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Introductory Note by the Editors-in-Chief

Sten Hagberg  |  Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University
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The Swedish Journal of Anthropology – called kritisk etnografi, launched in August 2018 – aims to provide a venue for anthropological voices associated with a Sweden based anthropological landscape and to strengthen the anthropological impact on current debates, hence promoting the public engagement of anthropology. Our first issue dealt with “The Public Presence of Anthropology”. It took as its point of departure the 2016 Vega Symposium organised by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG) to celebrate Professor Didier Fassin receiving the SSAG Medal in Gold for promoting the relevance of Anthropology, in relation to pressing public and political topics.

In this, the second thematic issue, edited by Professor Sten Hagberg, the theme titled “Comparative Municipal Ethnographies” is explored. The theme highlights the important role that Anthropology can play in ethnographic research on political decision-making that often flies either over or below research radars. In an upcoming issue, Professor Paul Stoller will edit a Special Issue on “Anthropology of Wellbeing in Troubled Times”, where the precarious being of humans is explored while at the same time highlighting our propensity for care and planning. A more timely and apt subject is hard to imagine, as this introduction is being finalised when the Corona pandemic is spreading worldwide.

Another issue which is forthcoming and currently being prepared, focuses on Applied Anthropology with Professor Lisa Åkesson and Professor Maris Boyd Gillette as guest editors. The issue ties Anthropology back to its long tradition of working in close cooperation with actors in society to support change and development but also deals with the risks and problems related to an academic discipline going “activist”.

Apart from publishing Special Issues, the journal encourages contributions from individual researchers. In the present issue, we initiate a subheading called “Bricolage”. This section will open up space for unsolicited papers on a range of different subject relevant to the scope of the journal. The first two papers to appear in this section are Professor Gudrun Dahl’s article on political effects related to the debate on the tragedy of the commons, and Associate Professor Torbjörn Friberg’s contribution on the sometimes strained relations between political authorities, higher education, and private development. A report from the 2019 Vega Symposium concludes this issue of kritisk etnografi.

The format of the journal is still in its infancy and we aim to include more of discussions, debates, short pieces on “hot topics”, and reports. As a first step in that direction, abstracts from all Anthropological dissertations defended in Sweden from 2016-2018 were included in the first issue and an update on that list will be published in the forthcoming issues. In the coming years we want to establish kritisk etnografi as a vital and
influential voice in anthropological conversations, having a special focus on making Swedish anthropology relevant to global audiences and to point out to how global issues are relevant for anthropologists active in a Swedish context. We will do this by including papers from the Annual Meetings of the Swedish Anthropological Association (SANT), and the triennial assignment of the SSAG’s Medal in Gold to an Anthropologist. We also encourage all to submit individual papers and to contact us with ideas and topics for special issues.
COMPARATIVE MUNICIPAL ETHNOGRAPHIES
Introduction: Comparative Municipal Ethnographies

Sten Hagberg | Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University

This issue of *kritisk etnografi* focuses on ethnographies of the municipality, the district, or the local government. The purpose is to contribute to ethnographically informed analyses of the conditions and articulations of local politics from different parts of the world. It includes ethnographic case-studies from Africa, Asia, and Latin America on a large variety of themes and approaches. Rich ethnographic descriptions cover themes like the marketspace of party politics (Ghana), diaspora politics and local development (Mali, Tibet/India), urban development and land speculation (Uganda, Niger), decentralised policy reforms (Indonesia, Bolivia), tourism industry and local politics (Philippines), and political failure (Burkina Faso). A common thread is the ethnographic analysis of how “democratic decentralisation” articulates meaning in different contexts and countries across the world. Key questions asked by the authors include: How do social and political actors navigate in the context of local elections and development schemes? How is public authority asserted – and by whom? What are the basic structures and rules of the game in changing institutional landscapes? To what extent is it possible and meaningful to compare municipalities cross-culturally?

With the help of such questions, this issue explores the contours of what can be termed “a comparative municipal ethnography”; hence, an ethnographically grounded analysis of what in different settings best approximate the English concept of municipality as a comparative analytical unit across cases, countries, and continents. The comparison of discourse and practice between municipalities puts the searchlight on the interaction of various actors and institutions, including administrative procedures, traditional and religious authorities, representatives of marginalised groups, development actors, political parties, and social and political brokers. The issue invites ethnographic case-studies on specific municipalities, as well as comparative anthropological approaches.

In the democratisation processes that were shaped in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, governments and international agencies across the world manifested a renewed interest in decentralisation as a means by which the over-centralisation of political decisions at the top of the state would be altered. A wide range of actors, including civil society actors, political opponents, and international donors, supported decentralisation for its potential to favour the devolution of central power to local institutions and structures (Manor 2011; Mback 2003; Ribot 2011; Sabbi et al. 2020). Decentralisation was a central element of the democratisation processes, which made some to refer to it as “democratic decentralisation” (Crook and Manor 1998). Others saw decentralisation as a legal technique of territorial administration, and as a political mode of sharing powers between central and local authorities in a country (Mback 2003; Oluwo 2001). A central distinction in terms of
the concept of decentralisation is that between “deconcentration” and “devolution”. While deconcentration refers to the delegation of responsibility and authority to field units of the same department or level of government, devolution denotes the transfer of authority to locally constituted units of government or special purpose authorities. A local service of the central ministry is an example of deconcentration, whereas the autonomous municipality run by an assembly of democratically elected councilors is a case in point for devolution.

Decentralisation policies and their political and economic implications dominated scholarly debates on how decentralisation should be and ought to be. Being a major component of the World Bank’s “good governance” package, democratic decentralisation was expected to bring service delivery closer to consumers, to improve the responsiveness of the central government to public demands and thereby reduce poverty, to improve the efficiency and quality of public services, and to empower lower units to become more involved (Nadeem 2016). Hence, laudable and yet somewhat contradictory goals were attached to decentralisation.

Anthropologists entered this scholarly debate by engaging the discipline to understand how the decentralisation reforms affected and transformed society. In studies in West Africa decentralisation became a very important research theme for many years (e.g. Amanor and Annan 1999; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Fay et al. 2006; Hagberg 2010; Hahonou 2010; Kassibo 1997; Laurent et al. 2004; Olivier de Sardan 2015; Olivier de Sardan et Tidjani Alou 2009; Sawadogo 2001). For instance, Malian anthropologists were often involved both in basic research and applied work when decentralisation reforms were implemented in the 1990s (Kassibo 1997; Fay et al. 2006). In my own work, I have found it fruitful to look at the wide range of activities that are carried out “in the name” of decentralisation rather than how decentralisation should be; hence, decentralisation is to be explored as a series of political, economic and cultural practices at work in local arenas (Hagberg 2010). While decentralisation practices are neither coherent nor uniform, they do justify legitimate claims made by local political actors. In other words, while decentralisation in the Global South was part of a neoliberal paradigm promoted by international donors – a model to be implement independently of country, context, and culture – we see that the democratic election of local governments also transformed and gave context to the model itself. Rather than looking at the implementation of the model, decentralisation provides context to understanding transformations in local arenas.

Such transformations are political, economic, and cultural in nature, or, perhaps better understood when described as responding to three basic human ambitions: power, wealth, and meaning. First, decentralisation affects the distribution and the exercise of power within society. Therefore, the materialisation of decentralisation depends not only on policy and legislative reform, but also on the political will of the central government to transfer real, discretionary, decision-making powers to local government bodies. Another issue pertains to legitimacy of the local government. Local governments may well be legal in that they have acquired decision-making powers without being legitimate vis-à-vis other local power holders. The role of the traditional chief vis-à-vis the mayor is tricky, to say the least. To some

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1 In the 2000s, research labs in Burkina Faso (Labo citoyenneté, https://laboratoire-citoyennetes.org/), Mali (Point Sud, http://pointsud.org/; ARGA), and Niger (LASDEL, https://www.lasdel.net/), to mention a few, had specific research programmes on decentralisation. The think-tank ARGA (http://www.afrique-gouvernance.net/) has had a particular focus on decentralisation policies ever since.
extent, rather than legislating away former power structures, the municipal council led by
the democratically elected mayor represents a new layer of political institutions.

Second, transformations are economic, that is, in terms of people’s livelihoods and
local economic development. The raison d’être of decentralisation largely relies on elected
government bodies’ abilities to support the livelihoods of local people and to address everyday
problems of poor health and education facilities, inadequate water supplies, and lack of
employment, marketing and investment opportunities. This requires ensuring effective
management of natural resources, the provision of appropriate, efficient, and affordable
services, the seizing of new economic opportunities, and the reconciling of competing
interests of different social groups. The paying of taxes and the increased control over people’s
livelihoods through land tenure and cattle markets are likely to have implications for rural
producers’ capacities to subsist. In practice, however, decentralisation does not necessarily
lead to local development. Poor municipalities may well see their opportunities deteriorate.
Corrupt practices do not disappear because of decentralisation as demonstrated by Blundo’s
decentralisation processes in principle may often practically undermine local governments
by channeling public aid through NGOs, leaving municipal councils with scarce resources.

Third, decentralisation involves people’s perceptions and meanings attributed to the
transformations in local arenas. Decentralisation may enable a re-appropriation of local
cultural identities and values and allow for local arrangements building on local rules and
institutions. By devolving more power to local communities, it may help make sense of the
postcolonial state administration and favour the emergence of local democratic culture. The
sense of belonging to a municipality has a lot to do with political imagination of “Us” and
“Them”. This might in turn lead to a politics of belonging where only autochthons may
aspire to the highest political positions (Geschiere 2009; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000;
Hagberg 2007). The tricky issue of how to draw politico-administrative boundaries prevails
in most countries and articulates with belonging and exclusion, whether in Mali or Sweden,
in Mozambique or Bolivia.

The title of this Special Issue is *Comparative Municipal Ethnographies* so as to signal
the importance of thick descriptions of local politics and transformative processes, while
simultaneously developing a comparative ethnographic analysis. What I call “municipal
ethnography” is in fact an attempt to use the municipality as an entry-point for studying
society, and cultural and political change. The municipality is thus conceptualised as a spatial
and temporal unit of analysis, and as a local socio-political, economic, and cultural arena.
As is the case in this issue of *kritisk etnografi*, a wide variety of themes and approaches may
be brought together, and productively compared, in a municipal ethnography. An interest
in local democracy is not limited to postcolonial contexts but has become a major area
of concern in most countries. There are numerous experiments and approaches of local
participatory governance, that is, “government-sponsored direct participation between
invited citizens and local officials in concrete arrangements and concerning problems that
affect them” (Hertting and Kugelberg 2018: 1). Hence, electoral democracy is not enough
to secure legitimacy for municipalities. This point is valid for any municipality, not just
those in countries in the Global South. Local democracy is by definition always in the
making or work in progress. In Clarissa Kugelberg’s (2018) insightful ethnographic study
of participatory governance in Botkyrka municipality in Sweden, the interaction between
politicians, civil servants, electors, residents, etc. or the so-called dialogue forum is analysed. The dialogue forum was set up to complement electoral democracy by inviting residents to discuss local issues. Yet rather than bringing about a deepening of participation, Kugelberg observes the power involved in informal discussions. She argues: “participatory governance is constructed and re-constructed in social interaction between participants from different sectors, with different mandates, and with different initial understandings of the roles and rules of such governance. It is a state of becoming” (Kugelberg 2018: 54). The important point highlighted by Kugelberg has a direct bearing on this issue of kritisk etnografi. Even in a country like Sweden, with more than 150 years of municipal self-government, local democracy faces important challenges to thrive and can obviously never be taken for granted. Hence, even though most contributions concern countries that turned to electoral democracy in the 1990s, the questions asked are valid for “old democracies” as well.2

This Special Issue of kritisk etnografi comprises of nine articles about municipal politics in nine countries in three continents, starting in Indonesia and ending in Burkina Faso. In his study of the politics of the 2014 Village Law in Indonesia, Hans Antlöv brings us to the core of decentralisation reforms. By this law, Indonesia was one of first countries in the world to provide far-reaching autonomy and fiscal devolution to its 75,000 villages. The Village Law gave villages the right to manage village-scale activities, empowered the village government and provided substantial national and district funds to do so. Throughout the article, Antlöv outlines the trajectory and results of implementing the Law, and analyses challenges in terms of collective action, village development and grassroots democracy.

