndakana tractors at face value seem much cheaper than the white farmer's tractor, this might actually prove to be an illusion. 60 Rand for one tenth of a hectare (the approximate size of a garden plot) also translates to 6000 Rand for ten hectares. Such astronomical amounts of cash are very hard to cough up for a group of rural dwellers like the Gasela residents. Second, Mr. Mfene also suggested that time was a complicating factor. Not only were the available tractors busy on other fields during the ploughing season, the community members also lacked the time during the week. Work in the fields mainly had to be done in the weekend or in the evenings. This also suggests, as a third factor, problems around labour, especially during activity peaks. Additionally, the conversations I had with people about the ploughing issue and the meetings I attended suggested a 'culture of dependency'. These were

³⁵ The neighbouring village.

people who primarily seemed to look for help from outsiders when confronted with problems. In my view this was related to their history as farm workers and the general oppressive machinery of the apartheid state that had marginalised them.

However, another factor also seemed to be at play here: the difficulty of managing a common resource. In Hardin's (1968) classical article *The Tragedy of the Commons*, he explains how herdsmen will keep as many cattle as possible on a common pasture. The damage done by adding an extra cow is shared amongst all herdsmen. The benefit, however, is mainly reaped by the individual. Eventually, according to Hardin, this will lead to a tragedy, an ecological disaster. Although the real world is much more complicated Hardin's model has helped to sensitise us to problems related to common resources. In Gasela another—but related—mechanism seems at play, which may remind us of the problems on the old Soviet collective farms: why invest privately—time, energy, money or other resources—in managing a common resource, while others—even those who invested less—will also reap the benefits.

The women's project

Indeed, after having been in Gasela for several days, I discovered that there was a history with managing a common resource in the community. My questions about the availability of seeds and fertiliser prompted community members to mention the 'women's project' which turned out to be an agricultural project located at the back of the main farmhouse. To my surprise, such a project had never been mentioned in any of the MRA reports about Gasela. It was a flat piece of land that had been neatly fenced off and was overgrown with weeds. Most of the seeds that were to be planted had not found their way into the soil but lay in a dark cupboard in the second kitchen of the farmhouse. Could this project provide some more clues for the failure to cultivate the large fields?

Several years ago, around 1995, a group of women from Gasela had been to a workshop in Stutterheim where they were encouraged to start an agricultural project. During my fieldwork in Gasela Mrs. Nomntu Stuurman, explained why the women's project had failed:

The thing of many people is not right. Everyone has a different view so it ends up in conflict.

Several other women also complained about the project, saying that someone had used some of the project's seeds for her own use. That person argued, however, that the project had failed because not everybody contributed the agreed amount of ten rand.

Clearly, even in this small version of a communal agricultural project in Gasela there were conflicts, irritations and misunderstandings around the use of resources. More specifically, there was the obvious tension between the private and the common domain that led to distrust and tensions. The number one priority for every household is to get its own garden ploughed and planted and only then can people begin to think about common agricultural goals. But even those goals are subordinate to private goals like sending children to school and clothing them. Undoubtedly therefore, the ten rand contribution to the project was too much to ask of many of the Gasela women.

What does the women's project tell us with respect to the chance of success of an even larger scale agricultural project? First, it can be predicted that raising more than one hundred rand per family, for ploughing in the big project alone, will be even more difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, if there are already problems around co-operation, between approximately twenty women in the women's project, would the participation of the whole community not lead to even greater problems? Although several people are enthusiastic, they are somewhat reluctant to invest privately in what is seen as a common resource. This is explicitly illustrated by a statement by Mr. Vuyo Yako who explained why people would be hesitant to use their own cattle for ploughing.

People don't want to use animals to plough, because it makes the cattle weak and makes the meat not nice. That results in a low price. (...) I can't give the community my cow, if someone else uses it, they can hit it and push it so hard it can die.

Moreover, not only does the women's project illustrate the difficulties of private investments in a common resource, it also points to another set of problems in Gasela: weak committees and weak leadership.

Organisation and leadership

Although the list of community structures established from 1993 onwards, like the ANC youth league, the ANC Women's League, the ANC 'proper', the Gasela Residents Association (GRA), the Crèche

Committee, the Water Committee and the Police Community Forum, seems impressive, most of these structures are rather ineffective. Moreover, the GRA and the ANC proper are one and the same and fraught with leadership struggles during the past few years.

A residents association, affiliated to SANCO, is ideal-typically a civic organisation that unites people outside the sphere of party-politics. However, in Gasela there were no other political parties active besides the ANC. As Lindile Msukwini, secretary of the ANC and the Gasela Residents Association explained:

The role of SANCO is to unite all organisations in the villages, but here we are only one. The [ANC] meetings are every week but sometimes it skips a week when the community needs to discuss something as SANCO. The ANC committee is the same as the SANCO committee.

He, furthermore, added:

A village is no village without SANCO....

Thus, the committee that was the ANC in one week was SANCO in the next. Nevertheless, although the committee seemed quite active and although there were no party political struggles in the community, it appeared that a lack of experience, combined with a lack of leadership left the community in a rather vulnerable position.

It appeared that a leadership vacuum existed since Mr. Jim Dabani, a vocal old man who was the first elected chairperson of the GRA, retired in 1996 because of a severe illness. His successor, Xolani Dubeni did not last long because he was apparently rude to people in meetings. Subsequently, Mrs. Nolindili Bhatyi became the first woman chair, although her husband, who is a church minister, seemed to pull strings in the background. However, the committee seemed quite directionless and Mrs. Bhatyi was far from vocal on the important issues. Mr. Dabani, somewhat bitter and rarely attending meetings these days, felt that the GRA was rife with jealousy and didn't do its job.

Having spent time in Gasela during my fieldwork gave me the opportunity to discover some of the reasons why people found it hard to start ploughing the fields. Lack of resources and management skills, a reluctance to invest private resources for the common good, organisational weaknesses and leadership struggles, all seemed to have contributed to the lack of progress. Why then was MRA still arguing in favour of establishing an agri-village in Gasela? The answer can be found in the changing relationship between MRA and the Department of Land Affairs.

Locked in a 'Market-Oriented' embrace

In the early years of the transition to democracy,³⁶ during the *freedom and consultation era*, the new government and the NGO sector became very close and a new role for NGOs was envisaged. For example, according to the *1996 Green Paper on South African Land Policy*, published by the Department of Land Affairs:

The land reform programme emphasises the key role of the non-governmental sector in supporting rural and urban development and land reform policies. Organisations in this sector have established strong links with communities involved in land struggles and have been instrumental in enabling communities to articulate their demands for land (1996: 78).

It was clear that DLA acknowledged the important role of land sector NGOs. Thus, especially with small communities like Gasela, most communication between DLA and 'the people' took place through organisations like the Monti Rural Association. With many of the larger communities the department itself had direct and regular contact.

However, after the new government had become more firmly established former NGO comrades became government bureaucrats—more loyal to their new employer: the government. Moreover, a *new realism discourse*, inspired by the macro-economic strategy GEAR (Department of Finance 1998 (1996)) swept the country. Thus, by 1997, the feelings of expectation within the MRA had been replaced by feelings of frustration. It seemed to them as if the Department of Land Affairs kept them on a string, especially since their 1996 report on Gasela had been received critically by DLA. Their level of frustration was especially high because of the fact that their former colleague and ex-MRA coordinator, John Carver, was now the director at DLA.

In the view of the new the MRA Director, Dudley Eastwood, there were macro-economic issues at stake here. In fact, in late 1997,³⁷ in a strategic planning meeting with his staff, he stated that:

...the basic assumption of the Department of Land Affairs is that giving arable land to the poor leads to a waste of economic resources. Don't be

³⁶ In areas like the Eastern Cape this transition did not go particularly smoothly, as Cousins stated: "...the new Eastern Cape Province as a whole is currently experiencing a traumatic transition to a new institutional and administrative framework..." (1996: 197). In these circumstances the newly formed government structures benefited greatly from the support offered by the NGO sector.

³⁷ Strategic planning meeting of the Land Rights Unit, 03.11.1997.

confused or idealistic about land reform in South Africa, you have got to go back to GEAR to understand why the department behaves like this...

Later on senior staff member Bongani Matsila remarked:

For Gasela John (Carver) seems to push for a solution whereby people will be placed in settlements with services and gardens...

This was the greatest fear of many rural dwellers. They would be rounded up from the scattered patches of land where they lived, to be placed in rural townships where the government could provide housing, infrastructure, services like water and electricity and schools and clinics. However, Dudley Eastwood still saw a possibility to convince DLA to transfer the land:

We're going for a major showdown with the Department of Land Affairs around Gasela...

This 'showdown' would involve fighting the department on its own turf and in its own terms whereby 'economic viability' became the defining notion. Thus, a government 'new realism discourse' had also penetrated the work of the MRA. Subsequently, in this political game to convince DLA to transfer the land 'hard science' became the political instrument. In this battle with DLA, MRA would consciously move beyond the soft type of research they had conducted in the past—social surveys, community skills assessment. The management team was convinced that only by adding hard facts—soil survey, labour requirements, predicted cash flows et cetera—they would be able to convince DLA. A fighting spirit took hold of the organisation to ensure that they found the right arguments in facts about soils, rainfall and production figures, against the background of images of a community consisting of rural agricultural producers in Gasela.

Here we observe that the management of meaning becomes crucial, as Cohen and Comaroff have argued: "the capacity to manage meaning is, perhaps, the most valued and the most valuable resource structuring political life" (1976: 103). Thus, in their view also the broker "is one who manages the meanings which people attribute to kinds of social phenomena" (ibid.: 89). One of the mechanisms employed is what Wood called labelling, the process of applying terms to people and processes. This involves power and control and "...the issue is not whether we label people, but which labels are created, and whose labels prevail to define a whole situation or policy area, under what conditions and with what effects?" (1985: 349).

In the case of Gasela the ‘scientifically’ argued *Report on Gasela November 1997*, produced by the MRA, became an important tool in the attempt by the NGO to influence and ‘manage’ meaning. Thus, for MRA Gasela came to represent a mix of a desire to regain lost prestige and respect of the Department of Land Affairs and to solve the plight of these rural residents. However, during this political struggle the plight of the Gasela residents came to be reduced to a pragmatic and bare minimum: the transfer of the land. For the time being it suited MRA politically to ignore the ‘social reality in the field’. The number one priority became securing the transfer of land.

In this political struggle to convince DLA, the Monti Rural Association had to make use of three ‘tools of translation’.

Three tools of translation

Intermediary organisations like the MRA engage in what I have termed *strategic translations*. In political processes actors in these organisations make conscious decisions to strategically translate information travelling up, or down, the ‘development chain’. However, one should, of course, be careful not to overestimate the rational choices that are made in development. Translations can also be a ‘by-product’ of the fact that different actors have different perspectives on the same issues. In the processes of interaction, negotiation and (non-)accommodation images, messages and policies are continually transformed. Nevertheless, in the case of Gasela, I would argue that the MRA actively attempted to manipulate the images that it relayed between the actors involved, in this case the people of Gasela and the Department of Land Affairs. Thus, it got involved in the ‘management of meaning’ (Cohen and Comaroff 1976) and by doing so it may also have been involved, as *a broker*, in a process to make “... *the other parties of brokerage relations—patron and client—dependent upon his services*” (ibid.: 88). Three instruments were of importance to an intermediary organisation like the MRA:

1. The mode of research;
2. The method of interaction with the beneficiaries through workshops;
and,
3. The reports that were produced.

These instruments, or ‘tools of translation’, were used in the political process to attempt to convince DLA of the need to transfer the land and of the need to continue its cooperative arrangements with the NGO sector.

The research

First of all, let us look at the research methods employed by NGOs. It is clear that research in any context should be critically evaluated, more especially in contexts where the actors stand to gain from the results of the research. Many non-governmental organisations engage in research activities that are enveloped in the same 'objective' and 'scientific' formats and discourse as academic research projects. However, there are distinct differences. The main difference is that the research conducted by NGOs, frequently, has an activist purpose. The research is part of a political process and is usually conducted to prove a certain point. Although academic research may also be influenced by those who pay the grants—especially in these times dominated by 'market thinking'—academic institutions in most parts of the world still try to protect their positions of scientific independence. NGOs, however, are less concerned with issues of 'objectivity'. In fact, these organisations can be quite blunt about the way in which they conduct research. I came across a clear example in a discussion with the Director of MRA concerning another MRA research project, that I was involved with in an advisory capacity.³⁸ In his view, I approached the topic too academically:

We are setting a precedent with this rights enquiry.³⁹ MRA has political objectives, more than the Department of Land Affairs. Our research is not neutral research, we need particular types of information....

This was also the case in Gasela.

The Monti Rural Association focused strategically on the economic and physical intricacies of the plan in order to be able to convince the Department of Land Affairs that was preoccupied by its own 'economic viability' discourse. This technocratic and (pseudo-)scientific approach, stressing agricultural production factors, was enhanced by making use of images of the Gasela residents as rural agricultural producers.

³⁸ Since I spent nearly 1 ½ years intensively studying the MRA, I was asked to comment on and give advice on a research project in the village of Mgwali. This involved sitting down with the NGO staff on several occasions and commenting on the design and implementation of the research.

³⁹ This research project in the village of Mgwali would possibly become a 'tenure test case' through which the government would learn about the intricacies of tenure issues and overlapping land rights.

In much of Southern Africa such images are used by the development industry to justify agricultural development interventions. Rural residents with decades of experience in the cash economy, and an urban outlook, are represented as 'traditional farmers'. The persistence of such images is related to a dominant and widespread belief that Africa is the one remaining continent where man is still close to nature and 'traditionalism' is prevalent. As Gasela is a place with a definite rural feel to it, many outsiders will be inclined to describe it as a 'farming community'. However, as Bank described in his essay, *Town and Country: urbanisation and migration*, many of the rural villages close to the towns in the Eastern Cape are:

...quiet and deserted during the week. The only obvious evidence of productive activity is the movement of older women working at their daily chores of housekeeping, firewood collection, and attending to gardens (...). In the deeper rural areas of the province (...), there are more deserted homesteads and unattended fields (1997: 24).

Such observations, therefore, make it imperative to look closely at the Gasela residents. Although, indeed, a large part of the community consists of ex-farm workers, many of the men and women have a very diverse background. In order to get more clarity, we will look at several categories⁴⁰ in the community:

- the older generation of (ex-)farm workers;
- the younger generation who are generally active elsewhere;
- the young generation of school-going adolescents.

Although the MRA did ultimately acknowledge the lack of agricultural and management skills in its 1997 report, it remained positive about the farm worker background of the older residents:

...virtually all of the interviewees mentioned that they have skills in vegetable growing and soil preparation...(1997b: 14).

However, in my view, the agricultural experience of (ex-)farm workers should not be overestimated. First of all, most of them were too old to actively farm. Second, their skills were too specific and limited. Skills,

⁴⁰ Naturally, it is not possible to neatly categorise all people in such a community. For heuristic purposes, however, it aids us to shed some light on the backgrounds of Gasela residents.

mentioned in the MRA report, like milking, fence mending and tractor driving do not guarantee the ability to successfully manage a commercial farm. Third, this generation lacked education and in the course of their lives had many bitter experiences. Apartheid 'successfully' kept these people ignorant and on the fringe of society. Last, those, who still worked as farm workers, did not have much time to spare. Thus, although willing, this generation might hardly be able to farm commercially. Their number one priority was security of tenure.

The second group, or the younger generation, consisted of the grown-up children of the ex-farm workers. It is this group on which the success of the commercial agricultural project would depend. However, in my view, this generation especially seemed to have a focus with regard to work and a cash income that was directed outwards. To illustrate this I could use many of the informants as an example. Yet, here I present a short working history of Mr. Vuyo Yako, who left Gasela for the first time in the late seventies, at sixteen.

In Cape Town Mr. Yako, while staying with his cousin's sister, attended night school and worked as a 'till man' in a shop for several years. During Gasela's 'boom time' he came back—in the '83, '84 and '86—to work as a carpenter and a painter for the General Government. In between, in 1985, he tried his luck in the Welcome Goldmine in Gauteng. After 1986 he went to Pretoria but didn't succeed there, but in 1988 he found work with the municipality in Glencoa, Natal. That didn't last long either and in the same year he returned to Gasela where he stayed for the next two years. Then—in his own words—in 1991:

...I went to the Transkei where I was employed by Sadac Kriel and Sali Avenas, who were Muslims, and who taught me bricklaying and carpentry (...). I returned to Gasela in '92 and I started working for a security firm in Bisho⁴¹ for Gqozo,⁴² where we received training at Amapase base. Every month-end I came to Gasela to pay my sisters (...). When the peace force left [Bisho] I started working for Red Alert Security from April '94 to '95. However, we were paid a low salary, we didn't get permanent positions and we were not paid regularly (...). I then joined the Peace Force in Johannesburg until September '96 and lived with my sister in Alexandra. But the Peace Force deserted us and I joined Prestige Cleaning Services in Sandton square. I am always working, I am always

⁴¹ Bisho was the capital of the Ciskei, built by the apartheid regime, ten kilometres outside the 'South African' town of King William's Town.

⁴² Brigadier Oupa Gqozo ousted the Ciskeian ruler Lennox Sebe in 1990 and subsequently became an even worse tyrant.

looking for money...I am hungry, I am not educated. In total I spent 2 years in Johannesburg. In September '96 I came back to Gasela, in 1997 I had no work, no jobs....