Charlotta Widmark addresses the situation for female Bolivian leaders of indigenous and social movements and analyses their chances of exerting influence and promoting female interests. She discusses the use of gender quotas to increase female participation, and the roles of the feminist movement and women’s organisations. Despite the gender quotas, the women’s participation has been unsatisfactory. Why do many women find it strategically more beneficial to promote female issues outside of formal political structures? Female politicians of indigenous and social movements need to balance dilemmas of conflict and complementarity in relation to other organised women, politically active men and women, and the organisations/communities that elected them.

Anna Baral explores how informal workers understood the role of the city management in the demolition of Kisekka, a spare parts market in the Ugandan capital of Kampala, to be replaced by an “ultramodern” shopping mall. She unveils two main forces prevailing in urban development: the push for entrepreneurialism and competition typical of neoliberal urban planning, and the trend towards re-centralisation with more government control. While decentralisation in Uganda has not necessarily guaranteed better service provision, the mushrooming of local administrative divisions has strengthened the party in power. For two decades mayors of Kampala have been from opposition parties, prompting the central government to re-centralise the city administration to be under the government’s direct control. As a result, the City of Kampala has intervened massively in projects of urban development, including the demolition and reconstruction of a number of city markets like Kisekka.

2 Interestingly, the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy engages in Municipal Partnerships between municipalities in Sweden and in municipalities in a number of countries in the Global South. Currently, more than 60 Swedish municipalities, county councils, and regions are involved in a Municipal Partnership (https://icld.se/).
From the demolition of a market to the construction of a shopping mall, Gabriella Körling and Hassane Moussa Ibrahima describe land issues on a micro and down-to-earth level. In the Nigerien capital of Niamey, and certainly in other African capitals as well, land is a central source of economic and political capital and the object of intense competition. Land speculation has accelerated with the decentralisation of land management, including zoning operations whereby rural land such as agricultural fields is transformed into plots for housing. The actors involved in zoning include municipalities, private and public enterprises, private entrepreneurs and individual land speculators, national politicians, customary landowners, brokers, and intermediaries to name a few. Körling and Moussa Ibrahima analyse the economic, political and spatial stakes of land management in the periphery of Niamey and demonstrate that land speculation is part of a wider struggle for political and economic influence that is reshaping local political arenas and rapidly transforming the urban periphery.

In a study of a municipality in Mali, Sten Hagberg and Bintou Koné analyse how diaspora communities living abroad with strong links back home can be heavily involved in municipal politics. Throughout the article, they demonstrate that the diaspora of Kiban municipality is supporting local development, while simultaneously fueling dispute. They describe the rivalry between two home-area associations when the municipality was founded in the late 1990s. While one association considered that it should support “the municipality”, the other wanted to support “the population in town” only, and not those living in villages. Hagberg and Koné particularly analyse the extent to which Kiban’s diasporas are drivers of both development and dispute.

Madhura Balasubramaniam and Sonika Gupta explore the history of collective claims made over the land in Majnu ka Tilla, an informal colony of exiled Tibetans, in New Delhi. The 60 years long exile has produced simultaneous narratives of refugeehood and citizen-like claims over land. In particular, the role of the Residents Welfare Association of Majnu ka Tilla in negotiating precarities of urban informality in Delhi is described. The association has provided the residents with an institutional form located outside of the formal process of Tibetan rehabilitation and has thereby allowed them to shift from the rhetoric of refuge to deploying a language of rights in their land claims. Interestingly, such a language of rights is unavailable to other Tibetans living in India.

Mari-Elina Ekoluoma explores the smallest political units of the Philippines, namely, the barangay, and the municipality. Since the 1980s, the tourist-town Sabang – one of a dozen of barangays of the municipality of Puerto Galera – has become an international sex tourism town. Sex tourism has brought lucrative business opportunities, as well as a reputation of seediness, immorality and a place of illegal and illicit activities. The municipal council has made several attempts to control the perceived “lewdness” of Sabang, including the go-go bars. In particular, the Lewd Ordinance was adopted by the council, but the mayor never signed it because, he argued, its implementation would ruin local businesses. Ekoluoma explores the practical outcome of the Lewd Ordinance: who and which institutions are entitled to identify, and control “lewdness”? The article draws attention to municipal policymaking and local responses to controversial municipal policies.

Ulrik Jennische approaches political governance in Tamale, Northern Ghana, to show how a conflict between the two royal lineages within the traditional Dagbon state is creating present-day divisions between the major political parties in the city. The article analyses small-scale street and market traders’ relation to political parties. Although politically
interested, traders often find that political parties polarise and bring conflict. While distrust toward political parties and the government might undermine the decentralisation, it also brings traders together. Jennische demonstrates how alongside the conflict, there is a peace process initiated by the political establishment and the eminent chiefs of the Dagbon royal lineage so as to preserve the moral economy of small-scale urban trade.

Sten Hagberg examines the socio-political transformations of Burkina Faso, following the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré from power in October 2014 and culminating with the municipal elections in May 2016. He develops a case-study on the political failure of a newly founded party and its presidential candidate at the national level. In particular, the article looks at how municipal and regional representatives handled the failure. The issue of political failure highlights how local political leaders are caught between their constituencies of voters and supporters, on the one hand, and the party’s headquarters and State administration, on the other. Hagberg argues that the framing and timing of political failure are central in understanding local leaders’ attempts to turn failure into a socially and morally loaded virtue.

To conclude, I would like to argue that by bringing together such a diversity of cases, contexts, and countries, the contours of a comparative municipal ethnography become visible. The power struggles between the elected mayor and the central State, between local moral values and the pragmatics of social and economic development, between local residents and external actors, between traditional leadership and party politics, all indicate the comparative potential in studying the municipality as a social arena, as a public space, as a cultural representation, and as a political imagination.

References


Community Development and the Third Wave of Decentralisation in Indonesia: The Politics of the 2014 Village Law

Hans Antlöv | PhD, FHI 360, Jakarta

ABSTRACT  In 2014, Indonesia became one of the very first countries in the world to provide far-reaching autonomy and fiscal devolution to its 75,000 villages. A new Village Law (Law 6/2014) gave villages the right to manage village-scale activities, empowered the village government and provided substantial national and district funds to do so. In 2019, each village received approximately USD 110,000 for village development from central and district governments. This article outlines the trajectory and result in implementing the Law and analyses some of the challenges in terms of collective action, village development and grassroots democracy. Keywords: Indonesia, decentralisation, community development, anthropology of policy, village government

Introduction
This article focuses on the debate around policy implementation, using a “big-bang” village autonomy law from 2014 in Indonesia as an example. In January 2014, the Government of Indonesia issued Law 6/2014 on Villages, aiming to address weaknesses in the existing decentralisation paradigm, by providing the country’s 75,000 villages with increased budget allocations and improved governance arrangements. The Village Law gives villages the right to manage village-scale activities, empowers the village government, and provides substantial national and district funds to do so. In 2019, villages received an average of around USD 110,000 annually for village development (World Bank 2019: 9). This article outlines the trajectory, results, challenges and solutions in implementing the Law, from the perspective of a Swedish anthropologist who has lived and worked in Indonesia as a development practitioner for more than 20 years and who has furthermore been involved, in various capacities and degrees, in drafting and implementing the Village Law. The article attempts to assess the politics around the Law, rather than how village development is experienced and practiced by the people.

In 2014, the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM) had been running for close to 15 years. Launched in 1997 as the “Kecamatan Development Program”, a World Bank-funded government project, it was taken over by the Government of Indonesia, expanded with additional funding from the Government’s own sources and renamed in 2007, the PNPM had grown into the world’s largest community-driven development project, with some success. The model was enticingly simple: provide community groups with block-grants to plan, implement, and oversee development projects themselves. By 2014, seven different PNPMs were operating; the biggest one – the PNPM Rural operated...
in 45,000 villages – was funded approximately 25% through a World Bank loan and 75% by the Government of Indonesia, managed by the DG for Village and Community Empowerment at the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). Many books and articles have been written about PNPM—some positive, others critical. The PNPM Rural had visibility and a positive reputation; the project management unit at MoHA received annually up to ten foreign delegations. In 2012, an evaluation showed that there were 400 Community-Driven Development (CDD) projects in 94 countries valued at almost $30 billion, many of them inspired by PNPM (Wong 2012: iv).

The DG for Village and Community Empowerment in MoHA had for close to a decade tried in different ways to improve its status. Villages are important in Indonesia. The village community is mentioned in the 1945 Constitution as a cornerstone of democracy. But the Government failed to substantially reform villages in the 1999 and 2004 revisions of the Local Governance Law; there were some minor tweaks and potential, but nothing really changed on the ground. However, after PNPM had become a household name, in 2010-2011, MoHA’s fortune changed. The House of Representatives (DPR) was willing to entertain the idea of a separate law on villages. To cut a long story short (Antlöv et al. 2016: 172-174), the Law was approved by the House of Representatives (DPR) in December 2013 and signed into Law a month later. One key reason for this was a political imperative: parliamentary and presidential elections were coming up later in 2014, and political parties and presidential hopefuls alike jumped on the village bandwagon to gather support. The slogan was “1 Desa, 1 Milyar” or “1 village, 1 billion rupiah” (around USD 83,000).

**Key Characteristics of the Village Law**

President Joko Widodo (“Jokowi”) won the election of 2014, partly by reaching out to urban and rural grassroots. One of his nine campaign promises (the *Nawa Cita*) was to “build Indonesia from the margins”, supporting disadvantaged regions and villages with the implementation of the Village Law, a flagship program. A new ministry was announced to implement the law: The Ministry of Villages, Disadvantaged Areas and Transmigration.

Building on PNPM, key changes introduced with Law 6/2014 include multiple accountability mechanisms for the village head through the introduction of a Village Assembly, more power and clearer election rules for the Village Council, improved transparency through an information system, inter-village collaboration, and crucially, substantially increased funding to villages (see Antlöv, Wetterberg and Dharmawan 2016: 174-178 for more details). With the Village Law, funding for villages has increased ten-folded. This is moving monies directly to village accounts, from less than 0.5% to more than 5% of the state budget (World Bank 2019: 9). Around 70% of these transfers come from the national budget and 30% from the district. In addition, villages can raise funds by village enterprises. The main difference from PNPM, is that funds are provided not to village community groups, but directly to the village government. Village governments have been the lowest level of government since colonial times, but have never had much authority or funding. In order to prevent the corruption and rent-seeking rampant of the

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1 Wong 2012; Li 2007; Barron et al. 2006; Wong and Guggenheim 2018

2 An existing Ministry of Disadvantaged Regions was merged with the DG for Villages and Community Empowerment from MoHA and the DG for Transmigration from the Ministry of Manpower.
authoritarian Soeharto regime (see below), KDP/PNPM since the very beginning effectively by-passed government structures by providing block-grants directly to community groups, only seeking formal endorsement or approval of community decisions from village heads and local government officials. This had been very effective in preventing corruption, less than 1% in PNPM.

During the drafting of the Village Law, there were thus legitimate concerns that large resources going straight into the village budget might not be used for the benefit of those that need them most and might lead to corruption. Without clear accountability mechanisms from communities and districts, large sums of money could simply enrich the elites or lead to wastage rather than develop the countryside, reduce poverty, or improve village welfare. As a result, several accountability mechanisms were introduced with the Village Law. The village head would face a three-fold accountability structure: horizontally to an empowered Village Council or BPD, downwards to the public through a Village Assembly (Musyawarah Desa), and upwards to the district government. The Village Law also recognised the need for a support system for villagers to exercise accountability, specifically through technical facilitators, which had been an essential component of PNPM’s operations and success which were critical to poor community-members’ gains from participatory development (Baird et al. 2013). I will return to implementation below.

Decentralisation and Public Sector Changes

The Village Law can be seen as the latest wave of decentralisation in Indonesia, 15 years after the “Big Bang” decentralisation to districts and cities (Abdulbaki 2008). After 32 years of authoritarian and highly centralised rule by President Soeharto (who fell in 1998), the two main public demands were democracy and regional autonomy. The first democratic elections were held in 1999, and the same year a reformed House of Representatives approved a new law on local governance, Law 22/1999. On 1 January 2001, Indonesia set in motion perhaps the most radical decentralisation policies anywhere in the world of the last 50 years. The authority over all government services except finances, foreign affairs, defence, justice and religious affairs were transferred to cities and districts (bypassing provinces), providing far-reaching regional autonomy to (at the time) 380 local governments (Hidayat and Antlöv 2004).

Indonesia’s degree of centralisation under Soeharto cannot be over-emphasised. A massive patronage system had been created in which the central government awarded local governments with budget allocation in exchange for loyalty. Local politics was largely based on clientism, in which local leaders built a loyal following through disbursing benefits to communities. Budget allocations were not based on performance or need, but rather on how close local governments were with the central ministries and how well local elites could lobby decisions-makers in Jakarta. There was a strong presence of the state in most public affairs – Jim Schiller (1996) called this the “powerhouse state” in the 1990s. So, Law 22/1999 and the subsequent revision in Law 32/2004 were up against some very strong practices and cultures.

Thus, it is no wonder that the implementation of regional autonomy has been a mixed bag, which provides the context for the Village Law. On the positive side, it has managed to keep the country from breaking apart by providing local elites avenues for their aspirations: there are today more than 510 districts and cities, and 34 provinces. It has also opened the
political space for citizens to become active in governing their own communities, as well as allowing for district heads and municipal mayors to be elected to office (up until 2005, they were appointed by regional Houses of Representatives). Electoral politics have been more competitive (Diamond 2010), although there are still instances of dynastic politics (Hadiz 2010). This has led to improved political contestation at all levels, including more competitive village elections (Antlöv et al. 2016; Aspinall and Rohman 2017). Through a case study of health service delivery, Fossati (2016) has shown that some local governments are becoming more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable. Especially in years of local elections and in districts with electorally competitive politics, “low-income households are targeted more accurately, suggesting that electoral incentives for local elites may increase access to social services among the poor” (Fossati 2016: 1).

As a result, some impressive local reformers have been elected and brought real changes to their communities. Among citizens, there has been an enormous social change with entrepreneurship evident in the newly established non-governmental and community-based organisations. Most governance indicators have improved since 2000. Indonesia is labelled a free and democratic country by Freedom House, even though it recently has been downgraded. In the words of democratisation theorist Larry Diamond (2010), what Indonesia has achieved “is quite remarkable and is deserving of admiration.”

However, there is a different argument to be made once we look beyond legislation and institutions. As we have increasingly learnt during the past few years across the globe, the bare minimal democratic cornerstones of state institutions, elections, and an open public sphere does not by itself guarantee social justice or substantive democracy. To support democracy and make government responsive to citizen needs, it is not enough to simply bring government closer through decentralisation or open up spaces for civil society. After two decades of reforms, regional economic development and public service quality remain low. Citizen needs have largely failed to shape government priorities. In 2018, 13.5 % of the rural population remain poor versus 7.3 % in urban areas (with an average of 9.82 %). Regional disparity is widening, especially between poorer eastern and more prosperous western Indonesia. Health indicators are still lagging in most regions. Even though some elected local leaders have improved living conditions and the economy, there is also continued bad governance in too many locations. Corruption remains an immense problem: in the past few years, Indonesia’s Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has charged a local elected mayor with corruption on average every second week.3

A major challenge to consolidating democracy and improving public services in Indonesia lies in the strong state and entrenched government processes. The bureaucracy remains dominated by people trained under the authoritarian regime, which was oriented away from serving the public interest. During the past decade, the Government of Indonesia and its development partners have made substantial investments in improving the planning and budgeting process of local governments. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on strengthening planning and budgeting,4 but there has been relatively little evidence on the impact these programs have on the lives of the poor. There are instances of positive reforms,

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3 https://m.katadata.co.id/berita/2018/10/25/banyak-terjerat-kpk-mendagri-kepala-daerah-tidak-berhati-hati
4 There are very few independent publicised reports on project impact in Indonesia; but see Ferrazzi and Rohde-wohld (2011) for one interesting study of fifteen years of GTZ support for decentralisation in Indonesia, and USAID (2018) for an assessment of the sustainability of ten local governance projects, that showed very little sustainability beyond the project interventions. No evaluation was done on impact.
but the overall system remains problematic, with village planning disconnected from district planning, bottom-up planning losing out to technocratic planning, and the results from development planning being disregarded in the budgeting process. The main issue seems to be about persisting community-level socio-economic inequality that rendered the formal deliberative forums irrelevant, especially for the poor and marginalised (Breman and Wiradi 2002; Pincus 1996). When their livelihood and access to services and resources are still very much dependant on good relations with elites, engaging directly within planning and budgeting forums may not be the most strategic option for the poor; it is better to use village elites to represent their interests (Sambodho 2019: 129, building on Wahl-Jorgensen 2006, calls this “mediated citizenship”).

The consensus is that there were, with regional autonomy, sufficient funds at the subnational level (Lewis and Smoke 2011: 2; Lewis 2013). Frontline agencies and governments service providers have the capacity and autonomy to develop their own solutions. But it is not happening. Rather, local government staff – including frontline agencies and village officials – are not subject to the incentive structure that rewards good or sanctions bad performance. Local governments lack latitude to reward staff for enhanced performance and lack the flexibility, information, and incentives to prepare and implement pro-poor plans and budgets. Local reforms are often constrained by national regulations. In short, local governments do not need to spend more, but spend better, including better planning, management, and accountability of available funds.

The success of the community-driven development introduced by PNPM started around 2010 to trigger a shift in focus, with a need to complement reforms in planning and budgeting with a focus on strengthening communities in order to get better quality from the resources that are allocated for service delivery. The move from the World Bank-funded KDP to the national PNPM in 2007 had been one first step.

At the core of this is the democratic argument that there is an obligation of public authorities to explain publicly, fully and fairly how they are conducting their public responsibilities – to answer and be held responsible for the discharge of entrusted power. Access to deliberative forums and citizen engagement to planning might not be not enough, it was argued; there must also be avenues for citizens to hold government officials to account at the community and frontline, and in that process gain access to the political bargaining table. Without the right of citizens to ask questions and the obligation of officials to answer for the disbursed power, the democratic authority of citizens will diminish, and democracy and government performance will falter – as has been the case in Indonesia. It is not primarily about political accountability (regular elections or the fiscal accountability of efficient public expenditure), but rather downwards or social accountability, the obligation of the government to present an account for and answer for the execution of responsibilities to those who entrusted those responsibilities, the public (World Bank 2004; Fox 2015; Bovens et al. 2014). This is based on a notion of demand for improved government performance and relying on civic engagement of ordinary citizens holding government to account.

Reforms were thus needed to improve efficiency and quality of expenditure by local governments, promote cross-sectoral coordination and program coherence, stimulate responsiveness to local needs and priorities through a stronger “demand-side”, and prioritise access to quality services and economic opportunities across the country. Demand-side governance is made up of development approaches that focus on citizens as the ultimate stakeholders for better governance – the right of communities to hold government to
account so that policies are implemented, and services delivered. Demand-side governance does so by strengthening the collective voice of citizens and civil society to hold authorities accountable for better development results, through a series of integrated steps around transparency, feedback loops, incentives and oversight (Gaventa 2004; Gastil and Levine 2005; Fishkin 2009; Antlöv and Wetterberg 2019).

**Implementation**

This is the context in which the Village Law was designed: to try to address the weaknesses in the decade-old decentralisation paradigm by providing authority and money to the villages, breaking up the monopoly and often corrupt practices of central and district agencies by giving authority and money directly to what was seen as a “purer” level of government, and increasing the capacity of the village community to control its leaders. The Law was well received by political observers and village officials when it was turned into law in 2014, providing a great opportunity to improve the lives of villagers, if transparent funding, good facilitation, capacity building and oversight were provided as mandated by the Law. So, let us look at how it has been implemented and the results to date.

Already before the Village Law, more democratic conditions in rural Indonesia had promoted better competition between village heads, with more varied backgrounds (Antlöv et al. 2016: 166). This competition has been further reinforced by the Village Law, with its increased amount of village funds. With the law, village heads have a much stronger position. They are directly elected by the community, with much less intervention from supra-village authorities than in the past. With increasing political competition at the district level for political positions, many village heads also have direct access to district government for resources; and we have seen the emergence of new forms of district-village clientelist relations, which can benefit both parties (Aspinall 2013; Berenschot 2019).

But in the absence of strong control mechanisms or incentives, studies have shown that village heads are not always operating in the interests of the community (World Bank 2018; Sambodho 2019). Even though the Village Councils are elected by villagers, members have limited understanding of their new tasks and responsibilities. There is almost no support from the national or district governments to the Village Councils, often leaving them in a limbo. These weak community-level control mechanisms have not been compensated by district-level support and supervision. There are hardly any sanctions for breaking rules in the use of national or district funds to villages – funds keep flowing. One reason is a perceived wariness on behalf of district government towards villages: district transfers to village are often the equivalent of around 25% of the districts’ available development budget (after fixed expenditures), and so the argument goes “why should we even bother putting more resources to villages when they already take such a large chunk of our budget outside of our control”.

The lack of accountability is also related to the persistence of traditional bureaucratic structures and ways of working with a strong state-focus. In spite of improved civic participation and democratic elections, local politics are still largely based on clientism. Many communities are passive and reliant on state authority and resources to initiate programs.

Under the Village Law, village heads are supposed to submit annual accountability reports, but these have not been strong incentives for improved performance – many only submit the simplest of reports (World Bank 2018). The important thing is disbursements,
not use or impact. How are funds actually used? Mainly for office salaries, operations and infrastructure. Less than 10% of the village budget is used for economic activities or services delivery (World Bank 2018). In short, there is a low direct impact on poverty reduction because most of the funding is for administration and roads (road jobs are short-term and do not significantly reduce poverty, even though roads to markets may have an economic impact). Poverty is not a specific objective of the use of the village funds, and the poorest and marginalised are seldom represented during village meetings. Management and monitoring evaluation mechanisms have not been designed in a way that would track village performance across time and inform further adaptation (Utami 2018: 5). The combination of disparity in village administration capacity and lack of standardised and simple procedures also causes complications in the disbursement process, with funds often being disbursed too late in the fiscal year to be used effectively and transparently by villages.

There are also challenges on the community side. A 2018 World Bank-funded evaluation of citizen participation after two years implementation of the Village Law found that many villagers tended not to participate in village meetings largely because of the high opportunity costs and the perception that the discussions only concerned village government and community leaders (World Bank 2018: xi). Village information boards are often in place, but that does not immediately translate into more accountability or participation, since village facilitators, who under PNPM were mobilising the collective action of community groups, are today mainly used for village administration, such as completing financial reports. There are also very limited programs to build the capacity of villagers. There seems to be an assumption that grassroots activism and mobilisation skill can be self-adopted by the poor and marginalised. Empirical evidence shows that only through intensive programs that are geared for political capacity building (such as were in place for PNPM), can these group effectively participate. Otherwise civic participation and accountability will only be the less effective “soft accountability” (Fox 2007). Studies are also showing that villages are losing capacity built under PNPM – what communities could do under PNPM in terms of planning, implementing and overseeing village-scale development projects, they are now less involved and doing less of (World Bank 2018). The Village Assembly (Musdes) has also largely failed to serve as the bottom up mechanism of accountability, largely bureaucratised as an administrative forum and stripped off its political dimension.

One of the main issues is the seeming unwillingness of central government agencies to fully implement the Village Law in the sense of providing autonomy to villages to determine their own needs and manage their own funds. Yes, central and district budget funds are being allocated to villages, but at the same time, in 2017, central ministries were still involved in annual village projects worth more than 275 trillion Rupiah (USD 20 billion), often with no alignment to district and village priorities. Some of these funds are for fully legitimate purposes, such as to support inter-village projects or highly complex technical solutions to local problems. However, there are still projects managed by Jakarta ministries to build village infrastructure or manage community outreach for purposes that PNPM had shown over a decade that communities could do by themselves more effectively and efficiently.