This extraordinary life story of a young man, who was thirty-four years old in 1998, is not as extraordinary as it seems. It exemplifies how many black men and women move all over the country in search for economic opportunities and have done so for decades. It is a generation with an outward, urban focus in search of a cash income that perceives the rural area of Gasela as home, where they are able to leave their children with grandparents and where they will eventually return to retire. I believe that it will be very difficult to motivate these people to seek their fortune at home in Gasela, let alone start their own 'communal enterprise'. They are not agricultural producers, but rather a 'rural proletariat' that seeks its fortune in the economic centres.

For the even younger generation, the ones in their teens and early twenties, the situation in the late nineties, was slightly different when compared to the past. Unlike the generation preceding them many now stayed in Gasela longer to attend secondary school in Ndakana village. However, although these boys and girls are staying in Gasela, their schoolwork prevented them from doing much work on the farm. In fact, in a group interview it appeared that only very few in the group actually regarded farming as a serious future 'career' option. Although some indicated that they would want to work in agriculture most dreamt of becoming a soldier or a doctor and rather seek paid work than farm for themselves.

Thus, one can say that the history of Gasela illustrates many of the mechanisms that adversely influenced the lives of the South African black population. Apartheid has left deep moral, social and economic scars and although Gasela is located in a rural area, many black South Africans have, to some degree, been alienated from the land. Although people are still interested in land, and especially in security of tenure, they may not be the ideal agricultural producers that the government—and NGOs—want them to be. In its 1997 report to the Department of Land Affairs the MRA ignored this social reality. Its research concentrated on 'hard facts': soil, rainfall and crops. Moreover, it used its workshops with the Gasela residents to communicate these findings and seek approval for its plans.

The workshops

The workshops conducted by MRA in Gasela were also instrumental in the NGO strategy to create an image of Gasela as a possible thriving agri-village. As Pottier has argued:

participatory workshops remain structured encounters marked by hidden agendas and strategic manoeuvres (1997: 221).

In fact, standard interaction between NGOs and their beneficiaries frequently takes this form. Also in the case of Gasela interaction between MRA and Gasela community members mainly took place in this manner. It is usually a lively happening in which information is gathered and disseminated. In fact, it is possible to distinguish between two types of workshops:

1. the information dissemination, or teaching, workshop;
2. the consultation and participation workshop.

In the first type of workshops community members are informed or taught about a diverse range of topics, ranging from information on what land reform entails to the way in which community meetings should be conducted, or the way in which votes should be cast during election times. The second type of workshop is the type whereby, under the banner of 'consultation' and 'participation', the community is asked to share 'its' opinion about a range of topics and participate in decisions. However, although both types make use of dynamic methods of interaction, the workshops leave much room for interpretation, errors and, what I call, 'strategic translation'.

The information dissemination workshops can be quite problematic, as it is usually the NGO that decides what type of information should be disseminated during these workshops. When very basic workshops are conducted about bookkeeping, or how to conduct meetings, problems rarely occur. However, in cases where the NGO briefs the community about important strategic issues, like for example government policies around land, problems may arise. As it generally is the NGO that holds the trump cards, the organisation can easily paint a picture of the situation that strategically suits them. Here we come to an important point. The intermediary status of NGOs, especially in countries or areas where 'the people at grassroots', and often even the government officials themselves, lack very basic knowledge, leaves room for these organisations

to engage in, what I call: 'strategic translations'. In other words, as these NGOs are usually the link between 'the people at grassroots' and government officials, the organisations are, for example, able to reformulate—or 'translate'—the policies of the government for 'the people' they work with. This is not necessarily bad, since translation might simply involve explaining something in layman's terms.

The capability of 'strategic translation' by NGOs can be even more problematic in the consultation and participation workshops, which can be illustrated by the Gasela workshop of 20 November 1997. The NGO is able to use its discretion, to 'consult' the community about certain topics, while leaving other topics outside the consultation process. In this workshop—where the author was also present—the results of the Monti Rural Association research project in Gasela were discussed with members of the community. Furthermore, MRA's proposals regarding commercial vegetable production were 'workshopped', as it is called in NGO jargon. The workshop was attended by 53 people: 31 women and 22 men.⁴³

After presenting its research findings and tabling its land-use proposals the MRA staff asked the community to break up into three groups, or commissions. The men, the women and the youth, then, proceeded to discuss the presented research findings and land-use options. The men showed preference for both crops and livestock farming, while preferring the crops with the highest returns: cabbages and potatoes. As to livestock, the men indicated that they preferred cattle only, which would be their responsibility. The women also showed a preference for both livestock and crop farming. However, they identified an additional cash crop: beans. Moreover, they showed an interest in a whole range of subsistence crops that they also deemed important: from maize, to sweet potatoes and spinach. The youth preferred only crop farming, especially cash crops like potatoes and cabbages and a few subsistence

⁴³ Quite often the number of people who are present in meetings and workshops is not representative. At this workshop 53 people attended of whom at least ten people were twenty years or younger. Considering the fact that 108 Gasela residents are above twenty years old, not even half of that 'adult' population was represented. A quorum problem: too few representatives present to make a valid democratic decision. Consequently, so-called 'democratic decisions' are actually taken by a minority of the people concerned, frequently 'the elite'. This calls for a critical evaluation. Do intermediary NGOs actually work through democratic structures and are they the democratising agents as is so often claimed?

crops like maize and beans. Furthermore, they felt that livestock should not be regarded as an option.

At the end of the workshop Dwight Rover, the agricultural expert of the MRA, in a concluding speech for the community stated:

...so, the option that we presented is all right. You've indicated that you want more crops, which I think is good. We'll incorporate your ideas into the final report, which will then be presented to DLA. If they like it and agree that you can farm, then we'll recommend to DLA that the land is transferred to the community (...). We'll let you know as soon as DLA gives us an answer.

Although Mr. Rover did indeed acknowledge the inputs made by the community members, his overall conclusion seemed to be that the Gasela residents endorsed the plans presented by MRA. This '*strategic translation*' of the view of the community was even more simplified in the report about the workshop,⁴⁴ where it was rephrased as follows:

The whole community are in favour of MRA's research findings. Crop farming is the top priority as it will alleviate poverty in the area. In particular, crops such as cabbages and potatoes are seen as a realistic option... (1997: 33).

In very clear terms this example shows how NGOs are able to strategically translate the position taken by members of the community in a manner that suited the political strategies of the organisation. In this manner, two issues were left out of the conclusions: what to do with livestock and how to incorporate a larger diversity of crops.

Especially ignoring the livestock issue can cause major problems during the implementation of the project. When discussing the issue of livestock in Southern Africa, one needs to be especially vigilant as cattle ownership means much more to Africans—and the Xhosa—than a narrowly defined economic value. Status, *lobola* (bride wealth), slaughtering for ceremonies, and a form of 'traditional' banking are some of the functions of cattle, besides the more direct values like milk, meat or draft power. In other words, livestock, and especially cattle, constitutes a significant part of the cultural fabric of society, as is the case with many South African livestock-keeping African peoples (Ferguson 1990).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Attached as an appendix to the 1997 report.

⁴⁵ In an excellent chapter, *The Bovine Mystique: a study of power, property, and livestock in rural Lesotho*, Ferguson (1990), for example, has shown how complicated the relationship of people with their livestock can be. For instance, when he asked them to choose

The MRA plans did not acknowledge the livestock that was kept by the most influential community members in Gasela. If we limit this discussion to the 62 heads of cattle that were held on the farm, then there is no way that these could be kept on the land if 40 hectares of cabbage and potato production would be realised.⁴⁶ In its 1997 *Report on Gasela MRA*, therefore concluded that:

...due to the lack of available area at Gasela extensive livestock production is not recommended although it can be practised (...). If the livestock option is pursued then it is recommended that cropping takes priority over livestock in terms of area and land suitability. Livestock can therefore be grazed on any areas not suitable for crop production... (1997: 22).

However, in the workshop on 20 November 1997, the organisation chose to be rather vague about the livestock issue. At no stage did any MRA member make it crystal clear that a choice for commercial vegetable production would automatically imply doing away with most heads of cattle. However, only five days later, in a stakeholder meeting on 25 November 1997—with possible supporting organisations and institutions like the Department of Land Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and without any community members present—the responsible MRA staff members explained that the people would not keep any livestock on the farm:

people will not keep livestock, but it is not clear how they are going to get rid of the livestock that is present...

between receiving a gift in the form of cash or receiving one in the form of cattle, many Basotho preferred the cash, even if the amount was much less than the value of the cow. According to Ferguson this is because people cannot freely exchange a cow that was received as a gift for cash. Selling animals is not a private and simple economic act. Rather, it is an (extended) family matter. Cash lies much more beyond these cultural control mechanisms.

⁴⁶ Only 21.7 hectares of forested and steep area would be available for cattle grazing:

TOTAL AREA	89.24 ha
SETTLED AREA	10.2 ha
FORESTED AREA	12.7 ha
STEEP AREA	9.0 ha
REMAINING AREA	57.34 ha

(source: MRA, 1997: 24)

Which caused Mrs. Mondli of the Amatola District Council to remark:

don't force your view on the community!

Which led to a significant answer by Bongani Matsila, a prominent MRA staff member:

we won't, we believe in a participative process...

Then why was this fundamental issue of livestock keeping not thoroughly discussed with the people concerned during the workshop in Gasela, five days earlier?

This example shows that non-governmental organisations are able to reinterpret, adapt and modify the information that travels 'upwards' from the field and 'downwards' from the government. More especially in situations where 'the people' lack the background, the knowledge, or the level of education, these consultation and participation workshops can be reduced to 'going through the motions'. In such instances, the so-called 'participative process' is like a play that is enacted, while having been carefully scripted in advance. The outcome is already known, or at least highly influenced by the scriptwriters: the NGO staff. Thus, quite often, although 'participation' of 'the people' is high on the development agenda, these workshops are nothing more than seeking endorsement for intervention packages already outlined in an earlier stage by NGOs.

In order to inform the Department of Land Affairs about the workshop results the Gasela reports became crucial instruments.

The reports

Not only the research and the workshops, but also the reports that are produced by NGOs should be considered as instruments in a political strategy. Especially in situations like Gasela, where the government institutions have little or no autonomous contact with communities, the reports prepared by an NGO can become a crucial tool. In fact, the reports to communicate with government agencies are what the workshops are in the efforts to communicate with 'the field'. A report is a locus of interaction in which NGOs have the possibility to present their version of 'reality'. Thus, to refer to the terminology of Cohen and Comaroff (1976) the reports constitute a crucial tool in the 'management of meaning'. Especially in combination with the carefully scripted

and translated results of workshops, these reports become important tools in political processes. Within certain limits, NGOs can use their intermediary position to 'strategically translate' both what is encountered at grassroots and in government circles. Thus, as was shown in the beginning of this chapter, although MRA acknowledged the lack of skills and problems around management capacity, the NGO was able to stress the hard 'technical facts' about soils, crops and climate in order to convince DLA that a land transfer would be the responsible thing to do. Without these necessary strategic translation tools NGOs are bound to fail in their political battles.

Another aspect of reports produced by NGOs should not be overlooked either. The reports, especially those produced in a reporting cycle as tools of accountability towards donors, also fulfil a strategic function with respect to legitimising the past and especially future role of the NGO. In other words, just as Long and van der Ploeg (1989) have shown with regard to the role of evaluations in development processes—evaluations interlink different interventions through time and serve to legitimise the role of intervening actors—reports are a tool to create, or at least stimulate, feelings of dependency in other development actors with regard to the broker. The final message in reports is usually: there is still much work to be done, and we—as NGO actors—are excellently suited to carry out that work.

Concluding remarks

The impact of colonialism and apartheid on the land sector of South Africa has left millions of poor Africans in extremely vulnerable circumstances. Just like the Gasela residents many people lack tenure security and the increasing emphasis on commercially viable tenure options will complicate future land transfers. As Murray has argued:

... poor people who aspire to buy farming land face enormous financial problems, firstly in bridging the gap between the purchase price of a farm and the aggregate household grant and secondly in mustering capital resources to embark on a farming enterprise (1996: 221).

The latter point also seems to be confirmed by the Gasela case study. Cash is hard to come by and often used for more immediate needs like food, clothing and school expenses. Moreover, even if land transfers are realised, group ownership arrangements (Communal Property Associations) may encounter similar problems as were demonstrated by the

Gasela case. There is frequently a lack of agricultural and management skills and, as Cousins has already argued, "...inequalities at the local level (...) complicates enormously the task of developing viable common property management arrangements..." (1996: 199). However, it should also be recognised that many rural residents in South Africa cannot and, in fact, should not be labelled as potential commercial farmers, or peasants. As an author like Bank (1997) has argued and the Gasela case has confirmed: many rural residents have an urban outlook in search of a cash income and should rather be conceptualised as a 'rural proletariat'.

With respect to the relationship between civil society, the state and the market the Gasela case seems to confirm that the NGOs cooperated closely with the government during the transition period to democracy—the *freedom and consultation era*—while a period of mild estrangement followed in the *new realism era*, when the policies of the new South African government became increasingly influenced by the market. Regarding the role of an NGO as a broker—in the Gasela case mediating between a powerful government department and a landless community—it can be concluded that the 'management of meaning' is indeed fundamental to the political processes involved, as Cohen and Comaroff (1976) have argued. A land sector NGO like the Monti Rural Association is an intermediary organisation. Its position, mediating between 'the people at grassroots' and other institutions like government departments, ensures that staff can engage in—what I have called—*strategic translations*. This chapter has shown that the choice to portray, or label (Wood 1985), Gasela as a potentially thriving agrivillage was a political decision by MRA, an NGO that had become caught in the Department of Land Affairs' *market-oriented embrace*. In the process of translation the organisation made use of three strategic tools: research, workshops and reports.

In the research conducted by the NGO it was consciously and strategically decided to focus on certain hard facts—climate, crop yields et cetera—and to a large extent ignore others, like the livestock issue, leadership struggles, a lack of management and agricultural skills and the fact that most of these rural residents have an urban outlook and experience. Subsequently, the workshop proved to be an ideal instrument to communicate only partially with community members, whereby certain information could be disregarded. This shows that Pottier (1997) had a point when he argued that participatory workshops are structured encounters in which hidden agendas and strategic manoeuvres play a

role. Moreover, it illustrates, just as Nyamwaya (1997) has shown, that the participation of communities themselves in development processes, although frequently stressed by NGOs, may be minimal, or at least heavily influenced by the brokers involved. Lastly, the reporting tool was used by the MRA to convey the desired message to the government. The MRA reports on Gasela were clearly employed to communicate certain facts to the Department of Land Affairs while ignoring others. In this case the reports, for example, made sure that the government was insulated from certain contradictory data. Moreover, reports may have another purpose as well. As loci of interaction with donors or government actors the reports serve the broker as a tool "...to create and maintain the need for his services..." (Cohen and Comaroff 1976: 89) and legitimize future interventions.

What we do have to remember, however, is that we should not overestimate the role of *strategic action* in development interventions and *strategic translations*. Although indeed, at times, deliberate and rational choices are made, Long and van der Ploeg were right to point out that:

... the execution of political power and policy [is] an active process (often with unforeseen outcomes), involving both cooperation and struggle among the various parties involved. It takes place within specific historical and institutional contexts which are themselves continuously being shaped and transformed by the actions of constituent groups and individuals (1989: 241).

Development is a messy and dynamic process and although some actors are more powerful than others, it means that it can hardly be predicted how the Gasela 'story' ends. Naturally, it is extremely important that the Gasela residents finally achieve tenure security after decades of uncertainty. Nevertheless, it should be understood that, even if the strategy employed by the MRA to ensure the transfer of land is a success, the terms under which such a transfer takes place will determine whether the land will eventually become an asset or a liability...⁴⁷

⁴⁷ By 2002 the land transfer had not yet taken place. However, many Gasela residents—with heavy involvement of MRA (the NGO paid for the ploughing)—did successfully start farming a portion of the farm. Nevertheless, a field visit by the author showed that one could not speak of a successful, nor economically sustainable commercial enterprise, as management skills, agricultural skills and marketing skill were still virtually absent. For its involvement in Gasela MRA has, nevertheless, received a Katlego award from the South African NGO Coalition.

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APPENDIX ONE

LIST OF FORMAL INTERVIEWS & TAPED EXCHANGES

This list comprises taped and minuted formal interviews and taped workshops and meetings. However, the bulk of the fieldwork material is in the form of notes of field visits, meetings and more informal conversations: these are not listed here.

1. Formal Interviews in Gasela

Interview	Mrs. Informant G1, resident	24.02.98
Interview	Mr. & Mrs. Vukhapi, residents	24.02.98
Interview	Jim Dabani, retired Gasela leader	25.02.98
Interview	Mr. & Mrs. Informant G 2, residents	26.02.98
Interview	Xolani Dubeni, former Chair of the Gasela Residents Association	26.02.98
Interview	Vuyo Yako, vocal resident	27.02.98
Interview	Mr. & Mrs. Informant G 3, elderly couple	27.02.98
Interview	Mrs. Informant G 4, resident	27.02.98
Interview	Mrs. Nolindili Bhatyi, Chairperson of the GRA	26.03.98
Interview	Mrs. Informant G 5, ANC Women's League member	27.03.98
Interview	Mr. Nomphele Mbutana, Secretary of the ANC Women's League	28.03.98
Interview	Mr. Mbulelo Mfene, member of the GRA and local ANC Branch	29.03.98
Interview	Mr. Nakase, Stutterheim Councillor	28.05.98
Interview	Mr. Lindile Msukwini, Secretary of the GRA and local ANC Branch	15.05.98
Interview	Group interview with 6 young Gasela men	22.05.98

HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE: ASSISTING MAURITANIAN REFUGEES IN SENEGAL

Marion Fresia

“Governance” is a concept that emerged in the 1970s in a context, in which western governments were facing mounting difficulties in controlling by themselves a society increasingly fragmented into various networks and subsystems. Thus, political scientists attempted to identify and describe alternative mechanisms of coordination which could make public action possible or compensate for it. In adopting the concept of “governance,” they challenged a purely institutional and rational vision of government and proposed, instead, to observe its informal, opportunist and flexible dimensions, which often transcend the usual boundaries between the public and the private sectors (Le Galès 1995; Blundo 2004).