There is also a lack of strong national leadership on village and community governance. It was mentioned earlier that a new Ministry of Villages (MoV) was created by President Joko Widodo in 2014 to oversee village governance and community development, which

\[5\] See Ananthpur et al. (2014) for a study on the importance of facilitators in India.
previously had been under the auspices of the powerful Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). However, when the MoV was announced in late 2014, MoHA immediately reacted. The basic idea had been to put the Directorate General for Village and Community Empowerment in MoHA as the centrepiece of newly established MoV. However, the newly appointed Minister of Home Affairs (the former powerful Secretary-General of the party that won the 2014 elections) did not allow this. He claimed that control over villages – the lowest level of government and the frontline domains of Indonesia – needed to remain under the auspices of MoHA. After a tense period of stand-off running into mid-2015, the DG for Villages was allowed to remain in MoHA, with a slightly limited mandate to oversee and empower village governments, while community empowerment and village development was moved over to MoV, starting largely from scratch and with very little real power. The historical roots of the Ministry of Home Affairs in Indonesia, as in many countries with ministries of the interior, is for national security, registration, supervision of local governments and public administration. Control comes before progress and domination before development. In Indonesia, the paradigm is that of “guidance” (*pembinaan*), and the new Ministry of Villages has not been able to provide a convincing alternative narrative.

Implementation has been anything but smooth; and the two ministries hardly interact. During the 2014-2019 period, ministers from MoHA and MoV were former party politicians from different coalition parties (PDI-P and PKB, respectively), and tensions were strong, trickling down to lower-level officials. In the 2019-2014 cabinet announced in October 2019, the new Minister of Home Affairs is the former head of the Indonesian police (a four-star general) while MoV remains under the control of the minor coalition member (PKB), albeit with a new deputy minister from PDI-P. We have yet to see whether this will provide a more conducive environment.

The differentiation between the MoHA and the MoV is partly ideological: while the MoV is on the side of community development, the MoHA is strongly in favour of seeing and treating villages as the lowest level of government to keep the country united. Both ministries issue regulations related to villages that often are contradictory. Districts governments that are supposed to oversee and coordinate all aspects of village governance, development and empowerment are under the authority of MoHA, which means that MoV has very little sub-national presence and is losing out – leading to limited village development and community empowerment happening.

This is partly the result of a legislative compromise with a hybrid system agreed; in Law 6/2014 on Villages, the village is defined as a self-governing unit but with a village government that is recognised by the State. Resistance was simply too strong from the “powerhouse” bureaucracy within MoHA to totally relinquish the control over villages. To further complicate matters, the national village grants (*Dana Desa*) are disbursed by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and therefore need to be accounted for centrally, especially since the village grant allocation is a main means to achieve President Jokowi’s election promises in 2014 and 2019 to build Indonesia from the margin. On top of these three implementation agencies are three steering agencies who are competing for national coordination regarding Village Law matters: The Coordinating Ministry of Human Development and Culture (*Menko* 6)

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6 What used to be the DG for Community and Village Empowerment in MoHA is now the DG for Village Government Guidane.

PMK), the National Development Planning Agencies (Bappenas) and the Executive Office of the President (KSP), each issuing various policy instruments and steering documents. Fragmentation between national ministries causes confusion. Each might be well-meaning and doing well individually, but it does not add up and the lack of coordination causes implementation issues.

In short, the Law was well intentioned – after more than 15 years of PNPM, community resilience had been built and the government wanted to mainstream PNPM into regular structures. But long-established state structures were too strong and took over. The Law has failed to capitalise on the transformation brought by KDP and PNPM by focusing merely on administrative and supervision mechanism, and abandoned its political and “Habermasian” empowerment agenda.

There are different understandings of the Village Law. From the perspective of those parliamentarians who drafted the Law, it is about improving service delivery and promoting local development. For the Ministry of Home Affairs (or at least the DG for Village Government Guidance), the Village Law strengthens the administration and official leadership of villages in order to build national resilience and unity. From a more progressive, MoV understanding, it is about recognising the rights of communities to manage their own affairs. From this perspective, what is needed is empowerment and autonomy, with the central and district governments actually stepping back and allowing the full implementation of the Village Law, with its provisions of subsidiarity and village autonomy. However, since the village is not a harmonious place with shared resources, more progressive voices also advocate for necessarily limiting the authority of the powerful and enhancing the position and protecting the interests of the poor.

The Village Law is a source for village elite to extract benefits for the community. An ethnographic study of a village in West Java (Sambodho 2019) shows how various elite families competed over being able to mobilise village projects, which has radically increased after the Village Law, and in that way gain political capacity that could be converted during village and district elections for votes. Rather than being incorporated as subordinates in a bureaucratic hierarchy as during authoritarian rule, village elites are thus becoming rural brokers, exercising considerable leverage in their relations with the state (Sambodho 2019; Aspinall and Rohman 2017:50; Berenschot 2019). From this perspective, the Village Law is not about rights or empowerment, but a resource for local political competition. But interestingly, these local elites in Indonesian villages – as members of the same lived-in community – cannot fully capture all the benefits. In these forms of clientelism, a beneficial leader must use his or her control of projects and resource for the broader community (Sambodho 2019; cf. Lucas 2016; Kusumawati and Visser 2016).

These understandings of the Village Law are quite in stark contradiction to each other. While some are based on district frontline agencies and the village government providing improved services, the community understanding is one based on their rights to manage

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8 Andrews et al. (2017, Chapter 3) calls this “premature load bearing”, putting too much weight on a structure before it is able to support it, or doing too much too soon.

9 Therefore, MoHA is supporting the use of the Village Funds to pay salaries for village officials and build proper village offices, rather than for rural development and community empowerment.

10 From a community empowerment perspective, there is also a romanticising of the village and the community, seen as cultural and fully encompassing unities, as something inherently good and real, perhaps as the embodiment of the “whole human being” (manusia seutuhnya) so often celebrated in Indonesia.
their own affairs without any needless outside interference but with substantial new resources. Part of the challenges with the implementation today is related to this disconnect. Policymakers, especially those in the Ministry of Villages and the House of Representatives that approved the Law in 2013 have quite an idealised notion of how the Village Law should operate (based on the bounded rationality of rational choice and positivistic models) and the reality has been quite difficult, determined by power games such as inter-and intra-ministerial competition, party politics, and ministerial whims, in addition to the reality of village life, which is different from the idealised notions.

Looking Forward

This might sound like an excessive dose of negative developments, but it should be taken in the context of an emerging democracy that is taking the “two steps forward, one step back” route to development. There are feasible solutions to most of these issues, solutions that are recognised by reform-minded government officials and in some places already being practiced. Importantly, the Village Law is still positively received in villages and communities, and communities are starting to see positive changes (albeit not as fast as was anticipated). There are no signs that the Law or the national village transfers might be annulled: on the contrary, funds transferred to villages are increasing on a year-to-year basis, including a substantial increase in 2019, an election year. And since President Jokowi was re-elected, support for the implementation of the Village Law will continue.

The Village Law is good, but the implementation may not always be. The rules under which power and resources are managed and the relationship between state and citizens (Bauer et al. 2015; Andrews et al. 2017) needs to be reviewed. Implementation is about good management and understanding the art of the possible, as well as practical wisdom of frontline officials on how to behave in particular circumstances. From the policy beneficiary’s perspective, the impact of policy is about everyday life as well as a collective interest in pursuing accountability from their government in using public resources. Says Andrews et al (2017: 83): “Organisations with weak capability for policy implementation are those that cannot equip their agents with the capacity, resources, and motivation to take actions that promote the organisation’s stated objectives.” I believe this is what is at work in the case of the Village Law in Indonesia: the ideological split at the national level leads to regulatory murky waters; the unwillingness of subnational governments to support and oversee villages since villages are already getting such a large amount of the district’s funds, which leads to impunity and capacity gaps. At the village level, unequal power relations put all political clout in the hands of village officials and the poor remain powerless, and dependent on the elite and therefore compliant.

However, local reforms and performance are not a result only of state policies but of communities’ own efforts—hence the importance of revitalising associational life, empowering communities, and developing community capacity as part of the self-governing community paradigm introduced with the Law. This includes on-going efforts by the Ministry of Villages to design a comprehensive package of facilitation, capacity-building for community groups not just village government staff, and clear national rules to allow communities to access funds in the village budget. This will provide villages with clear authorities and priorities for usage of village budgets, provision of technical support and oversight. Popular participation can be driven by innovative and committed citizens demanding their voices be heard. It can
also be provided by state agencies to overcome the distrust in government and to empower local communities. There is also a national village innovation set-up designed that will allow villages to learn from each other and pilots to introduce positive incentives for villages to make complementary investments in key services. Of crucial importance is strengthened accountability regimes: the right of citizens to ask questions and the obligation of state officials to answer and be held accountable for the disbursed power, with rewards for good behaviour and sanctions for bad.

Conclusions

The Village Law is an interesting case of how a development policy (around community-driven development), pioneered and tried out by the Government with World Bank financing and support, gets appropriated by national policymakers and politicians (Shore et al. 2011: 7) and then scaled-up to a degree it could not support. As noted in Tania Li’s assessment of KDP in the early 2000s (which became PNPM and which was later adopted into the Village Law), to govern through community requires that the community be rendered technically: investigated, mapped, classified, documented, interpreted (Li 2007: 234). This is a commodification and objectification of the community that takes away its spirit. Li (2007:255-256) sees this as a general slant towards technocracy and neoliberalism, in which governing through communities is apolitical and solutions to poverty and powerlessness are technical, with little consideration given to how empowered communities might actually come to demand not only better infrastructure, but access to land, fair prices and fair wages. KDP and PNPM did not address the material roots of social injustice. The same criticism can be levelled against the Village Law – it does not radically invert rural power relations, even though it does positively improve the autonomy of villages vis-à-vis districts, including how to access projects. Building on past hierarchical and patronising relations between state and community, the Village Law as a system of governance considers village communities as objects of power. Villages are expected to meet increasingly unrealistic output targets and performance indicators that are at odds with capacity and how they are organised in the first place (cf. Shore et al 2011: 20). The Village Law, in this perspective, is quite an effective form of domination over communities (cf. Shore et al. 2011: 9). It secures the voluntary compliance of citizens; and various “technologies of citizenships” are mobilised, allowing actors to internalise and embody a structuring framework, to use the language of Bourdieu (1977).

A main contribution of the anthropological study of policy is to challenge the received wisdom of public policies and understand the meaning and subjective understanding of policy making (Shore et al 2011: 8). Cultural studies of politics and policies argue that beliefs and perceptions are constituent parts of government and policy making (Cannadine and Price 1987; Kertzer 1988; Gledhill 1994; Bierschenk, and Olivier de Sardan 1997; Bubandt 2014). Politics should be viewed not only as competition over scarce resources, but also as representations of historical practices and local knowledge. Cultural representations are instruments for political discourse. Political symbolism, rituals and normative representation are employed for the legitimate execution of power and domination. The lack of cultural understanding within a democracy negatively affects its basic meaning: a powerful political imagery of hope and autonomy. To achieve this, ‘democracy has to be driven by a “spirit”, a secular dream of trust and mutual association by the people and for
the people (Bubandt 2014: 13).

So how do we reinstate this spirit? I would argue, with Sambodho (2019) that it is about allowing the village to be a space of contestation. There will always be rich and poor, elites and the under-represented. Let’s not romanticise the village. A simple call for “empowerment” will not do. Better is a long-term process that allows contestation – in community assemblies, at village elections, in local-level politics – through which a variety of voices can be expressed. To support this, information about budgets and performance must be provided, public meetings must be better facilitated, and communities be organised by civil society activists linked to district reformers. Sandercock call this transformative political action a “thousand tiny empowerments” (1998), not grand designs. In this sense, shifts in civil society strategy, and the political space they open up for collaborations with (innovative) state officials, may eventually produce broader impact.

The basic problem with the implementation of the Village Law is one of governance and politics, not technicalities or administration. Therefore, the solutions must also be those of governance and politics, with clear rules for allocating authority and resources to local practices and breaking down hierarchal state-community relationship. This includes the continued fostering of village contestation through the Village Council and Village Assembly, allowing various voices, including representatives of the poor and disadvantaged. For the Village Law to be properly implemented, both nationally and locally, accountability relationships need to be improved. When citizens and communities do not have the capacity and/or power to hold authorities to account for how responsibilities are disbursed, implementation will falter. When citizens and reform-minded local leaders become empowered, the powerful will be held to account and old systems of patronage might start to break down, motivating/incentivising/compelling them to do their job more effectively and put the benefits of the community ahead of their own vested interests. This can be done through coordinating citizen initiatives with governmental reforms in pro-accountability coalitions that bolster public sector responsiveness. Only then can the Village Law fulfil its potential.

References


Political Gender Dilemmas of Conflict and Complementarity in Bolivia: Quotas, Resistance and Parallelism

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ABSTRACT  This article addresses the situation for female Bolivian leaders with an indigenous and social movement background and their possibilities to exert influence and promote female interests. The article: 1) provides an outline of the different contexts in which quotas have been introduced and female participation increased, 2) analyses the roles and relations of the feminist movement and women’s organisations, 3) explains why the quality of women’s participation has been unsatisfactory (based on interviews with active female leaders and other sources), and 4) discusses some of the reasons why the women might find it strategically beneficial to promote female issues outside the formal structures. The article concludes that female politicians with an indigenous and social movement background need to balance dilemmas of conflict and complementarity in relation to other organised women, politically active men and women, and the organisations/communities that elected them. In this particular context, or system of gender, class and ethnic differences, gender parallelism seems to be a strategy that works. The study is based on literature studies and interviews with female leaders active within different contexts at different levels (local, departmental, or national), conducted during five field visits to the Departments of La Paz and Oruro during the period of 2006-2009, including a short update in 2018/19.

Keywords: Gender quotas, political participation, Bolivia

Introduction

In 2015, Bolivia was praised by the United Nations (UN) for its remarkable advances in terms of equal gender participation in the Parliament and Senate, now reaching 50% and 42%, respectively. Bolivia has not always been an example for the world. On the contrary, before the reforms of the 1990s, its official political sphere was noticeably gender unequal. Since the beginning of 2000, Bolivia has been going through a process of re-structuring of the state that is intimately connected to the organisation of civil society and has also affected female participation. Different factors have caused women’s participation in party politics and government structures to increase during the past decade: 1) the introduction of quota laws and new contexts of participation, such as the new local political governments introduced through the decentralisation reform of the mid-1990s, and the constituent assembly of 2007-2008; and 2) the increasing political influence of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), through which women active in the social movements have been able to enter party politics.

The present article’s overall question relates to the possibilities of and restraints on female participation and influence in relation to decision-making processes within the Bolivian society. The Bolivian legal framework supports equal representation of women and men,
and the legal framework has been developed further with the country’s new constitution, but the problem with the introduced gender quotas has been the quality of participation. Electoral gender quotas are usually introduced to increase female representation in leadership positions (descriptive representation) and to improve representation of women’s policy interests (substantive representation) (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Pande and Ford 2011). The effects may vary, but they constitute an important symbolic assertion of the value of men’s and women’s equal rights to representation. The introduction of quotas is often a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving the goal of gender equality, especially in situations where there is resistance and a number of complex circumstances interact, but the introduction of quotas does not automatically lead to equality or power sharing. With the good intentions of the government and legislators, what hinders Bolivian women from participating fully? In the following, I address the situation for female Bolivian leaders with a social movement and indigenous background, and examine their possibilities to exert influence, as well as to promote female interests. In a round of interviews with female politicians in Bolivia during the period 2006-2009, I discovered that most of the women – even though they had a formal platform from which they should have been able to promote gender issues – maintained and supported women’s organisations within the informal sector. It seemed that they could not promote female interests inside state structures and therefore continued to work for women’s rights in informal contexts¹. My two questions are: Given that they were granted equal representation in the country’s decision-making bodies, why did they need to maintain their activities in the informal sector? Which different conditions exist within as opposed to outside parliament? Knowing more about these issues, which are both practical and theoretical, can increase our understanding of how the Bolivian political context works, and of how the relation between informal and formal structures of political influence affects the possibilities for men and women to have their voices heard. Political scientists tend to focus only on formal politics, but with a wider anthropological perspective, it is possible to grasp how the situation is understood by people on the ground and why they act as they do. Because the largest number of female politicians have been recruited to the municipal level in Bolivia, these issues relate to the overall theme of this volume on ethnographically informed analysis of municipalities and local governments. In addition, the highest degree of resistance to, and violence against, women’s political participation has been reported from the same context.

In order to address the above mentioned questions, I will: firstly, provide an outline of the different contexts in which quotas have been introduced and female participation increased; secondly, analyse the roles and relations of the feminist movement and women’s organisations; thirdly, explain why the quality of women’s participation has been unsatisfactory (based on the interviews with active female leaders and other sources); and, fourthly, discuss some of the reasons why the women might find it strategically beneficial to promote female issues outside the formal structures and why this may continue to be an important strategy for some time to come.

In order to grasp the Bolivian context of political participation, I think conceptually in terms of a postcolonial, intersectional perspective in an attempt to understand the

¹ An earlier, short version of this paper was published in 2010 as Active Aymara Women Inside and Outside of Parliament. In Power to the People? (Con)test civil society in search of democracy. Outlook on Civil Society 1. Centre for Sustainable Development, Uppsala University.
interplay between different social hierarchies that affect people's possibilities in life. I want to avoid the homogenising tendency often found when it comes to women of indigenous background, whose experiences cannot be generalised without problematising gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, etc. As a concept, intersectionality arose as a critique of essentialist forms of understanding social categories that marginalise some experiences at the cost of others. Something particular is produced at the intersections of different social categories, and it is important to analyse how different positionings and identities are constructed and interrelated in specific historical contexts (Yuval-Davis 2006). This position is well in line with the anthropological approach of looking at political subjects that work within systems of ethnic, gender and class differences configured in local places (Aretxaga 1997).

In the case of Bolivian women's political participation, the particular system of ethnic, gender and class differences, is a system in which feminist and ethnic concerns easily clash, thereby producing gender dilemmas for the activists. Olivia Harris, one of the first anthropologists to theorise gender relations in the rural Andean area, characterise gender relations in terms of complementarity and conflict (Harris 1978). Harris outlined the principles of complementarity and unity between man and woman based on the concept of chachawarmi, a model founded in the social and economic organisation of the household. However, she pointed to the fact that important aspects of gender relationships could not be accounted for by such a model. It was, for example, when men acted as a group that gender asymmetries became visible. It is not possible to translate Harris' model to the broader national context, even though some of the principles appear in new contexts and discourses. Yet the characterisation of gender relations within politics as tainted by conflict and complementarity is a good starting point for thinking. By looking at the relations of inequality produced at the intersections of different social categories, due to the history and social stratification of Bolivian society, I will show that these gender dilemmas continue to be unresolved.

The study is based on five short fieldwork periods to the Departments of La Paz and Oruro during the period of 2006-2009, including a short update in 2018-19. Methodologically, the focus of the study is on literature studies and interviews conducted with female leaders active within different contexts at different levels (local, departmental, or national): within formal political structures (local and national parliaments) and/or within NGOs, social/unionist movements (local, departmental and national assemblies) and grassroots organisations. Interviews were also conducted with Bolivian scholars and officials with experience from the political sector. Most of the women interviewed have been working at different levels, for example starting in a grassroots organisation or neighbourhood committee, and subsequently elected as councillor at the municipal level, or starting as a unionist representative at the local community, moving through the national federation to an office as parliamentarian or minister of the government.

**Increased Female Political Participation**

Before I move on to the experiences of the female leaders I interviewed, I want to briefly return to what I started outlining at the beginning of the article. As mentioned, women's

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2 The label ‘indigenous’ may refer to people with very different life conditions in Bolivia, as was very clearly shown by Canessa (2014).
participation in party politics and government structures has increased in Bolivia during the past decade due to the influence of different factors. One important factor is the introduction of new contexts of participation, for this issue, especially the new local political governments introduced through the decentralisation reform of the mid-1990s are of prime importance. Another context of importance to Bolivia is the constituent assembly of 2007/2008 that took place during the first round of the MAS government with Evo Morales as president. The increasing political influence of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism), through which women active in the social movements have been able to enter party politics, constitutes a context per se.

MAS is a left-wing socialist movement founded in 1998. MAS was founded as a political instrument for a number of social movements and continued to incorporate more during the first years of government. In this way, it could be seen both as a political party and as a federation of social movements (Monasterios et al. 2007).

The contexts of political participation in municipalities, and the parliament, and the constituent assembly were introduced together with quota laws. The 1994 law concerning popular participation (municipalisation) promoted the equal participation of women and men and was followed in 1997 by a party law (30% quotation), in 2001 by a communal law (30% quotation), and in 2004 by a law for participation of civic groups and indigenous peoples (50% quotation). In 2006, the law for constituent assembly stated that, on the slate, a candidate of one gender should be followed by a candidate of the other gender, in practice legislating for at least 33% female representation. In 2009, the Congress approved a temporary election law stipulating equal opportunities for men and women, as stated in Article 9:

Candidate slates for senators, titular and substitute deputies, departmental assembly members, departmental council members, municipal council members and municipal authorities must respect the principle of equal opportunity between men and women, so that a male titular candidate is followed by a female titular candidate, a female substitute candidate by a male substitute candidate, or vice versa. In the case of uninominal deputy elections, alternation is reflected in titular and substitute candidates in each district. (my emphasis)

Parties complied (unwillingly) with the parity law, but only 20% of the elected women were placed as titulars, the majority as alternates. In 2010, the newly elected Congress adopted a permanent election law that better reflected the efforts of the women’s coalition. “[T]he new law required that 50% of the titular candidates in all the single member districts nominated by each party be women. In addition, the law recognised gender-based political assault as an electoral crime, with sentences of up to five years of prison” (Htun and Ossa 2013: 12).

**Intersectional Relations Within the Women’s Movement**

The promotion of equal opportunities developed surprisingly fast from the mid-1990s onwards, despite the tensions between the feminist movement and popular and indigenous women’s organizations. These tensions concern the relations of inequality at the intersections of class and race/ethnicity that characterise Bolivian society. To understand the current situation, I will start with an ethnographic reflection.

The female branch of the peasants’ union Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa”, known as the “Bartolininas”, is one of the main organisations within the women’s movement representing peasant women
at the local, regional and national level. In January 2019, “the Bartolinas” celebrated its 39th anniversary with a day-long programme including special invitations. Members and former leaders of the Bartolinas participated, and the invited guests were predominantly from the government, the MAS party, the national union of workers and the peasant union. The principal act took place in the courtyard of the national workers’ union’s (COB) headquarters, and all of the current board members of the Bartolinas were lined up on the stage together with representatives of the most important invited organisations. One chair, at the side of the General Secretary, was reserved for the Vice President of the plurinational state of Bolivia. All of the persons on the stage had flower garlands placed around their necks, and the event started with a music group performing a song especially composed for the Bartolinas. Some of the important representatives gave their talks, but everyone was waiting for the most important guest. Finally, the Vice President arrived carrying his little daughter and was surrounded by supporters and representatives from the Bolivian media. He sat down with his daughter on his lap, was wreathed with flowers and greatly acclaimed by the audience. Before he was given the microphone, the moderators of the event reminded the audience of the Bartolinas’ high expectations regarding both moral and actual economic support from the government. The Vice President delivered his speech and expressed support for the movement. I note that, during the formal act of the celebration, no representative of any other women’s or feminist organisation was invited to give a speech.

Tensions based on class and ethnicity between different groups of active women have been present from the start and continue to affect collaborations within the women’s movement in Bolivia. The contradiction between so-called Western feminism and other feminist positions of the popular sectors and/or indigenous peoples may still be found in different contexts and may even have become more polarised during the processes of change taking place in Bolivia during recent years, despite shifts in the distribution of power. The division resembles the conflict found in many other contexts between gender equality as sameness or as difference, but it is intermeshed with conflicts based on differences in class, education, origin and so on. In interviews conducted in 2018 with scholars and officials working with gender issues in different kinds of feminist organisations, the Bartolinas were neither seen as feminists nor as the organisation that would push the government towards a more gender sensitive politics. These views contrast with the perspective of the Bartolinas, who saw themselves as occupying a stronger position than ever. Most members don’t want to call themselves feminists, in fact they often express distance to the feminist movement. It depends more on the connotation of the word “feminist” and who uses it; since they elaborated a plan towards de-patriarchisation presented in October 2018,3 they want to change the current gender order. In the invitation to the above-mentioned celebration, they ended with the phrase “Women’s emancipation is the proper work of the women of Bolivia and the world”4. They had no direct influence on the government, but obviously they stood close to it and used their close relations to promote issues they found important.