Defined from this non-normative perspective, the concept of governance would appear to offer a particularly relevant tool for the analysis of the type of actions and collective organisations involved in humanitarian intervention. Although they claim to be independent of or even opposed to states, when striving to ensure the survival, protection and future of a given population (such as refugees, internal displaced people, disaster victims etc.), humanitarian organisations become *de facto* public authorities. They alter the local public space permanently by providing relief services in areas such as health, education, accommodation, sanitation and safety and by encouraging the constitution of a new local elite to take charge of the implementation of aid programmes. They also trigger the construction of new collective identities associated with the specific statuses attributed to the victims. Thus, humanitarian aid ultimately generates public action where it is least expected, in a supposedly “neutral” and “apolitical” sphere, and through the simultaneous participation of governmental, non-governmental and inter-governmental actors.

Many intellectuals and academics have studied the causes and consequences of humanitarian intervention in detail, in particular in view of its proliferation since the end of the Cold War and the paralysis of the United Nations system (Foster 1994). While attaching greater

importance to the analysis of discourse than practice, political scientists and sociologists have often depicted aid relief as an enterprise involving the domination of western countries over those of the south (Perrot 1994; Rufin 1994), or as a device of oppression, reducing the victims to a status of “apolitical animals” (Harell-Bond & Voutira 1992; Cernea & Mc Dowell 2000; Zetter 1991; Allen 1996; Kibreab 1993).¹ Apart from this committed approach, which often tends towards the denunciation of the phenomenon, knowledge of the concrete and localised dimensions of humanitarian remains scant. Questions concerning, for example, the ways in which basic relief services and legal protection are provided to the victims in the host country, the mechanisms of coordination that are used, the institutional and non-institutional actors involved in the definition and regulation of these mechanisms and the way they evolve in the long term—in particular after the withdrawal of aid organisations—remain unanswered.

These are the types of questions that this chapter seeks to address through the study of a particular modality of humanitarian aid: refugee assistance as coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).² It also explores the ways in which both the host country and UNHCR respond to the pressure exerted by displaced populations on local infrastructure and public services.

The analysis focuses on the case of Mauritanian refugees who were expelled from their country of origin in 1989. Recognised as refugees by Senegal, they were assembled in camps where they benefited from food distribution, health care and education.³ Particular attention will be paid to the key role played by intermediaries (local non-governmental organisations and refugee representatives) in the delivery of assistance to the Mauritanian refugees. Because they influence aid policy in line with their own private interests while unexpectedly responding to the general interest, this will involve, in particular, an examination of the strategic position of these intermediary actors. Within the camps, the intermediaries also contribute to providing tangible content for the refugee status by transforming it into a positive collective identity

¹ For a critical review of refugee research in social sciences, see Fresia (2007).

² In this text, the term “humanitarian aid” refers to this particular form of assistance provided to refugees.

³ As part of my doctoral studies at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, I conducted several field studies in four Mauritanian refugee camps located in North Senegal between 2000 and 2003 (Fresia 2005). I came back for field research in 2004, just before the 2005 military coup.

with which certain rights and duties are associated. This chapter also analyses how, in reality, the humanitarian space is always embedded in the local public space. State administrations try to maintain control over it by adopting action logics that often operate at the cost of the general interest. Finally, I will also highlight how the production and transformation of relief services is characterised by porous boundaries between private and public interests and question the effectiveness of humanitarian action in terms of governability.

The assistance provided to Mauritanian refugees in Senegal

On April 1989, a border incident between Senegal and Mauritania that caused the death of two Senegalese and the kidnapping of 13 others was used as a pretext by the two countries for the resolution of internal and external political tensions. Exploited by political leaders, it led to unprecedented intercommunity violence in Dakar and Nouakchott, resulting in the two states being obliged to repatriate their respective citizens. The Mauritanian government also took advantage of the situation to deport thousands of its own citizens, i.e. "Black Mauritians" who could easily be taken for Senegalese people. Its objective here was twofold: first, it wanted to get rid of its political opponents who were denouncing the racial, political and economical discrimination faced by Black Mauritians in their own country; and, second, it hoped to take control of the only fertile land in the country (located in South Mauritania) which was traditionally occupied by the Black ethnic groups (Haapulaaren, Wolof, Soninké). Expelled by terrestrial route, a large group of Mauritians found refuge on the left bank of the Senegal River populated by their Senegalese relatives, who belong to the same ethnic group.⁴ Initially, the latter together with the Senegalese Red Cross and various local NGOs took charge of them. However, when their number exceeded 10,000, the Senegalese government was no longer able to cope with this unforeseen situation, particularly in view of the fact that thousands of Senegalese repatriates were also arriving in the country at the same time. Thus, the government had to ask the

⁴ The majority of the deported people were Halpulaaren in origin and the group also included Wolof and Soninke. Some of them were also expelled to Mali but they did not receive any humanitarian assistance there.

United Nations system for financial assistance and a relief program, coordinated by the UNHCR, was soon set up. For the first six months, this humanitarian intervention was conducted within a vague legal framework. The Senegalese government did not initially carry out a census or provide legally recognised refugee status to the Mauritians, the two usual prerequisites for the exercise of the UNHCR mandate. This intervention was only legitimised *ex post* by a presidential decree granting refugee status to the Mauritians on a collective and *a priori* basis.⁵

The relief programme was based on two main components: aid relief and legal protection. It was implemented by a number of “operational” partners which were selected by the UNHCR from various non-governmental, local and international organisations. Around 280 refugee camps were then set up along the Senegal River valley. The most important, also referred to as “regrouping camps” as opposed to spontaneous settlements, were particularly well equipped with latrines, hydraulic equipment, medical and educational infrastructure as well as the distribution of covers and food. More than 18 new health centres (“*cases de santé*”), around 40 new classrooms and hundreds of new water sources (wells and fountains) were eventually constructed in the Senegal River valley.

The refugees also organised themselves for the purpose of dealing with the management of this new infrastructure and distribute the food. Within the first few months, they set up their own internal administration, referred to locally as the “camp office” (*bureau du camp*) with a “President” at its head. The camps were divided into groups or districts, each with its own representative in charge of the supervision of food distribution between families and the attendance of general meetings. Management committees were also designated for each sector of the aid: health, water, education etc. One of the tasks of the committees was to set up a system of contributions or “community cashboxes” to enable the populations to help fund the new infrastructure.

In 1990, the Mauritanian refugees also created their own organisation, the Association of the Mauritanian Refugees in Senegal (ARMS), whose purpose it was to represent them among the humanitarian

⁵ The Senegalese government chose to recognise Mauritians as refugees on the basis of a procedure called *prima facie*. This procedure differs from the recognition of refugee status on an individual basis which provides greater rights in terms of the freedom to move and work.

organisations and coordinate aid programmes between camps. It was also used as a “social” cover, enabling engagement in political activities which is normally prohibited under national and international law. In addition to these social and political associations, other economic groupings emerged in the areas of agriculture, market gardening, sewing and dyeing for the task of managing the “micro-credits” and income-generating activities included in the UNHCR programme.⁶

In 1992, soon after diplomatic relations between Senegal and Mauritania, which had been broken off following the 1989 conflict, were restored, under financial pressures from its donors (western countries) and political pressure from the host country (Senegal), the UNHCR began to decrease the total amount of aid provided to the Mauritanian refugees. First, the food aid was gradually reduced, ceasing completely in 1995. Three years later, in 1998, the organisation also withdrew from the health and education sectors. Since then, it merely provides “legal protection” to the Mauritanian by defending them against any attempt at *refoulement* to their country of origin. The UNHCR also tries to negotiate permanent solutions to their exile with governments, which are defined by international law as voluntary repatriation, naturalisation in the first host country or resettlement in another host country.⁷

According to UNHCR terminology, Black Mauritanians are now considered as “long term refugees.” The camps have become real villages and look just like Senegalese ones. While the refugees still benefit from a few income-generating projects, they also have their own economic activities, both in Senegal and Mauritania where they work on a clandestine basis. The UNHCR has still not succeeded in finding a permanent solution to their situation. The majority of refugees refuses to return to Mauritania officially in the absence of safety guarantees and the recognition of their civil rights.⁸ They also refuse to

⁶ Two major types of economic groupings were established; female groupings and “mixed” producer groupings which united refugees and locals in irrigated agriculture projects.

⁷ Legal protection and the search for sustainable solutions are actually the “*raison d'être*” of the UNHCR. As described in its statutes, its major task is to “assume functions of international protection (...) and the search for sustainable solutions to refugee problems”—Art 1. Since the 1980s, the institution has developed a second function in the countries of the south, which cannot afford to welcome unexpected influxes of population: i.e. the provision of relief aid. For more details on this topic, see Bergbender (1999).

⁸ General Ould Taya, who was President of Mauritania in 1989 and is accused by the refugees of having organised their “deportation”, was still in power in January

take Senegalese nationality as they do not want to lend support to the version of events whereby the Mauritanian government is said never to have expelled Mauritanian citizens during the 1989 political crisis but only Senegalese people. It has only been made possible for some of them, i.e. the leaders for the most part, to resettle in the United States in 2000.

Compared with other humanitarian operations carried out on the African continent (Sudan, Somalia, Great Lakes Region), the assistance provided to Mauritanian refugees was ultimately limited in scope. It did not lead to the creation of camps with thousands of refugees—the sites are small, accommodating between 50 and 2,000 people and are spread out over a distance of over 500 km—or the construction of “heavy” infrastructure such as wells, hospitals or roads. Moreover, it gave the refugees significant scope with respect to their choice of settlement and internal organisation.

However, despite being limited in scope, it is possible to observe that the humanitarian assistance immediately contributed to the modification of local public space. It generated new collective services and infrastructure in the areas of education, health and legal protection. It also contributed to the emergence of a new layer of intermediaries acting as the leaders of refugee associations, aid management committees and economic groupings. Finally, it made an unexpected contribution to the construction of a new collective identity, a “refugee” identity which the populations concerned were later reluctant to give up to adopt the citizenship of the host country or re-assume their own. With the exception of resettlement, which would enable them to keep their refugee status in a second host country, the Mauritanians have rejected all of the permanent solutions proposed by the UNHCR (i.e. repatriation, naturalisation) hitherto.

Public services of a “third type”: Education and health

We will now analyse in a more detailed and concrete way how two relief services in two sectors, i.e. education and health, were established in the refugee camps.

2005. He still has not recognised the existence of the Mauritanian refugees. This is why the UNHCR cannot guarantee them that they will recover their goods (cattle, land, houses), their jobs and their rights as Mauritanian citizens if they return.

Health and education are two major sectors included in all assistance programmes coordinated by the UNHCR. However, their regulation and operating modes do not concern the authority of the UNHCR alone. In practice, they are shaped by complex processes of negotiation between refugee representatives and the UNHCR's NGO partners, whose converging private interests contribute paradoxically to the production of collective public interest services.⁹

A negotiated offer of relief services

The population of Ndioum camp, which is located in the *département* of Podor, was approximately 2,500 in 1989. During the emergency period, a "embryonic" medical service was set up by the Senegalese Red Cross with the support of the French NGO Médecins du Monde. Free primary health care and regular supplies of medicines were provided to the refugees on presentation of their identity card.¹⁰ Having provided completely free health care for over a year, Médecins du Monde, which had become the UNHCR's operational partner in the health sector, agreed to finance the construction of a health centre and supply it with equipment and medication. This decision was made in response to a request from the representatives of Ndioum camp, some of whom had previously worked as doctors and nurses in the Mauritanian public health sector. They hoped to continue practising their profession and take over the management of the planned facilities. However, Médecins du Monde imposed several conditions on their involvement. It required, first, a symbolic contribution by refugees to the financing and building the health centre and second, the establishment of a system for the recovery of costs based on an initial supply of medication. The refugee representatives accepted these conditions and, in return, negotiated subsidies for the remuneration of the medical refugee staff and the members of the future health committee. Finally,

⁹ The case studies presented here are based on interviews conducted with the refugees, their representatives, the local populations, administrative authorities (Inspector of Education, head doctor of the health district) and representatives of the UNHCR and OFADEC (*Office Africain pour le Développement et la Coopération*). The research was carried out exclusively in the *département* (administrative district) of Podor, in the central valley of the Senegal River.

¹⁰ Despite being granted *prima facie* recognition, the Mauritanian refugees merely hold a "request certificate" for obtaining refugee status. This certificate, which is valid for three months and renewable, acts as a temporary "identity card" and authorises refugees to benefit from the UNHCR aid programme.

they also obtained monthly salary payments ranging from XOF (*francs CFA*) 250,000 to 500,000 from the UNHCR. Once the health centre was built and the committee created, Médecins du Monde gradually withdrew and the UNHCR entrusted the “follow-up” of the health service to OFADEC (Office Africain pour le Développement et la Coopération), a Senegalese NGO that has been in charge of implementing the UNHCR food programme since 1989. OFADEC improved the health programme coordinated by the former partner by employing a consultant whose role involved assisting the health committee to obtain supplies of medication and supervise its management. OFADEC also sought free drug donations from other financial donors. Meanwhile, the health committee was in charge of defining the regulations governing accessibility to the health centre: it was decided it would be opened to both refugees and locals and that drugs would be sold at the same price to all, but at rates lower than those charged by the Senegalese medical facilities. However, locals had to pay for their consultations, which was not the case for refugees. Overall, given that its prices were lower than those charged by the facilities within the Senegalese system, the refugee health centre was a very attractive facility.

The establishment of refugee primary schools followed a rather similar process, however the margin for action granted to refugees in this instance was greater. Some of the refugee representatives in Ndioum, including the camp President, had previously worked as teachers. They rallied the populations around a project for the construction a school where the Mauritanian school programme (including Arabic) could be taught. They collected contributions and succeeded in obtaining financial support from local NGOs (PIP) for the construction of several classrooms. At first, refugee leaders taught on a voluntary basis. Through their association (ARMS), they coordinated the teaching of a common school programme for all of the refugee sites. They also offered training to other refugees who were willing to teach their children on a volunteer basis. These efforts were then used as a showcase for obtaining financial support from the UNHCR for the funding of educational material, the construction of new classrooms and the payment of fees to volunteer teachers. Under direct pressure from refugees, the UNHCR agreed to finance an education programme, which was, again, to be implemented by its operational partner, OFADEC. As in the case of the health facilities, OFADEC was responsible for improving the structure and maintaining the system created by the refugee representatives. Together with the refugee leaders it coordinated teaching programmes, training

and fund-raising activities for the purpose of obtaining financial support from donors other than the UNHCR. The schools were only open to refugee children as the programmes taught were based on Mauritanian and not Senegalese educational requirements. Built on a temporary basis for the purpose of preparing refugee children for their return to Mauritanian schools, they remained opened until 1998.

Thus, what the schools and health facilities had in common was that they were established and financed on the basis of a hybrid process involving complex negotiations between the UNHCR's NGO partners (OFADEC, Médecins du Monde), the refugee representatives (camp presidents, health and education committees) and the refugees themselves (community participation). Their rules of operation and accessibility were mainly defined by the refugee leaders (ARMS, community committees). However, they were directly supervised by consultants hired by OFADEC, to whom the teaching and medical staff had to present regular activity reports. With regard to the involvement of the local administrative authorities, their role was limited to the indirect supervision of refugee health and education programmes. According to local Senegalese civil servants, these facilities enjoyed "a different status," they were "80 percent independent" and were based on "the authority of the UNHCR." Some of these officials even describe these schools and health centres as public services of a "third type." Indeed, there are no official documents defining the status or the operational regulations to which these facilities were subject. These two case studies ultimately highlight the fact that "intermediary" actors (the refugee leaders and OFADEC) played an important role in the production and regulation of relief services and the striking absence of state involvement in the entire process.

When brokers respond to the general interest

The construction of the health centres and refugee schools was mainly negotiated by social actors who occupied an intermediary position between refugees and donors, i.e. refugee representatives and non-governmental organisations.

The refugee representatives, "intellectuals" originating from the Mauritanian public administration, occupied an interface position between the refugee populations and any interlocutor from outside the camp, i.e. local and international humanitarian organisations and representatives of the Senegalese administration. Their linguistic,

legal and administrative skills enabled them to become the refugees' spokesmen. Thanks to their ability to resolve the refugees' problems, they became, to some extent, their "deputies" and therefore acquired a *de facto* form of public authority. Moreover, their strategic position made it possible and legitimate for them to present brokerage logics to international organisations for the purpose of obtaining funding for their projects. These logics were expressed by tactics of close supervision of representatives of the aid agencies and attempts to personalise ties with those who remained at headquarters in Dakar or Saint-Louis. The brokers' strategies also included the diversion of resources which were subsequently redistributed to family members, close friends or political clients.