The Bolivian case is no different from the rest of Latin America, where women’s movements from the 1970s to the present have been described using the phrase “from visibility to fragmentation” (Jaquette 2009). Jaquette points to the fact that, in many Latin-

4 La emancipación de las mujeres es obra propia de las mujeres de Bolivia y el mundo!
American countries, feminists used to mean urban professional women who worked in cross-class alliances during transition but faced difficulties in maintaining relations to the working-class and the poor after transition (Jaquette 2009: 6). Even if practical gender interests had ‘strategic’ feminist implications, women’s movements were not seen as significant actors in Latin American politics. Jaquette reports that progress on women’s issues depended on a few actors, such as feminist and/or grassroots groups, both urban and rural, women in political parties, elected women and so-called femocrats in government bureaucracies (cf. what I call institutionalised feminists). These actors rarely managed to achieve the level of coordination and consensus that the term movement implies. Women’s movements and activism are described as fragmented and diversified (Jaquette 2009: 208).

During earlier neoliberal restructuring in Bolivia in the hands of the governments of the 1990s, there were many examples of how organised women (in the form of professionalised NGOs) were unable to bridge the gaps of class and ethnicity to provide paths of influence for marginalised groups of women. This legacy influenced the new powerholders based on social movements of the 2000s, who chose to turn their backs on earlier feminist struggles and definitions of feminism in order to find a new, decolonised way of dealing with the issue. Rousseau (2010) mentions that professional women, self-identifying as feminists and with long experience of working within NGOs or state authorities, felt extremely estranged by the new political context and that their contributions were being disregarded and associated with Western imperialism (Rousseau 2010: 157). A process of redefinition of the women’s and feminist movements was very important, considering the earlier conflict between the popular women’s organisations and the institutionalised feminists (representatives of NGOs and state authorities), whose views on the status of gender equality among the rural Andean population were not embraced by the women of the social movements. There were also negative feelings concerning the unequal power relations between institutionalised female organisations supported by the earlier governments (e.g., the neoliberal government of Gonzalo Sanchez de Losada) and international donors, and the female branches of the social movements and base organisations. The conflict was not only a matter of who had the power to define, but also of contradictions based on class, ethnicity and so on.

Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017), who studied indigenous women’s movements in Bolivia, Mexico and Peru, also identify a process of boundary-making within these movements that sheds additional light on the situation in Bolivia. In all three cases, indigenous women had to defend the recognition of their specific discourse, articulating gender and ethnicity vis-à-vis the women’s/feminist movement. In their case studies, indigenous women organised outside of the established channels of representation of the women’s movements (a phenomenon very prevalent in Bolivia). The majority of the organisations they studied explicitly distanced themselves from feminist movements, although some of their members identified as feminists (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 202-203).

There are clear boundaries between the indigenous women’s movements and the feminist movements, but these do not prevent different forms of joint action on the defence of women’s rights from appearing on occasion. In Bolivia, the collaboration between indigenous women’s and feminist organisations – which was previously almost non-existent – proved to be crucial to the work of the constituent assembly in 2009. According to Rousseau

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The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs and interests was introduced by Molyneux (1985) and further developed by Caroline Moser (Moser 1987).
and Morales Hudon (2017), the indigenous women played a key role in the process and therefore were able to pressure the feminist movement to open itself to the demands of the indigenous movement. This key role was influenced by the overall political situation with the MAS in power. With the experiences gained from the constituent assembly, other inter-organisational collaborations to advance joint platforms on women’s rights have been created between middle-class urban feminists and indigenous women. These collaborations have been key to the adoption of laws on gender parity and alternation for all electoral processes, mentioned above, as well as laws on political harassment and violence against elected women, among other issues (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 203). Htun and Ossa (2013) analyse why, in relation to the 2009/2010 electoral law, women’s and not indigenous demands for inclusion were successful in Bolivia. They point to the fact that women overcame divisions between urban feminists and indigenous women from popular sectors to lobby for gender parity.

Experiences of Discrimination and Harassment

The Bolivian legal framework supports equal representation of women and men, and the legal framework has been developed further with the country’s new constitution, but women experienced difficulties in participating on the same terms as men. Why has the quality of women’s participation been unsatisfactory?

After assuming office, Evo Morales appointed men and women of indigenous descent to cabinet positions (Htun and Ossa 2013). In the 1990s, I met with several of the appointed female politicians in their capacity as leaders of grassroots or unionist organisations. Later on, they became leaders of the Bartolinas. At that time, for a woman of indigenous background to achieve a cabinet position was almost unthinkable for most people. Remedios Losa was the first woman de pollera\textsuperscript{6} to enter national parliament in 1989. She had indigenous origins, but also an urban background, being the daughter of a tailor and a craftswoman from the city of La Paz.

Although the discourses of indigenous female politicians generally display loyalty to the movement they represent, as in statements such as “Our goal is not to work against our men and the unified struggle”\textsuperscript{7}, none of the women I interviewed denied the difficulties faced by female leaders, and experiences of discrimination were common. In interviews conducted with female leaders of Aymara or Quechua background – active at the level of parliament, municipal and neighbourhood committees in the departments of La Paz and Oruro – I explored the ways in which they experienced their political participation. I will discuss three aspects that influenced these women’s participation: 1) the way they entered politics; 2) prejudices towards politically active women; and 3) their possibilities to exercise leadership.

First, to fulfil the quota reforms of the 1990s, parties have had to find female candidates for an arena highly dominated by men. Women with an indigenous and/or social movement background stand for the larger part of the increase in female representatives, especially at the municipal level. Most of these women have had experience of working within grassroots organisations, neighbourhood committees, peasant unionist movements, and the like. But,

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\textsuperscript{6} de pollera refers to the wide colourful skirt worn by women of indigenous background but is also a way to categorize women.

\textsuperscript{7} Sabina Choquetijlla, presidenta de la Confederación de Bartolina Sisa (1991), quoted in Widmark (2010).
due to the high demand for women (in order to fulfil the quotas), many women without previous experience of political administration and law in the formal political sector have also entered party politics during the past decade.

Firstly, political convictions or the desire to exercise leadership were not always the reasons behind women’s participation. Most women I interviewed seemed to have entered politics on other grounds, even though strong commitment may have developed with time. In many cases, they were pressured to take on a certain task, with reference to the need to fulfil obligations (cumplir) within their community and to display solidarity with their place of origin. Within the Andean communities, communal life is based on rights and obligations, and all married women and men are expected to contribute and take on positions in a rotating system (Albó 1989). Some women had also been appointed due to their level of education and knowledge of Spanish. Rural levels of education have only increased during the past 15 years, and monolingualism and illiteracy (now at lower levels) have been more prevalent in women8. Quite a few had a male relative who had been involved in politics (particularly the women who became more important leaders). Having a male relative who is a politician may well be an asset, thus having someone who could serve as a mentor and inspiration, but in some cases the women felt that they had not been elected in their own right. To sum up, the representatives were elected on grounds pertaining to gender and ethnic belonging in order to fulfil the expectations of the base organisations and to loyally serve the people they represented. In several cases, fulfilling these expectations was not possible, and participation implied a cost, which in many cases was perceived as being higher for the women than for the men, given the resistance they experienced just because they were women (Dominguez and Pacheco 2018; Widmark 2010). I will return to this issue later on.

The second issue hindering female participation was found in the way politically active women were viewed. The interviewees testified that the political sphere was seen as belonging to the men. An active woman was seen as someone who breaks the rules. A female unionist leader from Oruro who had to travel a great deal said she was not well thought of in her local surroundings. She told me that people believe a lot of partying takes place at trade union congresses and meetings, along with extramarital relations. “This has always been tolerated for men, but an active unionist woman is seen as immoral”, she said. Furthermore, most of the testimonies revealed that it was very difficult for women with an indigenous background to combine active leadership with the role of wife and mother. The same woman from Oruro said that if a woman is to travel, she needs to find another person (usually a female relative) who can take care of her household responsibilities while she is away. Dominguez and Pacheco (2018) refer to the problems of machismo, calling it a structural phenomenon shared by indigenous and mestizo women’s organisations (ibid.: 8). Ideal male gender relations in Bolivia are not equivalent to what has been labelled machismo in ethnographically based literature from Central America (see, e.g., Lancaster 1992; Gutmann 1996). Still, machismo of some kind is prevalent in Bolivia and the source behind acts of harassment. There is a conflict here.

Another gender discourse deals with complementarity, which promotes more balanced relations between women and men, as mentioned earlier. In literature from the Andes, several authors have referred to the complementary views on gender relations in the rural

areas, where it is the head of the family (usually a man) who should represent the household in the communal assembly. Political decisions are to be made in a consensual manner and the head of household is supposed to consult other members of the household when important decisions are to be made (Albó 1989; Harris 1978). The complementary organisation of gender relations is referred to using the concept of chachawarmi, analysed by Harris (1978), in which the conjugal union is seen as a part of larger cosmovision. Ideal gender relations within the Andean context (and from the Aymara perspective) are generally referred to as the union of contraries that complement each other to form a harmonious whole, but under the surface an opposition between man and woman is found. The idea that the relationship between man and woman is conceived of as a union of contraries is, according to Albó, central to the “Andean way of thinking” (Albó 1989). The complementary model is much appreciated in the Andes, but seems vulnerable to social, political, and economic changes. The concept of chachawarmi has been further discussed in scholarly works dealing critically with the subject. MacLean (2014), for example, shows the multiple discourses involved in the creation of gender relations in Bolivian communities, a diversity overlooked by political discourses on chachawarmi. Burman (2011) discusses different positions in relation to the concept of chachawarmi, and what it implies in relation to decolonisation and depatriarchisation.

In the interviews, the women said that, when they participated, they were not supposed to talk very much but wait until they were consulted. “Talk” in itself is an important issue. In the Andean area, cultural notions can be found indicating that women are unable to speak or not interested in doing so (Arnold 1997; Canessa 1997; Harris 1980). The image of the “silent Andean woman” has been questioned and problematised on several occasions (see Arnold 1997; Spedding 1997; Lazar 2008; Burman 2011). I do not doubt that women talk and have an influence on communal and political life, and this has also been ethnographically documented (see Lazar 2008; Spedding 1997). Yet notions and expectations may render the execution of the political assignments more difficult. In my interviews, I learned that one common division of labour based on gender ideas was that the men handle the discourse, and the women execute matters.

The historical silence of women in public life and women’s attempt to gain a voice in politics have been major themes in feminist scholarship. A gendered division of labour and a set of symbolic images not only create gender relations, they are also created by men’s and women’s different opportunities for expression. The verbal practices that take place in social institutions such as political assemblies show that talk is often used to judge, define, and legitimate speakers (Gal 2002). I want to recall, at this point, the fact that the intersections pertinent to Bolivian women’s conditions for participation are part of a historical process involving hierarchisation of the social strata – political power has been concentrated to the elite. A dominant national discourse has been created that establishes ethnicity with “the others”, “the Indians”, “the marginalised” – an image of passive women of indigenous background that has been reinforced by newspapers, television, and other media (Paulson 2002).

A third aspect concerns the possibility for women to actually exercise political leadership, once elected. It is well known that the female quota at the municipal level has been difficult to fulfill; it has also not led to results of acceptable quality, that is, the elected women have not been able to exercise their political labour (Costa Benavides 2003).
According to ACOBOL, the Bolivian Association of Female Councillors, the reasons why most new councillors of indigenous background face insecurity are their low income and educational level, in combination with lack of experience of public administration and juridical knowledge (ACOBOL 2013). According to the same study, rural indigenous women with little experience of political negotiation are criticised in a way that men are not. In the early process there were also examples of women being elected who were perceived as loyal to the party, without previous experience (Booth et al. 1997). The process has not been unproblematic.

Gender-based resistance to female politicians as well as acts of violence and harassment are issues that prevent women from performing well. Antonia Rodríguez, vice mayor of the municipality of El Alto, interviewed in 2009, expressed her experience as follows:

> Well … they treat us a bit as if they are simulating our participation, but the men are not convinced that we have the same value [as them] … so it has been very, very hard. When you talk in public, they silence you… Today, I don’t know if you noticed that I don’t have the same value as the ordinary mayor.

A colleague and I had followed her for a couple of hours and sat in on a municipal meeting. We could see that she was not taken into consideration at the meeting. There could be several reasons for this, but she believed it happened because of her gender.

Many of the women I interviewed testified to the strong resistance to female political participation, especially in the rural areas (see Michao Barbery 2007). Women have, once elected, been harassed and pressured to resign to the benefit of the male person next on the list. ACOBOL reported 572 cases of abuse and harassment from 2000 to 2011 (Htun and Ossa 2013: 11). One woman who had entered local politics in El Alto and was later (unjustly) accused of corruption, said in a regretful tone:

> In reality, it can be disappointing, what I can contribute, because, more than good things, bad things happened to me and I regret in my soul, sometimes, that I took on the leadership of my committee, having been in FEJUVE, because I never imagined that the people who were going to be there could suddenly begin to accuse you of everything.

The role of leader was not expected, and there were cases when women were exposed to “political violence and harassment against women” (Krook and Restrepo 2016).

Domínguez and Pacheco (2018) report that democratically elected women still face serious problems at the municipal level when trying to exercise their duties. Apart from generally confirming that harassment and pressure continue, their analysis of the way in which the electoral law of parity, or the rotation principle, is adapted to the principle of complementarity at the community level in rural areas is particularly discouraging. In this process, even though there should be a woman and a man for each position, one as titular and one as deputy, because women still play a secondary role in decision-making, women elected to the titular position are pressured to leave their position to the male deputy (Domínguez and Pacheco 2018: 4). As mentioned by Krook and Restrepo (2016), like other violence against women, violence against women in politics can be seen to serve as a form of gender role enforcement (Donat and D’Emilio 1992). The problem of political violence towards women eventually resulted in the 2012 law against political violence and abuse against women, but it took a long time before it was approved.

The pattern that evolved in the interviews is one in which the women were often pushed into participation in a political sphere that was competitive, corrupt, demanding
and male dominated. They found themselves in hierarchical relations of conflict and alliance – between women and men, among women themselves, and between different groups of women. It was very difficult for them to live up to expectations (Widmark 2010).

Due to the strong male-dominated and clientelist structures9 within official politics, as demonstrated by Bjarnegård (2009), a context with considerable corruption will also see many male-dominated networks, building on male loyalty. The high level of political harassment against women in Bolivia could thus be understood as a clash between a male-dominated political system and newly introduced quota laws. Most incidents of harassment of female politicians are reported at the municipal level. Many women are active at that level, and this is also the level at which gender quotas were first adopted. The interviews seem to indicate that the higher the women had climbed up the political ladder, the less harassment they experienced. However, they found it equally, or more, difficult to get their voices heard. Female parliamentarians and councillors whom I interviewed had not been able to promote specific gender issues in relation to their parliamentary tasks, and they had experienced difficulties in forming female networks within this sphere, despite the fact that two out of three were active within base organisations promoting Aymara women. The vice mayor I interviewed confirmed that it was equally difficult to promote female issues in municipal work; she promoted female artisans (often single mothers, widows and the like) in her free time.

During the interviews in 2009, several persons mentioned that, at the national parliamentary level, there was also competition between different ministries. Together with the tradition of clientelism and corruption, this made coordination between the ministries and state secretaries difficult, and it hampered the creation of networks between female parliamentarians and state secretaries. Several interviewees brought up how difficult it was for the Secretariat for Gender Issues to get the ear of the President and representatives of other governmental bodies. It was also difficult for individual female parliamentarians to get support for their ideas. Inside the official structures, women work with ordinary political issues. Gender issues are rarely promoted. Htun and Ossa (2013: 18) point to the fact that coalitions formed by women are often weakened inside the legal (or formal) structure, because they become the subjects of the party leader’s imposition of discipline and agenda control.

Relations to las bases and Other Dilemmas

The way in which elected women manage (or do not manage) to promote female issues affects their relations to their colleagues in parliament, and to the base organisations that had elected them. Because the governing party MAS consisted of a number of social movements, relations to the base organisations and the people the politicians were representing were very important. The followers, the people who elected them and who are organised in unionist base organisations, are often referred to as las bases. The fact that many women were elected in order to fulfil obligations to their home community or organisations, in combination with the fact that members of base organisations are normally very active, makes this

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9 “Clientelism” refers to a form of political practices common in Latin America that are characterised by “patron-client” relationships. It means that relatively powerful and rich political “patrons” promise to provide relatively powerless and poor “clients” with jobs, protection, infrastructure, and other benefits in exchange for votes and other forms of loyalty, including labour. These relationships are typically unequal and exploitative (see, e.g., Stokes 2011; Lazar 2004)
relation highly important. In my interviews with representatives of the “Bartolinas” (the female branch of the peasant union) and female parliamentarians (former “Bartolinas”), it was clear that relations were not always friendly. The “Bartolinas” were spoken of as if they represent female support of the government, but when I talked to them, they said they didn’t feel listened to at all. Unfortunately, there was also a certain rivalry between former and current leaders in the “Bartolinas”. One parliamentary woman told me she had tried to continue her contact with las bases, but “with the new leadership, I was not welcome”. In general, it was very difficult for elected women to fulfil expectations.

Even if Antonia Rodriguez, in the example above, was quick to interpret her difficulties as not being heard due to gender discrimination, gender solidarity may not necessarily be a basis on which women in her position would act. Cabezas Fernández (2014) looked into approval of the law against gender-based political violence by interviewing parliamentarians in 2008. Initially the law was resisted by a majority of the delegates, among them a group of indigenous women. The basis for the women’s sceptical attitudes could be attributed both to them identifying as indigenous persons representing Andean communities where gender relations are organised in a complementary manner and to the fact that ideally communal decisions are based on consensus. The law was interpreted as a law against actions committed by men, and the women opposing it referred to the fact that they were mothers and would not legislate against their sons. Their resistance is interesting because it shows the dilemmas and difficulties associated with the position of women with an indigenous background. According to Cabezas Fernández, they acted from their subjective position as a mother, giving priority to their sons instead of expressing solidarity with their ‘sisters’ occupying political posts. According to the author, acting from the position of a mother was a position they were allowed to take within the patriarchal system that made up the parliament. The opposing women had also referred to the need to agree with the men in a consensual matter (Cabezas Fernández 2014: 34). Eventually the law was approved in 2012, only after the startling murder of a female councillor of the MAS party.

Why Promote Female Issues ‘Outside’ Formal Political Structures?

As mentioned at the beginning of the present article, it seemed that elected Aymara women in the national and municipal parliaments dedicated a great deal of time and resources to supporting the work of women’s organisations outside parliament. The female parliamentarians I interviewed had their roots in Aymara base organisations promoting women’s issues. All of them continued that work outside parliament. One of them used her salary from parliamentary work to finance the office and work of the AMAQ, the base organisation she belonged to. Another woman served for a while as deputy secretary of gender issues and continued to work with and support the organisation where she was formed. The vice mayor dedicated her weekends to a female craft organisation in her barrio. Why did they do these things after having gained a political position in the formal structures? Obviously, the question could also be: Why not? These women had their colleagues and friends in the organisations where they used to work, and this was a place to rest and retreat to when the mandate period was over. They may also have felt obliged to their colleagues (see the discussion on rights and obligations above) or wanted to support their continued struggle.

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10 The term patriarchal system is often used as an overall label for many different male-dominated systems. This is a bit confusing considering the different gender discourses that exist.
There could be several reasons, but another line of explanation could be based on strategic choices, given that the formal sectors didn’t allow them to exercise the influence they wanted, and, as explained, they may have found it easier to promote female issues outside parliamentary structures. Due to the strong male-dominated and clientelist structures within official politics, the experiences of many of my interviewees suggest that – for women – promoting female issues in civil society organisations was more effective than working ‘inside’ the formal political structures, at the time of the study. To further the argument, positioning women’s concerns outside parliament is a way to maintain the balance – the complementarity and consensual form of decision-making with the men (see also Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017).

In the 1990s, the trend was to work towards mainstreaming of gender issues and against treating them as particularities within female branches and organisations – as side issues. The data presented in this article reveal that there may not be one general solution. Whether gender issues are best mainstreamed or treated on the side, may depend on the circumstances emanating from local systems of differences. In 1997, Charles Hale illustrated the emerging cultural politics of identity in Latin America with the example of the actions of a group of women in the Nicaraguan unionist movement who formed a separate branch in order to articulate their particular interests. These kinds of politics emerge when a certain experience cannot be articulated within the official structure. The strategies of indigenous women in Bolivia in relation to their unionist organisations reveal difficulties similar to those found in the Nicaraguan case. As mentioned, female indigenous leaders tend to be loyal to the cause of their union or party and do not want to criticise the organisation’s treatment of gender issues. Statements indicating that certain critique was not possible to articulate within the movement were collected during the field work, such as: “We want to work for a better society for everybody, not only for the women” (female Quechua leader 2005); “Within MAS we have no discrimination” (Isabel Ortega, parliamentarian for MAS 2006). One of the groups I interviewed in Bolivia in 2007 was a newly formed female branch of a federation of lowland farmers. The women said they had to form a female branch because, even though they were present at their general assembly, their issues and those of their “sisters” at the base in the community were not attended to within the larger organisation. Thus, if they wanted to have a voice, it was more effective to work outside the general assembly. So, this is where Caroline Moser’s (1987) framework may apply: a case where work outside the official structure meets practical gender needs within civil society, in a situation where strategic gender interests are still not possible within the official structures or the actors choose not to promote them directly, so as to avoid fragmenting the struggle for a cause that is perceived as more important.

Although the present essay does not mainly deal with indigenous women’s organisations, the framework and results of Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) may further our understanding of the strategic choice to place the main promotion of women’s interests outside the formal political structures. They compared the organising trajectories of indigenous women’s movements to mobilise women within indigenous movements in Peru, Mexico and Bolivia, leading to the creation of autonomous spaces from which they speak in their own name. Rousseau and Hudon use a fourfold typology: “women-only spaces in gender-mixed organisations; women-only organisations created out of gender-mixed organisations that remain related to the latter (parallel organisations or ‘gender parallelism’); organisations based on gender dualism in all positions of authority (couples fill in all the
positions jointly); and women-only organisation without permanent link to any other organisation (independent organisations)” (2017: 199). In Bolivia, they found “gender parallelism”, i.e., the creation of a parallel organisation for women that remained tied to an indigenous mixed gender organisation. The main example they use is the “Bartolinas”, the female unionist movement mentioned above. This was understood as an important move to strengthen the organisation’s mobilising ability. Other female peasant unions in the tropical valleys and the lowland followed the example. These new female organisations were still related to the mixed gender organisations from which they emerged, but were organised in a parallel fashion with their own statutes and leadership. These organisations differ from the “only-women spaces in gender-mixed organisations” that the authors report from Peru and Mexico, mainly owing to the fact that they can develop a public profile and represent themselves in official institutional settings (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 200). The third kind of organisational path based on gender dualism, mentioned by the authors, is unique to Bolivia. The Aymara and Quechua communities, organised through Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qollasuyo, CONAMAQ, follow “a structure of leadership that assigns married couples to fill each position jointly” (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 200). This is not implemented on the communal political level. If indigenous women were to mobilise around gender and indigeneity to form a collective identity, this would involve the creation of internal boundaries within indigenous movements on the basis of gender. Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) report:

However, in Bolivia the making of a boundary within the indigenous movement was somehow avoided through the phenomenon of gender parallelism, .... Indeed, the opening of the movement to women’s demands was strategically transferred ‘outside’ male-dominated organisations yet presented as the best way to recognize the specific contribution made by women to the movement (2017: 202).

They interpret the pattern of gender parallelism found in Bolivia as a strategy to avoid constructing boundaries within the indigenous movement. When indigenous women act jointly with indigenous male-dominated organisations, they can also pursue “complementary” issues of greater interest to them (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 202). A similar strategy may be transferred to the women’s engagement in political state structures where organised indigenous women in Bolivia have benefitted from a political context that has given them access to the state “both as political authorities and through normative changes” (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017: 207).