The local NGOs, the UNHCR's partners or operational agencies, occupied another strategic position between the refugee representatives and the UNHCR. OFADEC, a Senegalese NGO, played the most significant role here, not so much in the production of the aid relief services but in their continuation and management. From 1992, this NGO became the only partner of the UNHCR in charge of the monitoring and implementation of all aspects of the aid programmes. Its privileged position can be explained by the fact that it was the organisation with primary responsibility for food distribution. To enable it to meet this responsibility, the UNHCR provided OFADEC with funding to open several local offices in the Senegal River valley, purchase new vehicles and hire new staff. Once it had become an established presence in the valley, it gradually acquired a certain authority legitimised by its "good knowledge of the field." It eventually managed to take control of all of the UNHCR aid programmes (education, health and income-generating projects). Thus, its influence expanded in parallel with its role of accompanying UNHCR representatives on field missions. OFADEC took advantage of this situation to propose the reformulation of both the content and budgets of the standardised UNHCR programmes. According to its contract with the UNHCR, OFADEC's sole responsibility concerned the implementation of the UNHCR assistance programmes. However, it is clear that, in practice, the NGO had a significant margin for action that extended far beyond its role in programme implementation.

Finally, the two intermediary groups, i.e. the refugee leaders and OFADEC, had certain convergent practices and interests which produced public services. The existence of both was based on the reality of a humanitarian situation and refugees, from which they drew finan-

cial resources and social legitimacy. For the refugee leaders, a political and emotional dimension was added to this. The existence of refugee camps reinforced their political struggle against a dictatorial regime, which had oppressed them, and gave them the opportunity to expand their political networks. The convergence of interests between these two groups is also demonstrated by their use of the “humanitarian” discourse that highlighted the extremely difficult situation endured by refugees. Their discourse contributed to the legitimisation and materialisation of the legal category of the “refugee” and their brokerage activities enabled them to channel significant investments towards the camps which were subsequently transformed into permanent social spaces. That is why both can be described as *de facto* public authorities, even if the language they use is politically neutral. Finally, because they are dependent on the existence of a humanitarian situation, they also display a certain fragility. Following the withdrawal of the UNHCR, they would both have to redefine their logics of action and direct them at other objectives.

The state and its “wait-and-see policy”

Whereas the intermediaries played a key role in the production of relief services, the Senegalese state was conspicuous in its absence.

While the local administrative authorities were partly involved in settling the refugees, it would appear that they only played an indirect role in the creation of infrastructure and collective services within the refugee camps between 1990 and 1996. Given its lack of financial resources, the state willingly assumed a passive role. Thus, unable to respond to the pressure exerted by the refugees on its infrastructure and public services, it allowed the UNHCR to finance new ones and let it act in its place.¹¹ Thus, in reality, it delegated its role in the provision of public services. This also explains why local Senegalese administrations often perceive the Mauritanian refugees as a population under the authority of the UNHCR. However, they actually remain subject to national legislation which authorises or prohibits the application of

¹¹ According to international law, it is the responsibility of the states to provide refugees with access to basic services, whereas the main responsibility of the UNHCR is to make sure they benefit from legal protection. The countries of the south, however, often lack the resources necessary to provide even basic services and this is why the UNHCR has come to play a key role in the financing of basic infrastructure in refugee camps (Bergbeder 1999).

international law to their situation. This “simplified” perception of things tends to reinforce the idea that, despite living on the same territory, refugees and locals are not subject to the same authority. The position of local authorities varies, however, according to the issue at stake. At other times, and for other reasons, local authorities will clearly assert the exercise of their power over refugee populations in order to obtain financial support from the international community.

The relief services, which were produced on the basis of brokerage logics and without the intervention of the state, ultimately responded to the interest of a great number of actors. Indeed, refugees had access to health and education at lower cost, while locals also benefited from the new infrastructure built in the refugee camps (health centres, water fountains, wells, etc.). Even the state profited from the situation, as new collective services were created on its territory without its financial participation.

Thus, it may be claimed that these humanitarian services (health and education) were of “general interest” although they did not belong to or were not regulated by the public sector. What we have here is a particular configuration whereby collective private interests (i.e. those of the intermediaries and of the refugees) of an economical and political nature led to the creation of collective services that were of benefit to all, and whereby the general interest is defined, in part, outside of the state authorities. This configuration also created identity. The discourse of the intermediary groups (i.e. refugee leaders and OFADEC) and local administrations lent “concrete” content to the refugee status by attributing rights to it (i.e. the right to receive assistance and protection) and placing it under an authority distinct from that of the state. In this way, it encouraged refugees to transform their stigma into a “positive” representation which they had to defend, a process that could also be described as “contra-stigmatisation” (Elias 1997).

*The reclassification of the humanitarian services in the
direction of the state Sector*

It is important to understand the way humanitarian services evolve in the long term, in particular when financial donors (e.g. the UNHCR)—which also provide a living for the intermediaries—start to withdraw.

In response to pressure from western countries and the Senegalese Government, the UNHCR has been forced to reduce its financial sup-

port to Mauritanian refugees.¹² Officially justifying its actions on the basis of a depoliticising discourse (“Mauritanian refugees must become self-sufficient”), the UNHCR withdrawal was undertaken in a number of stages. It started with the suspension of food distribution in 1995 and continued with the steady reduction of the health and education programmes. To prepare for this event, the UNHCR approached the Senegalese administrative authorities on the matter of “integrating” refugee schools and health centres into the Senegalese administrative system. This involved establishing whether the Senegalese state would accept the obligation to pay the refugee staff and directly supervise refugee health centres and schools while adjusting their standards to those of the Senegalese system.

In response to this request, the local administrations first negotiated with the UNHCR to have health centres and schools inspected by a consultant in order to evaluate the skills of the refugee staff, the material resources required and the number of people who use the facilities. The result of the inspection was very negative. The refugee teachers and doctors were accused of poor management and incompetence by the Senegalese education and health inspectorate and the material being used was declared incomplete or obsolete. Finally, in July 1998, when the UNHCR decided to stop subsidising the refugee staff and officially disengaged itself from the supervision of the health and education infrastructure, the Senegalese state accepted the principle of its integration into the national public sector, but only on a selective basis.

With respect to the schools, first, whereas the children were integrated into the Senegalese school system, the refugee teachers were not and were, therefore, faced with unemployment. Most refugee schools were closed and their equipment was transferred to Senegalese schools. In some cases, the schools remained open but Senegalese teachers were appointed to replace their refugee counterparts. Although the integration of refugee pupils constituted a burden for the state, this was somewhat alleviated by their rather weak academic performance which meant that they were unable to advance beyond the first year of

¹² The UNHCR was pressured to end its aid programme in order to make the refugees less visible and encourage them to leave the camps. Refugee political activity in the camps was, indeed, a matter of conflict between Senegal and Mauritania, as Mauritania regularly threatened Senegal to proceed with new expulsions of Senegalese workers if the refugees became too prominent. Moreover, western countries want to preserve political stability in this region where millions of dollars have been invested for the development of irrigated agriculture.

secondary school. Moreover, school principals found it easy to obtain external donations if they highlighted the fact that their schools welcomed refugee pupils.

With regard to the health centres, these were integrated into the Senegalese medical system and placed under the supervision of the *départementale* medical district. However, they had to operate on the basis of “community participation”, as the state refused to employ the refugee staff. This meant that refugee nurses and doctors could pay themselves only if the health centre’s activities (i.e. issuing of prescriptions and sales of medication) were sufficient to enable them to earn commission. This system meant that the refugees had to accept being remunerated and treated as simple “community health workers” whereas they were state-recognised nurses and doctors back in Mauritania.

Through this new community system, the state opened the doors to economic competition: refugee staff remained only where there were enough clients for them to obtain sufficient commission. This is what happened with the health centres located in refugee sites that were located at a considerable distance from the Senegalese medical facilities: the increase in the price of drugs and consultations caused by the end of the subsidy system did not trigger a decrease in their activities. As opposed to this, the new system worked against the refugee health centres located near Senegalese health facilities. When the prices increased, the refugee health centres became less attractive than previously. Two of them were even forced to close with the departure of unmotivated refugee doctors. In these cases, the equipment was recovered by the state and transferred to the nearest Senegalese health facilities. The health authorities did nothing to try and keep them open.

State public services working in opposition to the general interest

The disengagement of the UNHCR resulted in the integration of the relief services into the state public sector. From then on, it was the responsibility of the state to supervise the health centres and provide access to education for refugee children. Thus, the state assumed control of the collective infrastructure (relief services) that was produced in a configuration, from which it was initially absent. Moreover, the assumption of responsibility for these services was accompanied by a reduction in costs as the state decided to manage health centres on a community basis and refused to integrate refugee teachers into its education system.

In reality, the Senegalese state was acting under the pressures from its own medical and educational administrations which were suffering as a result of competition from the subsidised relief services. At international level, the state was also subjected to pressure from Mauritania and western financial donors who wanted the Mauritanian refugees to remain as invisible and quiet as possible.

Unofficially, it was expected that the reduction in assistance and the integration of the health and education services into the Senegalese system would encourage the refugees to return home spontaneously or take Senegalese nationality. However, the assumption that the Mauritians' attachment to their refugee status was based solely on the benefits they derived from the aid they received proved incorrect. Although the refugee populations reacted badly to this situation, which involved an increase in the cost of healthcare and education, they were not prepared to give up their status as it gave them a sense of belonging and identity.

Moreover, rather than remaining quiet or "invisible", the now unemployed and unmotivated refugee leaders seized the opportunity to accuse both the Senegalese government and the UNHCR of succumbing to the blackmail of the Mauritanian government. The more vociferous they became, the more they embarrassed the Senegalese government which then adopted an increasingly repressive attitude to them. Finally, in response to their complaint that their first host country, i.e. Senegal, was no longer protecting them, it was decided in conjunction with the UNHCR to facilitate their resettlement in the United States. As a result, in November 2000, over 200 Mauritians were resettled in the USA. Of this group, many were doctors and teachers who had worked at the refugee health centres and schools.

Finally, once the basic services financed and controlled by the humanitarian intervention were integrated into the Senegalese public sector, they no longer served the general interest. On the contrary, refugees and natives no longer benefited from the low-cost health care they had provided. The community health centres did not appear to work and the new system encouraged employee absenteeism and the diversion of medication and funds.¹³ Already overcrowded, the Senegalese schools

¹³ The diversion of resources had already occurred during the period when the UNHCR was still involved. However, it was less as the health centres worked well and enabled everyone to have access to health care.

were faced with the burden of welcoming thousands of refugee pupils. However, due to a lack of money or identity papers, refugee families were unable to send all of their children to the Senegalese schools. Moreover, the departure of refugee leaders to the United States gave the other refugees the feeling that their representatives had abandoned them along with the UNHCR. For their part, the Senegalese people felt increasing resentment towards the refugees who they perceived as over-privileged by the international community due to the possibility of being resettled in western countries. The issue of resettlement eventually generated activity in the trafficking of refugee cards as both the Senegalese and Mauritians believed that a refugee card was a passport for migration to the USA.

From depoliticisation to the reconfiguration of the local public sphere

The above study of the education and health relief services confirms the hypothesis presented in the introduction: i.e., despite being built on a rhetoric of emergency and positioning itself outside or even against states, humanitarian intervention is actually a long-term process and has unexpected consequences within both the local and the national public space. It even presents all of the features of “official” or public intervention for the three following reasons.

First, it participates in the financing and coordination of collective services of public interest. Given that they are not financed or regulated by the state, these services are atypical. They are produced and structured by logics of private interest (those of local NGOs and refugee representatives) and yet, they respond to the common interest. Moreover, their management combines “new rules” (introduced by aid agencies) with older forms of collective organisation—for example, the system of contributions created by the refugee leaders preceded the humanitarian intervention (Schmitz 2000). Overall, the relief services were simultaneously financed by international donors, governed by logics of private interest and managed by community organisations, which are superimposed on older local political institutions. Hybrid in nature, they consequently evolve outside of the state sector between international law and customary rights.

In order to ensure the management of these new “public” services, humanitarian intervention leads, second, to the emergence of new actors, i.e. “intermediaries” who present themselves, in some respects,

as “humanitarian brokers” (Bierschenk, Chauveau & Olivier de Sardan 2000). These intermediaries appear to take the form of public authorities as they supervise the management of these new public services and influence the UNHCR aid programmes. Thus, we analysed how OFADEC gained power through its detailed knowledge of local realities and its capacity to coordinate all aspects of the humanitarian intervention in the field. With regard to the refugee leaders, their authority was legitimised on the basis of their ability to speak on behalf of the refugees and influence their political position. They also had “administrative” type powers as well as aid management skills which they shared with OFADEC.

Third, through the legal protection it provides to refugees, humanitarian intervention lends a concrete dimension to refugee status, which is associated with certain rights as well as duties. Intermediaries play a significant role in this process. Their *raison d'être* being tied to the existence of refugees, they contribute to the reinforcement of this status by associating it with a positive image. In their discourses, the figure of the “refugee-victim” passively waiting for aid is replaced by the one of the “Negro-Mauritanian refugee” claiming the respect of his rights. Thanks to the regular political and cultural meetings they organised, the refugee leaders played the main role in this “counter-stigmatisation” process. The refugee status was politicised, and moreover associated with an “emotional” dimension, which refers to an identity that nobody wants to give up. These Mauritians now feel it their “duty” to remain refugees until the Mauritanian government officially recognises the events of 1989 (their forced expulsion from their country of origin). This is why refugee status ultimately becomes a substitute “citizenship,” with which associated rights and duties are defined on several levels: i.e. at international level by inter-governmental institutions, at national level by the host country and at local level by the refugee leaders.

An ungovernable humanitarian space

The provision of aid to refugees ultimately contributes to the construction of an internal frontier between a humanitarian public space and an official national public space. In the case under examination, the former gradually “competed” with the latter as it offered better quality public services at a better price, and “citizenship” that afforded better opportunities for migration to the West than Senegalese nationality.

The Senegalese state was, therefore, a victim of its own decision to call on the UN system and recognise the Mauritians as refugees. However, the Senegalese government did not remain passive *vis-à-vis* these unexpected effects of the humanitarian intervention.

While the state did not become involved in the financing of the relief services, it was active and visible in other aspects of the humanitarian action. It tried to preserve some control over the humanitarian space emerging on its territory through its legislative and police administrations, in particular. At first, its action had a positive outcome: it fulfilled its duty to protect the refugees by registering them and renewing their papers. It also allowed the Mauritians to engage in political and even military activity on its territory, which was far from maintaining a neutral stance towards the Mauritanian government.

However, from 1992 when it restored diplomatic relations with the latter, the Senegalese state gradually modified its behaviour towards the Mauritanian refugees and adopted a far more repressive policy towards them. Subjected to pressures from its local administrations, on the one hand, and from the Mauritanian government, on the other, the Presidency became more and more reluctant to host and protect Mauritanian refugees. This shift in attitude explains why food aid to refugees was suspended in 1995 and the refugee health and education services were integrated into the Senegalese public sector in 1998. In addition, repressive measures against refugee political activities also increased. The political leaders were threatened with expulsion and the Senegalese government became clearly reluctant to renew the refugee cards distributed to Mauritians in 1990. In 2001, it went as far as cancelling the distribution of new computerised cards which the UNHCR had introduced in the Senegal River Valley and, in 2002, it decided to prohibit the Mauritians from celebrating the traditional International Day of Refugees. Today, the Senegalese state even requires that Mauritians submit individual requests for asylum, a requirement that can be considered as a legal aberration as they were already recognised as refugees on a collective and *a priori* basis in 1989. Few such requests are granted, which means that the Senegalese state is no longer willing to provide legal protection to Mauritanian refugees. All these repressive measures reflect a very specific objective: i.e. dismantling the humanitarian space which gradually took shape on Senegalese territory and maintained itself longer than expected.

However, despite all its efforts, the Senegalese government was unable to make the Mauritanian refugees invisible, just as the UNHCR failed

to negotiate permanent solutions for them (with the exception of the resettlement of 200 refugees in the USA). The end of food distribution did not trigger massive repatriation and the resettlement of refugee leaders did not discourage the refugees from maintaining their status. The repressive measures taken by the Senegalese state in depriving the refugees of its protection did not achieve the intended effects either. The Mauritanian refugees were still defending and maintaining their refugee status 16 years after their expulsion, because, for them, remaining refugees was a way of remembering what happened in 1989 and demanding that their basic rights be respected in Mauritania. Thus, the symbolic dimension of the refugee status largely exceeded the material or legal advantages associated with it.

Moreover, unofficially, the refugees constantly transcend the prohibitions, constraints and regulations to which they are subjected. They continue to engage in political activity, in particular from the United States where they can have direct access to human rights organisations. Because they can no longer count on UNHCR assistance or the protection of the Senegalese state, most of them have acquired false Senegalese identity papers in order to be able to circulate and work more freely and to secure their access to public services. Kinship ties and petty corruption at local administrative level (Blundo 2001) enabled them to obtain these papers easily without giving up their refugee status and declaring their “naturalisation” as normally required by the law.

Some of them even have new Mauritanian identity cards which they obtained through corruption or kinship relationships in Mauritania. This enables them to work clandestinely in their country of origin while leaving part of their families behind in the refugee camps and maintaining their opposition to the current Mauritanian regime. If these practices are illegal from the perspective of national and international law, they are legitimate and normal from the perspective of customary laws and local history. The border between Senegal and Mauritania has always been artificial one as it separates people belonging to the same families and ethnic group. Thus, based on opportunities and the resources available, the refugees continue to move back and forth between the two sides of the Senegal River, as they have always done (Sall 2000).¹⁴ The

¹⁴ On the transnational strategies adopted by the refugees to ensure their access to public services, refer to Sall’s study (2000) and his oral contribution to the APAD conference in Leiden (2002).

introduction of the refugee status enables the Mauritians to cumulate, not two but three citizenships: two national ones (Senegalese and Mauritanian) and one based on international law (i.e. the refugee identity).

This situation highlights the low regulatory capacity of both humanitarian organisations and the state as their actions are legitimised by legislation that does not make any sense from the point of view of the local populations. National and international law merely constitute an additional “layer” of rules and institutions which are superimposed on other rules and regulate institutions inherited from colonial and pre-colonial times. This explains why the state cannot control the unintended effects of humanitarian assistance. Alternating between a wait-and-see policy and repressive measures, the state reacts step by step, based on the issues at stake and political pressures exerted at a given moment in time.

Conclusion

The above analysis of relief aid as one of the alternative mechanisms that produce public action leads us to draw some important conclusive remarks regarding the concept of “governance” in Africa.

First, it may be asserted that services based on the general interest can be financed or regulated outside of traditional governmental institutions. However, we have noted that situations of this nature do not endure. The services produced are gradually reclassified towards the state sector. If this dynamic is inverted compared to the evolution of the Senegalese public services, which are currently being privatised, it nevertheless confirms the existence of a blurred boundary between the private and public logics. Whether it is integrated into the public sector or privatised, the provision of public services in Africa always involves the participation of many actors from both the governmental and non-governmental sectors. State administrations (central or local), international organisations, NGOs, community associations and individual actors (refugee representatives) all participate at various levels and times in the financing, the management and the regulation of these public services. This is why it is often difficult to establish who financed or regulated what. Thus, the concept of “governance” does involve a necessary displacement of boundaries between the state and civil society so as to facilitate the analysis of the way in which public action is being defined and implemented in Africa. As in western democracies,

private actors can pursue activities that promote the general interest and public actors can use private management methods or behave like entrepreneurs in the promotion of their own interests. Public action and politics do not necessarily feature where they are the most expected, i.e. in the state-controlled sector.

Our analysis of the humanitarian space leads us to a second conclusion: alternative and unexpected modes of producing public action do not necessarily make it more effective or efficient (in terms of “governability”). This can be explained by the fact that humanitarian intervention remains embedded in a national space which does not always make sense to local populations. Both international and national law establish their legitimacy on the basis of a concept of identity and the nation-state that is western in its inspiration. As we know, this framework does not always correspond to local African realities and merely constitutes an additional layer of rules and institutions. Other norms, institutions and logics inherited from local history and tradition exist, and are often considered more legitimate by the populations than the more “modern” or recent ones. This weak anchoring of national and international law generates multiple overlapping effects between various standards and identity referents. This complex situation explains why neither the state, the UNHCR, nor community organisations can produce controlled and rational public action as their decisions will always have unintended effects.

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THE DAILY GOVERNANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH: GENDER PERSPECTIVES FROM
DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

Brigit Obrist van Eeuwijk¹

Introduction

In the international development community, the understanding of governance has changed during the past decades. Governance is now used as a broader concept than government. According to the UNDP, “governance is the complex of mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” (Uphadhyay 2006). In this new perspective, local governance has received increased attention. A World Bank discussion paper, for instance, defines local governance as “the way authority is organized, legitimated and employed by and on behalf of local people through planning, decision-making, rule enforcement and accountability processes” (Helling et al. 2005). Actors involved in local governance include local governments and other public sector structures and committees as well as civic social institutions by which people organise to act collectively such as village committees, water user groups, rotating credit and saving associations and youth groups.

Environmental health is certainly an issue of public concern. It requires individual and collective efforts to ensure that the natural and built environment are free of undue hazards and that households and communities have access to essential services including water supply, sanitation and solid waste management. Local governance is particularly important for environmental health as this is the level where many environmental health hazards can be controlled and environmental health services are provided and/or managed (Cairncross et al. 2003). However, weak public structures on national and local levels are often a key cause of poor environmental health, especially in the context of

¹ Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel, Switzerland; E-mail address: Brigit.Obrist@unibas.ch.

urban poverty. Urban residents are exposed to many health hazards and almost left to themselves in the day-to-day management of environmental health (Harpham and Tanner 1995, Atkinson et al. 1996, Harpham and Molyneux 2001, Obrist and Eeuwijk 2003).

This paper examines such a situation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As in many other cities of developing countries (UN-Habitat 2003a, UN-Habitat 2003b), high rates of urbanisation in combination with slow economic growth have undermined efforts of the government of Dar es Salaam to provide adequate services to local residents. Water, sanitation and garbage are among the most pressing environmental health concerns (UN 2001). Recent reforms to tackle the economic and political crisis underlying environmental health problems include the introduction of a multiparty system, a nation-wide decentralisation process strengthening local governments, a liberalisation of the market, a privatisation of formerly public services and a poverty reduction strategy (World Bank 2004).

In 2000, Dar es Salaam was divided into three Municipal Councils with a lean City Council for coordinating joint activities. To increase popular participation, one councillor from each ward in a municipal area is now elected into the Municipal Council. An important function of these newly formed local governments is the monitoring of formerly public services which have been partly privatised, like water provision and the removal of solid and fluid waste.

In the policy debates accompanying these reforms, the experiences of urban residents on the lowest levels of the political hierarchy is often neglected. Our paper looks into the ward and focuses on environmental health on the ground level. It asks how local residents have experienced these reforms in local governance and service provision in an inner-city neighbourhood.

Recent evidence from a study in Accra (McGranahan et al. 2001: 131) indicates that women play increasingly important role in environmental management on the ground level, particularly in niches between the public realm of the state and the private arena of the household. As an extension of their reproductive role they collaborate, for instance, in keeping the communal areas of house compounds clean and are considered primarily responsible for maintaining the space between the houses.

Up to now, this topic has not received much attention in the social science literature on African cities. Recent studies in Cairo, Dar es Salaam, Lusaka and Mopti have concentrated on urban women's

increasing involvement in productive work (Hoodfar 1997, Creighton and Omari 1995, Lugalla 1995, Tripp 1997, Hansen 1997, Harts-Broekhuis 1997). They showed that men faced difficulties in fulfilling their role as main breadwinner due to the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Growing numbers of women contribute substantially to the household economy, not always out of choice but because they are forced to do so to make ends meet. While women's increasing involvement in productive work is by now widely acknowledged, their increased contribution to reproductive work has been neglected.

Our paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of this neglected topic: the often hardly visible role of urban women in environmental health management. It inquires into gender divisions of labour and responsibilities in the daily governance of environmental health. By "daily governance" we mean mechanisms and institutions through which social actors organise the control of hazards and the management and use of services, in this case environmental health services, in day-to-day life.

The household is focal point of a gender division of labour and responsibilities derived from the framework of social relations in the wider society (Brydon and Chant 1989). At the same time, household members belong to wider social networks² through which they exchange contacts, information and help in the form of money, services, goods or loans (Tungaraza 1993, Lugalla 1995, Tripp 1997). Members of networks share facilities and utensils, provide and receive moral and material support or training and apprenticeship, and assist one another to save small amounts of money.

Our paper asks whether the household is also a focal point in the daily governance of environmental health. It further examines the role of social and economic networks in gaining access to essential environmental services. These questions seem all the more relevant since various authors contend that membership in a household and wider networks gives people access to resources in an uncertain world where neither the economy nor the state provide much security (Hoodfar 1997: 8, Harts-Broekhuis 1997, Moser 1998).

² The idea of a network helps to conceptualise the connections and interconnections that exist between individual persons which may be activated in interaction for particular purposes or in particular situations (Rapport and Overing 2000: 290-293).

To empirically investigate the three interrelated research questions of our conceptual framework, we suggest a new approach which focuses on “task-centred interactions”. This means that we select an environmental health activity, consider it as a “task” and map the social categories with which the person assigned to this task actually interacts. By mapping social interactions centring on a specific task, such as water provision or waste removal, we can empirically establish culturally defined—and redefined—rules underlying daily governance of environmental health.

Study design and methods

Our study has largely grown out of collaboration with the Dar es Salaam Urban Health Project and forms part of ongoing research.³ The present paper draws mainly on ethnographic field research over eighteen months from 1995 to 1997 and a follow up in 2002 (Obrist 2006). A variety of qualitative research methods were used ranging from participant observation during nearly a year long residence in the neighbourhood, document reviews and in-depth interviews to semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Comparative data have been collected from a purposive sample of 100 sample households. A sub-sample of 20 households was regularly visited over a period of three months. To validate our findings from the sample households, we conducted focus group discussions with people representing other social categories in terms of age or gender. Five years after the main ethnographic research, we conducted a follow-up study that consisted of six focus group discussions with the same gender and age groups as well as informal conversations and observations.

Ilala: An inner-city neighbourhood

The site of this study is a neighbourhood of about 10,000 residents only five kilometres from the city centre of Dar es Salaam. Laid out by the British in the late 1920s (Leslie 1963: 22), the colonial ward Ilala became part of the administrative structure of the newly independent

³ Throughout the paper, plural forms are used for the author to emphasise the team effort behind this research.

one-party state in 1961. It was subdivided into party branches (*tawi*) and ten-cell-units (*shina*) and became integrated into one of three districts of the Dar es Salaam Region. In the 1990s, the administrative divisions were again modified in the course of the Local Government Reform: The District Ilala became the Municipality Ilala, and the former Tawi Ilala has been substituted by the Mtaa Kasulo. In everyday language, however, people commonly use the term Ilala for this neighbourhood.

Many people remember the “good old days” of the 1960s when Ilala became a model neighbourhood for low-income workers. Every house was fitted with a cesspit and connected to the main water system. Until the late 1970s, the water, garbage and sanitation services were fully functional. However, the continuous influx of migrants in combination with economic decline and mismanagement led to increasingly difficult living conditions. The infrastructure began to decay, and basic services like piped water and door-to-door garbage collection no longer reached the neighbourhood. In the mid-1990s, the former model neighbourhood looked rather dilapidated and was densely populated. An average of six families lived in each Swahili house, one family per room, and all of them shared the communal facilities in the courtyard.

Ilala used to be inhabited mainly by Zaramo, one of the matrilineal societies of eastern Tanzania who have long been under the influence of Islam beliefs and practices (Beidelman 1967), but immigration led to ethnic heterogeneity. In our sample of 100 households, women originated from 15 out of the 20 mainland regions of Tanzania as well as from the Islands Pemba and Zanzibar. According to their own classification and that of Tanzanian sociologists (e.g. Lugalla 1995: 126–129), most residents of Ilala belong to the lower ranges of the urban middle-class. In our household sample, 60 percent of the men were low-income wage earners and 69 percent of the women generated income as petty traders, small-scale entrepreneurs, long distance traders and wage-earners. Nearly all women and all men had been to school.

Most women in our sample (74%) adhered to the classic urban gender model: The husband was the main breadwinner (*mtafutaji*) and head (*kichwa cha nyumba*), and the wife acted as cook (*mpishi*) and caretaker of the home (*mtunzaji wa nyumba*). A small group of women (14%) said that the parents share household headship and that husband and wife “help one another” (*kusaidiana*). Another small group (12%) referred to themselves as heads. Most of them lived in single-parent households after divorce or the death of the husband.

Urban gender models are in flux, partly due to the changing economy, partly because of other and crosscutting influences, such as competing religious and secular trends of interpreting gender relations. More generally, administrative structures, environmental health conditions and social relations in Dar es Salaam have been subject to rapid change over the past decades. This is the background against which the everyday management of environmental health has to be examined.

Household water provision

In spite of recent reforms, water clearly remains a critical issue in Ilala and in most parts of Dar es Salaam. The city is unable to supply enough piped water to all households. The demand far exceeds the capacity of the providers, and much water is lost due to leaking pipes. The city tries to solve the problem by rationing. Industries get water during the day, less privileged residential areas mainly at night.

In the mid-1990s, water was so scarce that city residents were more concerned with water quantity, i.e. water needed for cleaning, than with water quality, i.e. safe drinking water (Obrist 2003: 284). Their concerns partly changed with the liberalisation of the water service. In 1997, the Dar es Salaam Water and Sewerage Authority (DAWASA) replaced the National Urban Water Authority (NUWA), and many private companies got a licence to run water supply businesses (DAWASA 1999–2003). In Ilala, the municipality as well as private entrepreneurs have recently developed boreholes fitted with electric or hand pumps to tap the ground water. However, this water is rather saline and its quality is doubtful. People do not like its taste and do not drink it. Most women still resort to the same options as in the mid-1990s in their procurement of drinking water.

A systematic comparison of task-centred interactions across households reveals clear rules in the daily governance of the water supply. The household is indeed a focal point. The costs for piped water are divided by household units. The owner of a Swahili house collects the money from the tenant households and pays the DAWASA bill. However, more than a third of all households refuse to pay the bill. This reflects an often heard complaint that even if people pay the bills regularly and personally talk to the DAWASA representatives, they cannot rely on tap water. Sometimes they get water once a month, then on a few consecutive days. Most residents cannot see, why they should pay the

bills, if they do not get a good service and have to spend additional money on services of private pump owners or street vendors.⁴

The household is also the social unit within which the responsibility and labour of getting water is organised. Even in a Swahili house shared by many people, each household is responsible for its own supply. Only in times of need or as a special favour, members of different households help each other, for instance if a relative, neighbour or friend falls ill or is absent.

Gender structures the responsibility and labour of getting water within the household. An often formulated rule says: The husband provides money, and the wife fetches water. Young boys may assist, but as they grow older, the activity is primarily assigned to daughters. Adolescent and grown up men rarely carry water, at least not in public.

Women in Ilala have three options for fetching water. The first option is to get it from the tap in the courtyard. In this planned neighbourhood, all houses are connected to the main water system, and some houses actually have water day and night. The problem is that the service is erratic. In the same street, some houses have, others do not have running water, and even if they do, they get it for less than six hours per day. Many women have to get up at midnight and wait for their turn to fill all available containers.

Most women have to resort to the second option and fetch drinking water outside the house. Some of them have access to water in a house next door, others in the same street and still others walk a long way, to another street, the school or the mosque to get water. If they are lucky, they get their water for free, but more frequently they have to pay, either to contribute to the water bill of DAWASA (formerly NUWA) or to the expenses and/or maintenance of a water pump that was installed on private initiative. Those who have piped water thus sell it to neighbours whose taps remain dry.

The third option is known from many cities around the developing world. Young men push carts with plastic containers through the streets and sell water door to door. Prices fluctuate with the availability of

⁴ The house where I lived, for instance, had no water for six months until, all of a sudden, water started to run at midnight for about two hours. Only the lowest tap in the toilet gave water. The water ran so slowly that it took a long time to fill all the available containers for the next twenty-four hours. Unfortunately, this miracle did not last long, only for two weeks. Like the other tenants, I contributed only reluctantly, when the house owner collected money from us to pay the water bill.

water and the distance from the water source; if water is scarce and men have to push their carts far, the price doubles or triples. Although it is more convenient to buy water from street vendors than to carry the buckets, many women prefer to fetch water themselves because they do not trust the quality of the water sold by the young men.

The daily budgeting for water is the responsibility of the women. Unless they live in a house with regular tap water supply, they have to use the daily allowance left by the husband to buy not only food and fuel but also water. Since this allowance is often inadequate, most women have to add from their own income or use manual labour to replace it, which means fetching water from a cheap source. If possible, mothers delegate this laborious and time-consuming task to daughters and house helpers. Women carry, in other words, not only the practical burden of organising daily water provision but also help to ease the financial one.

Women often move beyond the domestic arena and gain access to water through social networks. They negotiate with relatives, neighbours, with people working in the school, the party office or a restaurant and with service providers. Women living in the same house have their own networks. Woman A may have a friend living in the third house on the street to the right. If she runs out of water, she sends her daughter with a bucket to this friend. Once in a while, she may also have enough money to buy water from a street vendor. Woman B from the same house may have a larger allowance. Whenever she needs water, she can call a street vendor. Some of these street vendors are connected with one another because they work for the same cart owner, but neither Woman A nor Woman B knows them personally.

In the course of the Local Government Reform, community managing tasks have been assigned to locally elected councillors. In Ilala, the councillor was a very active woman. She fought for people's rights to get more water and brought worries about water quality to the attention of the local government. However, as the discussion of our findings has shown, the political reforms and the policy change in the water sector have not resulted in a major change in the daily governance of the water supply. Although the local government has played a more active role, most rules governing day-to-day management are defined by community structure and gender. Only if the supply of safe piped water became fully operational would the intellectual, practical and the financial burden shift from the women to the government or a public-private partnership.

Household sanitation services

Sanitation is another major environmental concern in Dar es Salaam. The sewerage system built by the British covers only a small part of the city and is rather dilapidated. Many houses have a septic tank and special trucks are needed to empty them. In densely populated neighbourhoods the streets are often too narrow for these trucks; but this is not an issue in Ilala. Since it is a planned residential area laid out in a grid-like pattern, trucks have easy access to each house. In the mid-1990s, only few city council trucks operated in the area and provided their service selectively. But even after DAWASA took over responsibility and licensed private companies to provide sanitation services (DAWASA 1999–2003), trucks hardly reach this neighbourhood. Personal connections through vertical networks and some extra cash may facilitate the process, but there is no guarantee.

Our observations of task-centred interactions reveal again clear patterns of daily governance which are similar yet differ in detail from those seen in water provision. Toilets are communal facilities shared by all tenants of a Swahili house. Since these facilities form part of the built infrastructure, the house owner is responsible for their upkeep including cesspit emptying. He or she should organise and pay for sanitation services. In practice, however, many house owners neglect their responsibility, and the tenants have to organise themselves. An initiative person takes charge, collects money from each household and makes the necessary arrangements with providers of sanitation services.

The household thus again becomes a focal point in the governance of environmental health, and responsibilities are gendered within households. According to the gender model, cesspit emptying and the construction work it involves is clearly men's work. As head of household, every husband has to make a contribution to the payment of the sanitation services. In daily practice, wives also take an active role, although mainly behind the scene. They complain to their husbands, to other tenants and to the house owners and thus indirectly exert power. Often they obtain information and contacts through their networks and even make first arrangements with service providers. Moreover, the growing number of *de facto* female household heads has to make financial contributions like their male counterparts.

Most residents in Ilala recur to the sanitation services of local experts (*wataalam wa kienyeji*). These experts charge a fee, and the client has to buy cement and whatever building material is required. They dig a

deep pit close to the existing septic tank, break the floor of the toilet and make an opening wide enough for buckets to pass in and out. To empty the old cesspit they use buckets, fill them with human waste and pour it into the new pit. It usually takes them a whole day to dig the new hole, and another day to empty the old septic tank. Before completing the work, they bring clean sand from the bottom of the old cesspit and show it to the client. They then pour kerosene into the pit to kill the bad smell and reconstruct the old toilet using cement. The new hole is either completely covered or left partly open to be used as a garbage hole.

This local sanitation method is shrouded in secrecy, partly because the government has banned it, partly because local experts do not like to be observed. Their work is regarded as dirty (*-chafu*) in a pragmatic and in a ritual sense. Bad spirits (*majini*) live in dirty places like toilets, and the men have to perform rituals to placate the spirits before they do their job. In the mid-1990s, our respondents in Ilala did not talk about this topic until we happened to be present when local experts came to do their job. After this incidence people opened up and told us that these local experts are more reliable and do a better job than the men employed by the NUWA. Five years later, this method was confirmed as common practice during our focus group discussions, even after DAWASA had privatised sanitation services.

While household water provision is a regular and daily activity, cesspit emptying is not. In some houses, it has to be done every year, in others every two, five or eight years. The length of the interval depends on what goes into the tank. If people use the toilet also as shower, it takes less time to fill the cesspit, not with excrements but with wastewater. The effect is similar if wastewater of the communal sink flows into the tank.

Again we find that many responsibilities in the daily governance of environmental health are delegated towards the lower levels of the hierarchy. Even though national regulations guarantee this right, residents in Ilala do not have access to public-private services organised by the authorities. Government and party officials on the next lower levels—the ward, the branch and the ten-cell-units—turn a blind eye to the fact that people prefer the services of local experts to the legal ones. Further down the echelon, house owners bear the main responsibility for cleaning cesspits, but since they often do not fulfil this task, tenants have to take over. According to the rules, men are in charge of this environmental health activity; but in reality, it is women have become

increasingly engaged: As an extension of their reproductive tasks, they take an active but often less visible part in environmental management by mobilising intangible resources like information and personal contacts and by pushing others into action. Female household heads, of course, play the same role as the men in the same position.

Household waste removal

Garbage is the third major environmental health problem in Dar es Salaam. After 2000, the situation has visibly improved compared to that described for instance by Yhdego (1991). In the city centre and along the main roads street cleaners do their best to remove the litter, and in all areas of the city, waste collection services have been placed under private management, with the city and municipal councils monitoring the delivery of the services (Rutsch 2001). This change can also be observed in Ilala. In the mid-1990s, the residents had to dig garbage pits in the sandy ground around the houses because the collection services did not reach them. By 2002, the municipalities had contracted private and often local companies to collect garbage from house to house.

When waste removal centred on garbage pits, households often collaborated and took turns in collecting money and organising labour. The household in charge was usually represented by a woman who hired casual labourers to dig the garbage pit or asked one of the sons or a single tenant to do it. Two communal activities were an exception to this rule. The first one was organised by the CCM branch because a big heap of garbage had accumulated on the open square in front of the party office. The local leaders called all men from the houses facing the square to a meeting; they discussed the issue and agreed to contribute in cash or labour to a large garbage pit. The second collaborative effort was arranged by a "five-house-cell". A local leader organised cash and labour for a communal garbage hole.

Garbage pits are, however, a poor solution in densely populated urban areas: they fill up quickly, especially if clandestinely used by other people, and there is hardly any place for new ones. Many people reported that the ground around their house has already been used as a garbage dump. For these reasons, citizens and authorities preferred collection services to garbage pits, already in the mid-1990s.

Women often used "informal" services of men with pushcarts (*mko-koteni*) collecting garbage from house to house. They considered them as local professionals, similar to water vendors and sanitation experts,

and paid them a negotiated price. The city council had banned these “informal” services, but most residents did not abide to this regulation. They argued that this was the only affordable alternative to digging pits because city council trucks served only the houses of rich people, an argument confirmed by my own observations. Early attempts to introduce services run by private companies failed because residents refused to pay the fees. Even better-off residents rejected private companies saying they preferred to distribute small sums among those trying to earn a living through “informal” activities rather than paying fees to a private company that makes a few rich people wealthier.

Five years later, the residents and the municipality have reached a compromise: the government contracts small private companies and thus creates job opportunities. The company operating in Ilala has a timetable for most streets; and small trucks pass twice a week. For this service, the company charges each Swahili house a fee and collects it at the end of the month. Collecting money from house to house is not an easy task because many people complain about the price, but if they refuse to pay, they can be taken to court. The fee is divided among households. In male- or parent-headed households the husband is supposed to provide the money. Since men often do not earn an adequate and regular income, women have to help out, but they insist that paying is not their responsibility.

For many residents, however, the services of today have not yet reached the standard of those provided in the 1960s. In those days, the government collected the garbage three times a week. Its services were free and even included the distribution of garbage containers with a lid. Nowadays, the service is less frequent, has to be paid and does not provide containers.

Although they are still illegal, many women continue to use the services of the “informal” cart collectors. These men are available at all times and do the job for little money. The companies tolerate these cart collectors and allow them to use their local dumping site for a small fee. A few trucks of private individuals also collect garbage, but they tend to be even more expensive than the officially contracted company.

Daily governance in waste removal, on one hand, thus followed similar rules as that in water provision and in sanitation. Households are a focal point in the organisation of responsibility, cash and labour, and women carry most of the practical and intellectual burden as well as contributing financially. It differs, on the other hand, because a closely interlinked mix of private-public services supports them in

garbage collection. Most women agree that the new collection system is much better than the garbage pits, even though the services could be further improved.

Conclusions

In principle, the governance of environmental health in Dar es Salaam is clearly structured. It operates on several interrelated levels linking the national, regional, city and municipal levels with the ward and the household levels. If, however, governance does not work properly on the upper levels, day-to-day decision-making, responsibility and labour is delegated downwards. Our gender-sensitive examination of task-centred interactions in water provision, sanitation and garbage collection has made this clearly visible. It revealed, in fact, a paradox: Those on the lowest levels of the hierarchy, namely women, end up with the biggest responsibilities.

Women have moved into various niches between the public realm of the state and the domestic arena of the household where they interact with other household members, neighbours, relatives as well as representatives of different institutions and local service providers to manage essential services as best as they can. Women take charge of these activities as an extension of their reproductive tasks, but they often do so in the name of their husbands whom they support and replace because men are busy gaining a living. Less rather than more involvement would mean an empowerment for these women. If they were freed of the most arduous tasks to ensure environmental health, they could use their time for income generation, child care or further education. This can only be achieved if those in power on the higher levels of the social and political hierarchy become fully engaged in the day-to-day governance of environmental health services—as they used to be in the early 1960s.

Acknowledgements

I thank the residents of Ilala for their generosity, the Tanzanian field researchers, particularly Susan Mlangwa, Happiness Minja and Charles Mayombana with his team, for their compassion and the Dar es Salaam Urban Health Project, especially Dr. D. Mtasiwa, Dr. L. Cloutier and P. Pichette, for their intellectual and practical support. Field research was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The paper

has been enriched by discussions within the “NCCR North-South: Research Partnerships for Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change”, in particular the Individual Project 4 “Health and Well-being”, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Swiss Development Corporation. My thanks also go to the reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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PUBLIC GOODS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF
COLLECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE: THE CASE OF THE
DRINKING-WATER SUPPLY SYSTEMS IN THE
MARADI REGION OF NIGER

Mahaman Tidjani Alou

The issue of the public goods in African villages is one of a series of new and highly paradoxical topics that ultimately cannot be resolved by empirical studies alone. Thus, this contribution is based on an approach that seeks to provide a further explanation of this issue and introduces directly, through the adoption of another perspective, the factor of local powers as expressed through actors' logics in village arenas and in the area of natural resource management (Olivier de Sardan 1999; Jacob 2004).

This study is based on data collected on village water issues, an area that is often presented as a key one in the context of the socio-economic development of African countries. As demonstrated by the sheer volume of publications dedicated to the topic, water is a subject that generates copious debate.¹ Much of this debate focuses on its progressive scarcity due to the depletion or pollution of groundwater sources. Both the economic battles over water and the issues at stake are raised with the aim of highlighting the new restructuring of the poles of the global economy. However, the issues surrounding water in developing countries are diverse. While some countries face water surpluses that represent a threat to their populations, others have problems involving water shortages and difficulties of access which are equally problematic for their populations. Water is indeed scarce in such areas and is often badly managed. Hydraulic installations, when they exist, are inadequately maintained. Parts of Niger, such as the Maradi Region, belong to this last group.

Water supply is a priority of government policy in Sahelian countries, in particular Niger. Drinking-water supply is, therefore, at the centre of the policies focusing on the rural context. In the villages studied, the

¹ See, for example, *Revue Tiers Monde* 2001.

state provided both concrete wells and boreholes and numerous development projects were financed by donors. In spite of this, and despite being perceived locally as a vital issue, the villages did not succeed in regulating their water supply on a sustainable basis.

This study aims to reach an understanding of the concept of a “public good” through the study of the issues surrounding water management in Niger. It shows that the management of collective hydraulic infrastructure also promotes new rules aimed at the production of public goods in villages where research has demonstrated the difficulties in identifying and delineating a local public space. In this regard, Olivier de Sardan has already shown that the traditional chieftaincy is a key institution of local political systems in Niger. Despite being located at the centre of issues of power and influence in the rural world, this institution has a limited capacity of ruling these societies which are not strongly organised and are difficult to mobilise in the context of collective action (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 139–140). The patrimonial and personalised management of collective infrastructure dominates in this system and often results in its private appropriation. These observations, which are regularly updated by social science researchers and experts working in Africa, highlight the failure of certain development policies. They also reveal village arenas characterised by various “incapacities” which, in a way, can be seen to predestine the investments made by the state or the development projects in villages to failure.

Without denying the relevance of these analyses, I would like to adopt another perspective. Instead of focusing on the failures or incapacities of local actors in the management of the collective infrastructure placed at their disposal, I would rather highlight the social processes generated in the villages as a result of new social practices associated with such infrastructure management. We know that these practices usually result from state policies, that they are implemented by public administration or development projects and are expected to be complied with by the local population. It is a classical “top-down” process. However, as demonstrated by the repeated failures observed in this area, this compliance is never automatic and this is probably why such policies are now accompanied by a number of different approaches. Unlike the standard practice of state services, which takes neither the wishes of the population nor the need to inform them into account, these approaches are supposed to be primarily participatory in their basic philosophy. Furthermore, they are nourished by democratic ambitions, another aspect of participatory ideas which, in terms of their discourse at least, assign a good level of responsibility to the population which will

manage the infrastructure made accessible to it through its selected representatives. Finally, these practices pinpoint the actors involved in various learning processes associated with the mobilisation of resources and their management and thus give rise to new configurations. These configurations are structured around new social roles, in which social capital plays a decisive role in dictating how social action is conducted. Thus, what is primarily at stake at this stage is the actors' ability to diffuse new social practices, based on participatory ideologies, and to stimulate compliance and sustainable appropriation by the non-initiated populations.

The methodological approach

This orientation anchors the research in the problematic of collective action at the level of at least two of its components: (1) the 'old' theories of modernisation, put forth by authors such as K. Deutsch, which are based on strongly evolutionist motives and rooted in developmentalist perspectives. In fact, it is obvious that development policies remain deeply ambivalent and hard to dissociate from teleological approaches; (2) the theories of resource mobilisation that have now become well established and involve authors as diverse as Olson, Hirschman and Oberschall (Birnbaum 1983). From this point on, the issue was not to analyse the practices of established powers in their strategies of legitimisation or accumulation of resources, but to gain a better understanding of particular processes of institutionalisation that occur at village level through the implementation of micro-systems whose routinisation favours the emergence of new structuring values. The question that arises here is how new powers constitute themselves and become institutionalised through social engineering actions which are initiated in the villages through development projects and, specifically, through the management of the collective infrastructure they implement. This study attempts to answer this question.

Our data was collected in the course of a joint study on the management of "mini-AEPs" (i.e. *mini adduction d'eau potable* or borehole systems that feed standpipes serving populations of under 2000) conducted in the Maradi Region of Niger in October 2001.² The research was

² The team was comprised of Dominique Rossier, Moumouni Magawata, Issaka Nassari, Souley Aboubacar, Abdoua El Hadj Dagobi, Mahaman Tidjani Alou, Mai Moussa and Matti Dan Mallam Adamou. The results presented here should be

carried out at two sites: i.e. Chadakori (see Souley 1996) and Soumarana (Raynaut 1973), two large Hausa villages which were both equipped with mini-AEPs. The systems were installed at around the same time in 1998, but using different modes of management. Agriculture and livestock breeding are the main activities in these villages.

The approach adopted in this study is based on two hypotheses. First, we consider that collective infrastructure and its management in the villages trigger numerous transformations involving the learning of new social roles by a variety of actors and the exposure of these actors to regular confrontations with other actors, including members of their own group and actors external to the village, with whom they would not normally come in contact. Thus, the management of this collective infrastructure generates socio-political dynamics that are sometimes new to the villages. Second, we consider the possibility of analysing the provision of collective infrastructure by the development projects as the provision of public goods (LASDEL 2004), which is to say that these activities are aimed—in terms of vision, at least—at promoting the general interest of the village. Viewed from this perspective, therefore, water is a public good and its management is a matter of the public sphere. Based on the analysis of local institutions, therefore, I would like to demonstrate that, far from constituting mere playgrounds for various social actors, based on a dynamic of collective appropriation, the structures created in relation to water management favour the emergence of new values aimed at the establishment of a notion of “public goods” in the village. In this context, the challenge is not to deal with the issue of water by considering it immediately as a public good in itself, as the lawyers and economists do.³ Instead, it is rather a matter of understanding how it gradually becomes a public good in the village space by describing the social mobilisation aimed at the production of social change in the village that results in the collective appropriation of the water management infrastructure.

considered as initial findings which need to be consolidated through complementary field studies. It would be desirable to track the observed sites for a longer period, to see how the identified tendencies evolve in the future.

³ Water belongs to the group of environmental public goods, which, according to Chamard, include: forest, natural maritime and river areas, mountain regions, dunes, wetlands, fauna and flora, air, water, sunrays etc. (Chamard 2004: 330).

An institutional approach to public goods

The mini-AEPs challenge previous water management systems and, at the same time, define new institutional frameworks that clearly aim to enable more sustainable water management.

The challenging of previous water management systems

For a long time, water management in the villages of Niger was based on the prevalence of state technical services which designed and implemented state water policies. Thus, state officials played a significant role in the management of the water supply. As a result, for a long time, the state installed hydraulic infrastructure in the villages (i.e. cement wells, boreholes and drinking-water supply systems) on the basis of its own spatial-planning logic without considering the real expectations of the population or its ability to manage the new installations. According to the logic of the state, it was clear that the hydraulic infrastructure would match the population's demand for water and digging a well and providing access to water would be enough to satisfy its needs. OFEDES (Office des eaux du sous-sol/Office of underground water sources), a state-owned company funded by international co-operation, was created to build and maintain hydraulic infrastructure in the villages.

(...) The entire water management sector was in the hands of OFEDES. Just a small section was part of NIGELEC⁴ (as NIGELEC was in charge of water and energy up to 1988). So from the state's point of view, because it received substantial funding, all the problems were solved when OFEDES was created. OFEDES carried out the work, monitored itself somehow and managed. So, OFEDES was the whole story: it dug wells and maintained them and repaired the pumping stations. To be honest, OFEDES was really the ministry.⁵

The idea that the state should play a central role in economic and social development was largely shared and no one thought to question it. Moreover, what could be observed in relation to the water sector also extended to many other sectors which became, in fact, natural areas of intervention for the state.

⁴ NIGELEC is the state-owned company with responsibility for energy production and distribution.

⁵ Interview with Abdou Hassane, the first Nigerien engineer assigned to the technical water service, on 12 April 2000.

However, the limits of this prevalence of the state in the water sector quickly became apparent. As long as the state and the international community could take on the enormous investments required in this sector, there was no particular problem. Problems arose, however, with the advent of the crisis in the public finances, which was further heightened by the cut backs in international funding. This crisis shed new light on the public management of water in the villages. Indeed, through the structures it created, the state frequently demonstrated its inability to prevent the deterioration of wells, which were often either badly maintained or not at all, and the endless breakdown of boreholes. The expense was too great. In fact, it is possible to state that the changes that occurred in the management of village water supply arose due to the state financial crisis and, as a result, a large number of the prerogatives previously enjoyed by the state were transferred to the village communities. This transfer of management responsibilities was also facilitated by external actors who took advantage of the structural weakness—and even failure—of the state to circumvent it by promoting new rules for the management of water resources in the villages in addition to providing finance. Legislative and statutory texts on the water regime,⁶ which were adopted in the course of the 1990s, provided the legislative basis necessary for the development of a new institutional regime in the villages.

The promotion of new institutional technologies in the villages

Although original in form, the local institutions which developed around water management in the villages of Chadakori and Soumarana did not constitute a foray into virgin territory. The Maradi region, to which the villages belong, is often perceived as an “overfunded” area. Despite being neither *chef-lieu d'arrondissement*, i.e. the capital of the *arrondissement* or administrative district, or *chef-lieu de poste administratif*, i.e. main administrative location, Chadakori and Soumarana were heavily involved in this development process and had, therefore, extensive experience in the area of public intervention in the context of development aid. During the colonial period, they had provided experimental

⁶ A decree on the water regime was passed in 1993 and updated in 1998. It is intended to act as a general legal framework which structures the water sector in Niger.

fields for the development of new species of groundnut, Niger's main agricultural export product in the 1950s and the 1960s and had also benefited subsequently from significant public investment. Therefore, although original in form, the structures implemented in the context of management of the mini-AEPs fell within the scope of an established tradition of institutionalisation through development projects in the form of co-operatives and associations. Hence, the participatory institutions established for the management of the mini-AEPs facilitated the emergence of new power structures in the village through the actors they promoted. These structures were added to the existing ones and rendered the institutional arena in the village even more complex.

Participatory institutions

a. The management committees and their members

Thanks to the external funding, management committees (*comités de gestion*, COGES) were established everywhere which involved the management of water sources either by the community or by delegates, i.e. private contractors. There is nothing innovative about the structures of these COGES. They adopt the traditional approach to the division of tasks through the appointment of a president, vice-president, general secretary, deputy general secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer and many other positions found in all associations. In the absence of other communal structures, the members of management committees should represent the diversity of the village communities. In reality, however, they can be seen to facilitate the emergence of actors who are elected or co-opted on the basis of various personal qualities. Indeed, in general, the functioning of these management committees cannot always be described as exemplary. They often face difficulties in getting villagers to implement the jointly decided rules for the management of water sources which the committees are supposed to put into practice; they also make cavalier use of the funds collected for the maintenance of the water systems for their personal use. They are, in fact, widely criticised because they do not work well or, at least, not well enough.

As opposed to this, the management committees created in Chadakori and Soumarana to manage the mini-AEPs appear to have functioned in accordance with the prescribed rules. The initiators who were involved in the formulation of these rules would appear to have learned lessons from former management situations and took special care when

selecting their members. The latter have certain qualities that make them equal to the task of managing the drinking-water supply systems recently installed in the villages. Some of these qualities were repeatedly referred to in the interviews held as part of the study:

“They get on well with everybody”

“They’re patient”

“They work hard”

“They’re honest”

These qualities appear to have been recommended by the organisers who prepared the village for the installation of the new collective infrastructure:

A: “We were told from the outset to select someone patient who was capable of assuming responsibility and would not be vulnerable to temptation.”

Q: “You say firstly someone patient. What else?”

A: “Somebody who could keep some distance.”

A: “These are the criteria. We were told that impatient people who could not keep their distance or hold their tongues should not be selected.”

Q: “The people who are in the office have the above-mentioned qualities then?”

A: “Yes they do, they are people we chose.”

(Maigari’n Gudan Magagi, Chadakori, 11 October 2001)

Of course, the fact that they can read and write may also have played a considerable role in the acquisition of their new roles. Even if they did not go to school, many of them benefited from literacy campaigns within the framework of the numerous projects organised throughout the region.⁷ Thus, they are able to read and write in their language, have good rhetorical skills and have mastered the terminology of associations. At village meetings, they are able to explain things and convince people using appropriate and accessible language. Moreover, having undertaken various study trips, they are aware of the experience gained in neighbouring villages with similar systems. They also participated in seminars and are well acquainted with their counterparts in Maradi, both within the NGOs and state services. Furthermore, within the villages themselves, they are recognised in their role as members of the management committee by the local authorities, with whom they

⁷ For example, Chadakori has a literacy centre with a village library.

sometimes work on water issues. However, it is also important to note their relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* the local authorities.

In both Chadakori and Soumarana, the members of the management committees do not appear to have been associated with the village ruling families. They mainly attracted attention on the basis of their involvement in previous projects, through which they gained new resources and skills and distinguished themselves among the other villagers, thus putting themselves in an ideal position to manage the mini-AEPs. This is a very important point because there are numerous examples of management committees that were monopolised by ruling families on the basis of their position of power in the villages. In Chadakori, the positions of president and vice-president of the committee are occupied by two old marabouts who were probably elected because of their wisdom; the general secretary and his deputy are two literate young men who have experience with projects and some experience with collective duties. In both villages, the treasurer and assistant treasurer are women. In Soumarana, all the other committee members are young men, as are the general secretary and his assistant in Chadakori. It seems clear from these observations that water management favours the younger generation, who were formerly excluded from the management of public affairs, to the lower rungs of the leadership ladder in these villages. They have certain resources that predispose them to the exercise of collective responsibilities. It would also appear that women are trusted with financial management, despite the fact that, according to some of the women interviewed, they are not always included in the decision-making process.

b. The role of the management committee

The COGES always assumes a central role in the management of hydraulic infrastructure. In the case of community management, as exists in Soumarana, it has a direct executive function. It appoints the water distributors (*fontainiers*), the caretaker and the maintenance technician and is also in charge of collecting the fees and managing the mini-AEPs. Moreover, it is also responsible for the relationship with the banks. In the case of the delegation of management to a private entity, as is the case in Chadakori, the COGES does not have a direct executive function, but its role does include the selection and supervision of the manager. Such assignments are conducive to the learning of reading, accounting, conducting meetings, etc. They also confer power and considerable visibility in the village. The canton chief,

who seeks their guidance on the village water issues, pays attention to them.

In any case, the functions of the management committee members are important because of the large sums of money they manage. Indeed, in the Maradi Region, water, which used to be classified in the villages as a natural resource, “a gift from God,” is now increasingly becoming valuable and prized product capable of generating considerable revenue. It must also be acknowledged that the private management of the mini-AEPs is developing and becoming more professional. The manager of Chadakori mini-AEPs, who trained and worked as an electrical fitter, is also in charge of a similar installation in another village (Sabon Mashi). He considers that his new occupation will be really profitable when is responsible for the management of four mini-AEPs. In another village (Tchadoua), the management of the system has prompted frantic competition between local traders. In Chadakori and in Soumarana, water was not sold before the mini-AEPs were built, instead it was shared and management costs were covered through the levying of a fee.⁸ The funds collected in this way were mainly used for the maintenance of the system. The mini-AEPs have made it possible to systematise the sale of water in the villages of Chadakori and Soumarana. Pricing was the object of a collective discussion at a village assembly and caused numerous controversies, however there is still consensus on the price determined at the time. This has enabled the village to accumulate significant financial resources. The money earned through the mini-AEPs, i.e. the “water money,” is not used for maintaining the infrastructure, it also enables the build up of only collective savings which are deposited in banks and intended to be used in paying off the cost of the infrastructure. These funds could eventually be invested in other sectors of local village life. Membership of the management committee enables participation in the control of these resources currently being set up by villages which were previously excluded from such processes. Thus, those involved reinforce their social position in the village. Dealing with the numerous external actors (state and NGOs representatives, researchers, consultants) who come regularly to the villages makes them well known and enables them to become spokespersons for or accredited representatives of the village.

⁸ In Chadakori, before the mini-AEP was installed, each family paid XOF (*francs CFA*) 25 per week into a maintenance account.

The superimposition of several structures of power in the village

Thus the installation of the mini-AEPs prompted the emergence of new specialised functions in the villages of Chadakori and Soumarana. The institutionalisation of these functions promoted the progressive implementation of a power pole around water issues which superimposed itself on the pre-existing poles. Chadakori and Soumarana are not places where the state has a strong presence: they are neither a district capital (*chef-lieu d'arrondissement*) nor main administrative location (*chef-lieu de poste administratif*). In these villages, as elsewhere in rural Niger, the traditional chieftaincy remains at the centre of the local political system. The state is only represented by school teachers and nurses. There are no policeman and no *gendarmes*. The representatives of the state technical services (involved in livestock breeding or rural development) come to these villages only sporadically—and do so increasingly rarely due to the crisis in the public finances. Therefore, the establishment of the management committees of the mini-AEPs prompted political changes in this arena.

a. Keeping the administrative chieftaincy at bay

In both villages, the chief is excluded from the water management activities. In Chadakori, which is the administrative centre of the canton, the chief is a central figure in village life. A former civil administrator, *sous-préfet*, deputy general secretary of the powerful Association des chefs traditionnels du Niger/ACTN (Association of Nigerien Traditional Chiefs), his authority in the village is indisputable and clearly reinforced by his national prominence. Moreover, in spite of his responsibilities outside the village, he is very interested in keeping up with development issues in Chadakori and knows quite a lot about them. He played an active role in the establishment of the institutions for the management of the mini-AEP. Contrary to what is usually the case, he is not a member of the management committee. In the institutional system established, the canton chief is only a member of the monitoring and follow-up council which also has two other district chiefs (*chefs de district*) as members. Hence he is involved in the management of the hydraulic infrastructure but his function within the control and follow-up committee appears to be limited to an advisory and arbitration role, a “last resort” option in the case of conflict. As a matter of fact, considering the role played by the canton chief on this committee, there is good reason to think that this institution, which

he controls, was created for the purpose of excluding him from the management of the mini-AEP.

Unlike Chadakori, Soumarana is not the administrative centre of the canton. It is an administrative village, like the 10,000 others that exist in Niger. However, it is quite densely populated. The state is not strongly represented in Soumarana either. As in Chadakori, the only state presence is the school and the health centre. Its village chief, a former caretaker at the *Institut National de Recherche du Niger*/NARI (National Institute of Agricultural Research of Niger) in Maradi, cannot read or write. He has only been in power for three years. He is not a member of the management committee of the mini-AEP. And since there is no monitoring and follow-up council in Soumarana, the chief has no control whatsoever over water management which is completely managed by other actors in the village. However, at one stage the village chief thought of playing a role in the management of the mini-AEP. One day, it occurred to him to ask the members of the management committee about the balance in the account. The account statements that were presented to him did not satisfy him as he was expecting to see some cash. His request to see the cash was rejected out of hand. The members of the management committee did not feel that they needed to justify their actions to him. An open conflict ensued,⁹ which was arbitrated by the technical water services and ultimately resolved in favour of the management committee. Thus, when it comes to water issues in Soumarana, the village chief is a citizen like any other. He is totally excluded from this process which brings new resources to the village. It must also be acknowledged that he has very little legitimacy in the village and his authority has been diminished by several cases of tax misappropriation and by acts of misconduct on the part of some of his relatives. Moreover, because of his conflict with the water management committee, the village general assemblies dealing with water issues no longer take place in front of his courtyard, but at the entrance to the village, a location selected by the new water managers.

b. The technical water services and their relegation to the role of service providers

This exclusion not only affects the traditional chiefs, it also infringes on the prerogatives of the technical water services. Formerly the holders of

⁹ The conflict had reached its climax as we were investigating in the village.

the only legitimate expertise and skills in terms of the installation and maintenance of water sources, they are now relegated to the rank of service providers. Their fees (professional and fuel expenses) are paid directly by the farmers who manage the water system. The latter have acquired new power in the village as they manage a scarce resource and control the access to it. The technical water services only intervene in the case of a serious problem and when they have the budget to do so—which is seldom the case due to their poor financial resources. They are learning—reluctantly—to accept this new situation which reflects the repositioning of the state in the local arena. In Chadakori, they are in direct competition with the private manager of the mini-AEP who has also appropriated a significant proportion of their technical prerogatives, as a result of which their intervention in the village is now rarer than before. The financial crisis of the state is strongly in evidence again here. It is demonstrated by the lack of monitoring and follow-up visits undertaken by the technical water services, which is unable to perform its duties:

The problem we have here is that the donors now tend to go to the private sector. Besides, the state does not have the resources to allocate to the services so that they could monitor and follow-up all these installations. Thus, they are left in the hands of the population. We rarely check out these installations due to the lack of resources. (Official from the technical water services in Madarounfa, Maradi, 18 October 2001)

The same situation can be observed in relation to the technical water services in Soumarana—at most they arbitrate in cases of conflict and accompany aid donors on their supervisory visits.

c. Donors: centres of attraction

Donors have become the main centres of attraction in the rural world. Despite being absent on the ground, they constitute a constant presence through their funding and the rules they impose with regard to the allocation and management of resources they introduce:

You know the diktat of donors is a constant presence here. Because the state has not been able to provide the resources to build these facilities for a long time now, donors make their demands and impose their methods in allocating these water sources. (Official from the technical water services in Madarounfa, Maradi, 18 October 2001)

Projects are their main intervention tools. They command significant resources, capture the civil servants of a state relegated to the

background, use numerous consultants and organisers who act simultaneously as trainers,¹⁰ advisers,¹¹ and brokers.¹² Because they are central actors in the local arenas and thanks to their various channels of intervention, donors are also courted by the villagers who have “learned to please them.”

Apart from these new processes which donors control by way of their funding, they also maintain a significant hold over the villagers through their projects. They channel the deliberations of village general assemblies through their coordinators and consultants, who sometimes also influence decisions. In Chadakori, the determination of the price of water was the focus of many discussions and villagers believe that they succeeded in reaching a consensus thanks to the help of a consultant sent there by the project for this purpose. The new members of the management committee were also trained for their new administrative and financial tasks by consultants recruited by the project. It is also thanks to project that women were given positions in the newly established management structures. It should also be noted that projects provide additional funding if needed. This influence is felt particularly acutely by the canton chief of Chadakori who complains about the fact that the management committee of the mini-AEP has constant recourse to the director of the local development project in Maradi (PDLM) who played a central role in the emergence of this new dynamic:

Up to now, the management committee has found it difficult to break away from the PDLM. As you know, sponsorship is difficult. So, as soon as something happens, they have to go to the PDLM (maybe it is a question of trust). The PDLM is the Swiss cooperation agency, you have to go to them, because all of the structures were established with them, the administrative procedures etc. So, when something goes wrong, they trust the PDLM much more than the technical water services, which is a per-

¹⁰ This task is fulfilled by consultants. For example Sidi Consultancy Office is in charge of training in Chadakori. The topics on which training is provided are varied, e.g. associations, accounting, management etc.

¹¹ The co-ordinators hired by the projects are also advisers. To an extent, they are in charge of the daily monitoring of the management committee. They live in the village and are the guarantors of the training provided by the consultants.

¹² The brokerage function arises from the frequent contact of the project co-ordinators with the village. The brokers eventually become well-informed spokesmen for the village and promote the experience of the village on the level of the project administration.

manent administrative service and should normally provide the training, follow-up and support. (Canton chief of Chadakori, 11 October 2001)

In fact, projects monitor infrastructure management discreetly. This is very understandable in view of the familiar tradition of the embezzlement or personal appropriation of village funds which generates some distrust on the side of the projects. The latter are responsible for the proper functioning of the infrastructure they helped to establish which legitimises their operational competencies in the eyes of their organisations. In some way, they act as a shield from the inevitable intrusion of the village chiefs or the technical water services in the normal functioning of the management committee. This reinforces the position of the projects' employees, within both the villages and projects that employ them. This situation is due to a large extent to the financial capacities of projects which make them inevitable actors in local arenas, within which they remain the sole owners of strategic resources.

Thus, even at village level, it is easy to observe how power structures with their diverse resources amass and become entangled to give local governance a far more complex configuration than would be apparent at first (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1998).

All of these processes of institutionalisation that are taking shape around the management of water are facilitating the emergence in the villages of new structuring dynamics which, in turn, are generating new values.

The logics of collective appropriation

Participating in the production of infrastructure

For some time now, development projects have been making the access to funding for hydraulic infrastructure conditional on the contribution by beneficiaries. This contribution can take several forms. In both Chadakori and Soumarana, the populations participated in the construction of the infrastructure. Each village provided free labour on the construction sites of the mini-AEPs and contributed financially through fees collected from inhabitants:

A committee composed of a president and general secretary goes from door to door to collect fees in every neighbourhood. Everyone gives whatever he can. This operation took two or three days. The money was collected and given to the village chief who, accompanied by the village

committee, gave it to the Maradi technical water services. (A member of the Soumarana management committee, 13 October 2001)

This participation acts as a kind of security, an indicator of the beneficiaries' desire to obtain the water infrastructure. It also promotes village debate on questions concerning the usefulness of the financial contributions required by the projects and on the issues at stake. For projects, it is always an indicator of popular support. The aim of this approach is, primarily, to break with former practices which did not take the populations' recommendations in relation to the construction of the hydraulic infrastructure into account. The aim was to put an end to a conception, widely held in the villages, that the wells financed by external aid are "the projects' wells," meaning that they do not belong to anybody. Seen from this perspective, it is easy to understand why the populations showed little interest in the daily management of the wells and why the management committees operated to the benefit of some people without being subject to any form of sanction for the eventual misappropriation of resources which occurred at the cost of essential maintenance of the infrastructure. Thus, the question that arises here concerns the significance that can be attributed to this participation which determines the access to the mini-AEPs in Chadakori and Soumarana and whether it is indicative of the intention on the part of the beneficiaries to appropriate the infrastructure. To be honest, this would not be sufficient. According to the projects' managers numerous examples exist which demonstrate that the financial participation of the populations does not prevent any of the usual malfunction of the management committees. This participation can be considered at most as a possible indicator of the future appropriation of rural infrastructure, the characteristics of which display all of the features of a public good in gestation which the villagers will have helped to create.

The modes of delegation of power in the new institutions

This logic of appropriation also finds expression in the procedures used for the selection of the leaders of the management committees. The traditional chief usually influences the choice of the members of these structures; he nominates either a village worthy or one of his relatives, or may even have himself nominated. In the case of Chadakori and Soumarana, the members of the management committees are co-opted. However, they were selected by a larger constituency representing all of the neighbourhoods.

In Chadakori, the 14 members of the management committee represent the seven village neighbourhoods, i.e. two representatives for each neighbourhood, one man and one woman. Only four of the 14 members are actually active; the others rid themselves of their functions for their own benefit. Those who asserted their position appear to have a degree of legitimacy based on the competence they display in managing the mini-AEP. As already observed, this capital of initial competence was created through their participation in previous projects: i.e. the coordination of a local NGO and management of literacy centres. From another perspective, when the option of private management selected by the village is considered, it may again be said that it was a conscious choice:

The issue of the private management of the water source was raised during the debates. Indeed, experience had shown us that if the management was left in the hands of the population, there would be waste and anarchy which could not be sanctioned. Thus it was to avoid this that we chose private management with a contractor responsible for selling the water. (Achirou Arzika, Ci gaba NGO, general secretary of the Chadakori management committee, 10 October 2001)

Hence, the status of the manager is well known in the village. Most of the people we interviewed know he was selected from a group of eight candidates following an invitation to tender. "*He is nobody's man*". He is generally perceived as a businessman. "*He is here to earn money*."

Despite being organised on a different basis, the management committee of the mini-AEP in Soumarana was selected using a transparent nomination procedure which did not involve the local eminence in any capacity. In any case, as demonstrated above, it succeeded in asserting its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the village chief. The nomination of the committee members appears to have been related to the economic position they have attained through their agricultural activities (Soumarana supplies the city of Maradi with market garden produce, which is a source of significant revenue for the village) and the management capacities they demonstrated while overseeing other projects in the village (e.g. a popular saving banks, irrigation projects and economic interest groups).

In the context of this logic of appropriation, the gradual establishment of an associative culture in the village must be taken into account. It takes shape through the invention of a new terminology in the local language for the designation of the various positions within the management committee. Thus, this localised nomenclature adapts to the standard language of associations by giving it more intelligible meaning

in local representations. Moreover, it also consolidates—in the local language—new arenas such as the “general assembly,” the “office” and the new positions of power such as the “president,” “general secretary” and “treasurer.” These arenas and positions now belong to the institutional landscape of the village. In terms of communication, the Chadakori management committee publishes its accounts every week by posting them publicly in the area in front of the canton chief’s courtyard. The general secretary also confirms that this openness and transparency is further reinforced by the regular convocation of the general assembly. Thus, the chief’s courtyard has been abandoned as a public place for debate in relation to water issues in favour of other arenas directly related to the mini-AEP.

Pricing the water

It is interesting to note that in both Chadakori and Soumarana the determination of the price of water was the object of democratic debate, in the course of which all points of view were taken into consideration. The consensus achieved is, indeed, reflected in a price that is acceptable to the population, although a higher price would have made it possible to protect the village water supply in the event of serious breakdown. Thus, the price of the water was not set by the management committees or the manager in the case of Chadakori. It was the village general assemblies that decided on the rates to be applied on the basis of studies provided by the consultants who were hired by the project on behalf of the village. The entire system works on a basis whereby the water appears to belong collectively to the village inhabitants who, correspondingly, define the conditions governing access to this resource.

The choice of management modes

Despite protests about its ability to manage a public good, community management continues to prevail in the area of village water management (Olivier de Sardan & Dagobi 2000). This type of management did not always meet with expectations. It is based on the assumption that the villages work on the basis of a community logic and it appeared obvious that the community management of water sources would naturally follow the normal flow of village processes. However, this assumption has not always been borne out in reality. As a matter of fact, this form of management worked badly in many cases and was,

in effect, diverted in the direction of private appropriation. Thus, in the past, it showed little effectiveness in the management of hydraulic infrastructure.

The establishment of the mini-AEPs constituted a significant issue in both Soumarana and Chadakori. It put an end to the chore of fetching water which mainly involved women and girls. Furthermore, the water provided by the new system was cleaner as, although appreciated, the water from the wells in the villages does not always meet basic hygienic requirements. One of the technical aspects of the new system is worthy of note. The installation of the mini-AEPs involved the operation of a new technological system that requires daily maintenance and trained specialist staff. In Chadakori, the water is pumped using an electrical generator fired by diesel, whereas in Soumarana, a solar panel provides the energy for the generator. In both cases, any breakdown would affect the populations' drinking-water supply. In addition, in both cases, the main managers of the new infrastructure required professional training. Finally, the mini-AEPs have brought significant financial resources to the villages. Water is no longer available free of charge. In Chadakori, each family pays a weekly fee to fund the maintenance of the system. In Soumarana, the water is sold, but at a give-away price to ensure its general affordability. The mini-AEP systematised the selling of water and, once the low maintenance costs were covered, enabled the accumulation of significant financial resources by the village—hence the significance associated with the issue of the management of the mini-AEP.

In Soumarana, the village well was managed by a committee which in terms of its actual operation was composed of two people: an old man with no income was responsible for the water source and a female cashier collected the water fees. These fees were mainly used for the maintenance of the infrastructure. The organisation was simple and operational and it did not attract any interest due to the low volumes of cash involved. It was the aid donors who insisted on the establishment of the mini-AEP management committee. Thus, it may be considered a conditionality, but one imposed in a village that already has experience in the management of a collective good (as in the case of the savings bank and economic interest groups established in the context of the ANPIP, a small-scale irrigation project funded by the World Bank).

In Chadakori, it was the donor organisation, which appears to have learned some lessons from previous experience in the area of experience in community management, that proposed the option of the private management of the water infrastructure. The private management of

mini-AEPs had also proven successful in other villages in the region. Although the influence of the donor organisation can be detected in this case, it must be acknowledged that the choice made in Chadakori reflects the clear preference of the associative village leadership for a different type of water management:

Q: What are the reasons for adopting such an option?

A: The reasons are that during a study trip made by the village delegates, it emerged that in places where the people buy their water, they do not know anything about the purpose and the use of the revenue. It is managed solely by the people in charge of the business and the village worthies who do whatever they want with it. The second reason is that in case of misappropriation on the part of the manager of the system, nothing happens. We cannot even ask him to give the money back. In an environment where we are all more or less related, if my relative embezzles, I cannot ask for him to be sanctioned and made to reimburse the community.

(...) We also understood that when the revenue is significant, a small group of people decide what to do with it. Thus, in order to overcome these inconveniences, we decided to hire a contractor to manage the system. He is responsible for the correct functioning of the water source and he collects the charges. At the end of the month, he faces the people and has to account for his management. (Achirou Arzika, Ci gaba NGO, Chadakori, deputy general secretary of the Chadakori management committee, 10 October 2001)

Thus the choice of the type of management for the infrastructure can be seen as a collective mobilisation enterprise, the aim of which is to teach all villagers to become involved so that they understand the issues at stake in the good management of the mini-AEP.

A village good

On another level, the collective appropriation of the mini-AEPs is also expressed in the appearance of institutional practices hitherto unknown in the village, i.e. compulsory accounting, the sanctioning of misappropriation and the creation of a village fund.

Compulsory accounting testifies to the transformation of attitudes towards the people. The latter are regularly informed of the functioning of the water system through village general assemblies and the public posting of information. They are kept informed of the status of the accounts and are familiar with how they work. In addition, the members of the management committee in Chadakori may be called

on at any time by the follow-up and monitoring council (*Conseil de Suivi et de Surveillance*) to work on issues the latter deems it useful to address with them. Also in Chadakori, the manager of the mini-AEP regularly accounts for his activities to the members of the management committee. Everyone knows about his management scheme and the profit he makes. Everyone also expects him to maintain a regular supply of water to the village. On one occasion, the interruption of the supply of diesel for the mini-AEP generator was the subject of general disapproval on the part of the village population which was highly critical of the manager's negligence in this matter and made this clear to him during a general assembly, thus demonstrating its interest in his management activities. The manager knows now that he faces this kind of reaction which could ultimately lead to the cancellation of his contract with the village.

The sanctioning of misappropriation and embezzlement is also a new practice. In the course of our surveys, no such activities were denounced in the two village management committees. The same did not apply, however, to the water distributors, for whom rules have meanwhile been created. They must make daily cash payments and those who do not return the total proceeds of their sales are immediately dismissed and replaced by others who are considered to be more honest. In the course of our research, we observed several such cases of dismissal which were not challenged by anyone. It is accepted that their dismissal was acceptable if they made personal use of the money from the sale of water which is viewed as the community's money. This sanctioning makes it possible to improve the criteria used for the recruitment of the water distributors. Moreover, the revenue is deposited in the village savings banks and other banks so as to break with the former practices in which services were more personalised and money belonging to the community was mixed with that of the person responsible for it.

The use of the funds collected through the sale of water is also a part of the production of a village good. In Chadakori, the manager gets 70 percent of the money collected from the sale of water. The remaining 30 percent is returned to the village. One third of this 30 percent is deposited in the village savings and credit bank and the other two thirds are deposited in a bank in Maradi. Members of the management committee confirm that the bank deposits, which continue to grow, have never been used. These committee members and the members of the follow-up and monitoring council receive a payment taken from the ten percent deposited in the village savings bank. This

payment is irregular and low, however. The distribution framework in Soumarana is different. Thirty percent of the income is used to pay the salaries of the staff responsible for the operation of the mini-AEP and a fee paid to the members of the management committee. The remaining 70 percent is deposited in a bank in Maradi. This is used to cover eventual repair charges and was used, for example, to replace the solar panel converters when they were stolen. Thus, the money put aside to pay for the eventual breakdown of the water infrastructure may also be used to finance village investments. This point has not yet been reached, but for the first time, Chadakori and Soumarana have proper funds belonging to the entire population and intended for collective use.

These are merely indicators that enable us to understand how the logic of collective appropriation takes shape and develops in rural villages. Other indicators could eventually be added to them and the indicators that have already been identified could also evolve in other directions, thus eliminating the significance of the collective appropriation dynamics we have just observed. What is at work here are shifting and incomplete social settings which are specific to institutionalisation processes and must be analysed in the context of everyday interactions for a sound understanding of the configurations they generate.

By way of conclusion, it may be stated that in Chadakori and Soumarana, the processes for the production of an idea of a public good developed in accordance with specific modes. As we have seen, these were externally driven by development projects and outside of any state logic. This idea of a public good originates from two series of interdependent factors: a structuring process of institutionalisation and the logics of collective appropriation. The problem today lies in knowing the extent to which the processes that have emerged around the water sources will continue to evolve and spread to other activities in the villages. It is important to acknowledge that the dynamics at work strongly depend on external aid and the accompanying conditions involving a state with very few resources and customary authorities in the midst of a crisis of legitimacy. The logic of actors certainly deserves to be better understood. To this end, the analytical frameworks provided by the sociology of collective action could certainly prove very useful in this regard (Olson 1978; Hirschman 1983; Ostrom 1989). Herein lies the future orientation of this ongoing research.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Gerhard Anders is senior lecturer at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Zurich. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Malawi, Sierra Leone and Liberia. His research focuses on the anthropology of the postcolonial state, anthropology of law and anthropology of development. He is currently working on a research project on international criminal justice and governance in Africa and a monograph titled *In the Shadow of Good Governance: An Ethnography of Civil Service Reform in Africa* is forthcoming.

Felicitas Becker is Assistant Professor of African History at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Her interests include grass-roots politics and experiences of marginalization and the development discourse, Islamic history and practice in East Africa, and particularly Muslim responses to AIDS, on which she has co-edited a book. Currently, she is researching the history of writing in the Swahili and Portuguese languages in Africa.

Giorgio Blundo is an anthropologist, *Maître de conférences* (associate professor) at the EHESS, Marseille. He has carried out research in Senegal and Niger since 1986 in the field of political anthropology, studying political arenas, decentralisation, brokerage, factionalism and corruption. He is the President of the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD) and a member of the editorial committees of *Critique Internationale* and *Enquête*.

Jacky Bouju is *Maître de conférences* (associate professor) in Social and Political Anthropology at the department of anthropology of the Université de Provence. He is also director of the Aix-en-Provence Branch of the CNRS Centre d'Etude des Mondes Africains (CEMAf). He is now carrying out a comparative research on ordinary daily violence in 8 capital cities of Africa. At present, he is a board member of the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD) and co-director of the editorial committee of *Le Bulletin de l'APAD*.

Marion Fresia is Lecturer in Anthropology of Development at the Institute of Ethnology, University of Neuchâtel. Her PhD thesis (EHESS-Marseille) explored the dynamics of social change in context of displacement and humanitarian intervention in the Senegal River Valley. She is now carrying research on the social worlds of international humanitarian organizations taking as a case study the UNHCR, where she has been working for two years.

Éric Gauvrit, graduated from the Political Institute of Bordeaux, is a Project Manager for CREDES, a Public health consultancy firm. For over 15 years he has participated in University research programmes, short-term missions in Africa and technical backstopping of studies and long-term projects financed by European Union (EU), World Bank, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Lux-Development. His key qualifications are Health policy and health systems organization; Monitoring and Evaluation of health and HIV/AIDS projects, Institutional analysis and organisational audit.

Sjaak van der Geest is Professor of Medical Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam. He has done fieldwork in Ghana and Cameroon on a variety of subjects including the use and distribution of medicines, popular song texts, meanings of growing old, and concepts of dirt and defecation. Personal website: <http://www.sjaakvandergeest.nl>; E-mail: s.vandergeest@uva.nl

Marc-Éric Gruénais is *Directeur de recherche* (senior researcher) in social anthropology at the Institute of Research for Development (IRD). Member of the «Communicable diseases, health systems, societies» team in an an Inserm-IRD-Université de la Méditerranée unit (Marseilles), his main research topics deals with quality of care and health systems decentralization in Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Morocco).

Julia Hornberger, PhD, is a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand's Wits Institute for Social & Economic Research (WISER). Her research deals with issues of community policing, private policing, violence and human rights, crime, and issues of the state, urban governance and migration in Johannesburg. Her doctoral thesis is entitled "‘Don't Push this Constitution Down my Throat!’ Human Rights in Everyday Practice. An Ethnography of Police Transformation in Johannesburg, South Africa." The thesis is an ethnographic account of

everyday policing in Johannesburg caught between the unprecedented legitimacy of human rights in the political life of early post-1994 South Africa and societal practices of informal and popular justice.

Pierre-Yves Le Meur is an anthropologist at the Institute for Development Research (IRD), member of the “Socio-environmental dynamics and resource governance” research unit. With a long experience of fieldwork in Benin and, more recently, in New Caledonia, his research focuses on the links between politics, development, identities and access to land and natural resources. He is currently preparing with Jean-Pierre Jacob a collective book on the interplay between land property and the forms of citizenship.

Wiebe Nauta is Assistant Professor of Development Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University. He teaches Development Studies in the Minor Programme Globalization and Diversity and in the European Studies Programme. His research focuses on NGOs active in the field of HIV/AIDS. He majored in Rural Development Sociology and received his PhD in Non-Western Sociology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His PhD thesis explored the changing role of land sector NGOs in a transforming South Africa.

Nelson Obirih-Opareh is an Economist, Senior Research Scientist, and Head of Agriculture, Medicine and Environment Division of the Science and Technology Policy Research Institute (STEPRI), of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Accra, Ghana. He has done a lot of studies on a variety of subjects including the Impact of decentralisation and privatisation on the practice and performance of service delivery: waste collection in Accra; rice production in Ghana.—Agenda for policy study; Climate change, biofuel, and strategies for harnessing potentials of agricultural biotechnology for food security and poverty reduction: The case of Ghana; and Urban agriculture.

Brigit Obrist van Eeuwijk is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Basel, Switzerland and senior social scientist in the Department of Public Health at the Swiss Tropical Institute (STI). Her research interests include medical anthropology, urban anthropology, gender, and globalization theories. She holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Basel and leads a medical anthropology research group.

She directs the research project “Social Vulnerability and Resilience” in the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South examining the potential and limitation of a resilience approach to sustainable development.

Raphaël Okalla (Ministry of Health—Cameroon) is public health doctor at the Ministry of Public Health and Population (Cameroon). He was involved in several research programs on the local organization of health systems in Central Africa. He was recently chief program officer of the Malaria National Control Program in Cameroon.

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (sardan@ird.ne) is Professor of anthropology at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* in Marseille and Director of research at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (France). He lives and works in Niger (he is among the founders of LASDEL, Laboratory for Study and Research on Social Dynamics and Local Development, in Niamey). He’s currently working on an empirical socio-anthropology of public spaces in West Africa, i.e. on the delivery of public services and public goods by African administrations as well as by local councils, NGO’s or development projects.

Mahaman Tidjani Alou is a political scientist, University of Niamey (Faculté des sciences économiques et juridiques—FSEJ), LASDEL Scientific director (2001–2007). He has been working for several years on West African political elites, policy and the state, combining ethnographic and historical approaches. He is preparing with J.-P. Olivier de Sardan a book on *Les pouvoirs locaux au Niger*.

Simon Turner is Senior Researcher and Head of the Research Unit ‘Migration: Management, Development and Conflict’ at the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen. He has worked on governmentality, masculinity and identity politics in refugee camps and recently on diasporas and conflict, with a focus on the African Great Lakes region.

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Giorgio Blundo

PhD (1998) in Anthropology and Sociology, University of Lausanne, is Associate Professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). He has published extensively on local politics, bureaucracies, decentralisation and corruption in West Africa, including *Everyday Corruption and The State. Citizens and Public Officials in Africa* (with J.P. Olivier de Sardan, Zed Books, 2006).

Pierre-Yves Le Mour

PhD (1992), Anthropologist, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Development Research (IRD), has published extensively on politics, development and land tenure in West Africa including *Gouverner les hommes et les ressources* (with Jacob & Chauveau, 2004).

ISSN: 1568-1203
www.brill.nl/afss

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ISBN: 978-90-04-17128-2



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