The phenomenon of “gender parallelism” has expanded concurrently with the strengthening of the indigenous movement in national politics in Bolivia. In sum, during the Morales government, there was a better balance of power between the indigenous movement and the state compared to earlier governments, and indigenous women, such as the Bartolinas, were able to take advantage of that situation. As mentioned earlier, in 2019 the Bartolinas were said to have no direct influence on the government, but they used their close relations to promote issues they found important. According to a consultant to the

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In Mexico and Peru, there are examples of indigenous women-only organisations without a permanent link to any other organisation, organisations created as a reaction to the national mixed-gender organisations’ unwillingness to integrate gender demands. These are not to be found in Bolivia, which may indicate that indigenous women in Bolivia are more loyal to their organisations or to the ethnic cause – or it may indicate that their gender demands have been met to a certain extent.
movement whom I interviewed, the Bartolinas rarely managed to impose their views by pressure and conflict, but rather looked for other ways to make their male comrades listen, such as inviting the government’s representatives to lunch. In that familiar environment, they had an opportunity to express their views and be listened to.

**Gender Dilemmas of Conflict and Complementarity**

In the present article, I have asked questions about and discussed the reasons why Bolivian women, having obtained descriptive representation, still position the promotion of female policy issues outside parliament. During a short period of time in Bolivia, there has been a drastic change in the form of increased female political participation within official structures as well as class and ethnic representativity. This drastic process of change has affected the quality of participation of newly elected women and other formerly excluded groups, and the strong resistance to change has resulted in increased levels of gendered political violence. In addition, many women have been busy ‘proving’ their capacity, while they are expected to be loyal to the social and ethnic cause and not to demand rights because they are women. The elected women need to balance these conflictive situations and react against violence and inequalities, in their struggle for a new society in partnership with men in a complementary relation. Due to the robust structures of male dominance in Bolivia, one of the strategies for making gender issues and women’s rights issues visible is to work in parallel, women-only organisations ‘outside’ of formal political structures.

The above sections show how female politicians with an indigenous and social movement background need to balance dilemmas of conflict and complementarity in relation to other organised women, politically active men and women and the organisations/communities that elected them. In this particular context – or system of gender, class and ethnic differences – gender parallelism seems to be a strategy that works, at least for the female branch of the peasant union: the Bartolinas.

Bolivian society is historically divided into social, racial and ethnic hierarchies. Thus, from an intersectional perspective, it is no surprise that the women’s movement is fragmented and that different feminism develop side by side. Although collaborations to advance joint platforms on women’s rights have been created between middle-class urban feminist organisations and indigenous women, as seen in relation to the Constituent Assembly and other legal proposals, the social and ethnic conflict remains unresolved, resulting in mutual distancing attitudes. The need to balance conflict and complementarity may also be seen in relation to the feminist/women’s movements. The successful collaboration between indigenous women and the feminist movements in elaborating the constituent assembly is an issue that stands out and was possible due to the current political trends. The political ground in Bolivia is shifting with regard to women’s participation in politics. This is a slow and difficult process of integration versus parallelism, which requires the constant vigilance of women’s movements and groups both within and outside state institutions.

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“Like the Chicken and the Egg”: Market Vendors and the Dilemmas of Neoliberal Urban Planning in Re-Centralised Kampala (Uganda)

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ABSTRACT The article explores how groups of informal workers understood the role of the city management in the demolition of Kisekka, a spare parts market in Kampala doomed to be replaced by an "ultramodern" shopping mall. The case unfolds between the push for entrepreneurialism, competition and individual initiative typical of neoliberal urban planning, and the re-centralisation trend that has characterised Kampala in the past decade. Despite narratives of self-entrepreneurship and independence, the presence of the central government in the urban workers’ lives was substantial. While decentralisation in Uganda has not necessarily guaranteed better service provision, the mushrooming of local administrative divisions has proved to be a winning card for the party in power. Kampala, however, represents an exception. Mayors have been elected from the opposition parties for two decades, prompting the government to re-centralise the city administration through the Kampala Capital City Authority Act 2010, which has returned the city to the government's direct control. As a result, the municipality has intervened massively in projects of urban development, including the demolition and reconstruction of a number of city markets like Kisekka. The article shows the tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces in the administration of the capital and its consequences in the lives of Kisekka Market workers.

Keywords: Decentralisation, re-centralisation, market, Kampala, urban planning

Introduction
In October 2018, when this article was taking shape, Ugandan media was swamped by the reactions to the announcement of resignation of Jennifer Musisi, the Executive Director of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA). Established by an Act of the Ugandan parliament in 2010, and identified with Musisi ever since, the establishment of the Authority has represented an anomaly of recentralisation in the history of Ugandan decentralisation. The reactions to Musisi’s resignation letter mirror the tensions that have underlain the governance of the Ugandan capital in the past decades.

This article shows some of these tensions from the entry point of Kisekka Market, a spare parts market in central Kampala, demolished in 2015. Located on the bottom of a polluted valley and hosting more than ten thousand workers (predominantly men, many of whom were school dropouts and sometimes prone to violence), the site had a gloomy reputation. Its demolition and the promised replacement with a shiny new mall were framed by stakeholders as an improvement for the whole city.
The article positions the reconstruction of the market at the intersection of apparently contradicting dynamics: a long history of decentralisation in the country, the recent turn of Uganda towards recentralisation and rampant neoliberal trends in urban planning, visible especially in the capital city. Under the leadership of the KCCA, the government’s control on the municipality has been reinforced. At the same time, private-public partnerships and the ambition for a competitive and beautified city have bourgeoned. This intersection has affected urban market vendors, used by politicians and administrators either as scapegoats for the flaws in urban development, or as a key voting bloc.

The first section provides a historical contextualisation to decentralisation and recentralisation in Uganda. The article then proceeds to introduce Kisekka Market at the intersection of these tendencies. Voices from the market and from the KCCA will explain what decentralisation, recentralisation and neoliberal urban planning have meant for those primarily affected by new forms of urban management. Torn between aspirations of development and competitiveness, on one side, and the vulnerability of informal employment in city markets, on the other, the KCCA faces a dilemma that one officer described as one “of the chicken and the egg”: what comes first – development or the people?

A Decentralisation Success Story and its Impact on Kampala

Uganda is often presented as a success story of decentralisation in Africa. Local structures of power dating back to precolonial times enabled British indirect rule system, particularly in the pyramid-structured Bantu kingdoms in the centre and south of the protectorate. Where hierarchies of chiefs were absent or less relevant, like in the north and east of what would later become Uganda, local chiefs were introduced by the colonial government. At independence in 1962, a miscellaneous system of federal and semi-federal prerogatives was established in the country – a heterogeneity levelled after the abolition of all kingdoms and chiefdoms in 1967, with the creation of 18 equal districts (Green 2015: 493) under the regime of Milton Obote.

Local and capillary situated sources of power and support played an important role during the bush guerrilla war waged against the rule of Obote and Okello, officially ceased in 1986, when the National Resistance Movement/Army lead by Yoweri Kaguta Museveni came to power. The bush war relied heavily on the support of local communities and villages: once in power, the National Resistance Movement acknowledged the importance of this decentralised structure by formalising a system of local government cells (Resistance Councils), which were given a “Resistance Council and Committees Status” in 1987 (Makara 1998: 33; Green 2015). The Local Governments (Resistance Councils) Statute of 1993 devolved administrative and political powers to local governments and turned districts into centres "for service provision" (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2205; see Makara 1998). In the Constitution ratified in 1995, article 176 2 (b) enshrined the principles of the Local Governments Act 1997 thus transferring “administrative and fiscal responsibility to local council structures for the delivery of basic services” (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2205). Local governments were ultimately accorded political, administrative, financial and legal powers (Onyach-Olaa 2003: 105).

1 Throughout the article I use “informal” in a very broad sense, following the concise definition of informal economy provided by Lindell (2010a: 5), as the one that “lie(s) beyond or circumvent(s) state regulation".
In Kampala, which gained the status of district (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2207) despite its unique and incomparable challenges in terms of service delivery and administration, decentralisation was particularly encouraged by external donors. UNDP and the World Bank, among others, provided broad support, informed by the logic that decentralisation would improve development and government’s accountability (Onyach-Olaa 2003: 106; see Lambright 2014; Makara 1998: 32). Donors’ interventions did not tackle “national or intergovernmental problems, conflicts, or inequalities” (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2207), and rather focused more narrowly on the local scale.

In the urban setting, the process was accompanied by a massive liberalisation that visibly affected urban planning. The World Bank supported structural adjustment programs and projects that encouraged reliance on private initiatives. The “First Urban Project” (1991), meant to fill the gaps left in planning and management by the City Council, had urban marketplaces as one of the main targets (World Bank 2000: 3). The wording of the project’s assessment report indicates the spirit of the initiative: it commends the positive effects on an estimated 25,000 vendors, either through direct support (by provision of “lockup stalls, stall sheds, offloading sheds, toilet and administration blocks”) or by bringing inspiration to others (as in the case of Kisekka, subject of this article) to “improve their markets on self-help basis” (ibid: 1). Self-initiative and entrepreneurship were encouraged, at the same time as urban management was decentralised and progressively delegated to private stakeholders.

Complying with the donors’ requests, the centre delegated its powers to the locals, while private investors were invited to take charge of urban development and of marketplaces in particular (cf. Lindell and Appelblad 2009). In Kampala, private-public partnership became the main approach to service delivery in local governments, while the New Public Management philosophy invited different stakeholders to become protagonists of city governance, encouraging “public organisations to introduce business-based ideas into their management” (Asiimwe 2016: 23; Madinah et al. 2015; see Hansen 2004 for parallel, contemporary dynamics in Zambia). While the official discourse on decentralisation presents it as an avenue to development and good governance (Green 2015), simultaneous liberalisation trends also meant cutbacks to public expenditures.

In a domino-effect, liberalisation increased, in turn, the informalisation of the work force, a phenomenon that has been observed also in other regions of Sub-Saharan Africa (Potts 2008). Everywhere, an increased presence of informal workers pushed out of the formal economy – street vendors and hawkers in particular - has in turn encouraged rigid top-down policies to cleanse cities, and to get rid of unpleasant and undeserving citizens. Closed markets have replaced street markets in Uganda as much as in Kenya (Kinyanjui 2014; Lindell and Ihalainen 2014); shopping malls have fostered racial and social segregation, but also incarnated myths of modernity, in South Africa (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009) as much as in Zambia (Miller et al. 2008). In Kampala, like throughout the continent, this transition translated to higher unemployment rates rather than development and amelioration of services. Kampala thus represents a typical example of African neoliberal urbanism.

Places like Kisekka Market expanded in the nineties, attracting people who did not have a place in the formal labour market. In the beginning of that decade, Kisekka was little more than a gathering of scattered kiosks, selling food and second-hand spare parts in a swampy valley crossed by Nakivubo Channel. The clinic of dentist Samson Kisekka, also
Prime Minister of the country from 1986 to 1991, oversaw the valley and gave the market its name. According to the memories of the old trader Ssegujja, who was still working in Kisekka Market in 2014 at the time of my fieldwork, the City Council authorised the market workers to build semi-permanent structures in the valley around 1994. Workers recounted that in 1999, at the time that other markets were improved in the spirit of the World Bank, an association of traders signed the first tenancy agreement to lease the market’s land for 12 years. They could therefore construct proper shops with bricks and metal roofs, marking the start of the official and formally recognised marketplace that would survive until 2015. The workers in Kisekka seemed therefore to indirectly benefit from the general privatisation and development-driven policies in a decentralised Kampala. The situation however would change in the successive phase of recentralisation.

**Recentralisation and the Takeover of Kampala: The KCCA**

While the public discourse on Uganda as a champion of decentralisation seemed to remain hegemonic in my daily conversations with colleagues and informants, enough evidence supports a different view of how political and administrative trends have changed in the country. While the government allowed new districts to mushroom and secured political support through the promises that the status of district brings (Perrot et al. 2014: 6), new trends have become visible, particularly in the capital city.

Since the end of the 1990s, the government has taken a number of steps to recentralise the management of districts. In 2005, the Local Government Amendment Bill returned the power to appoint districts’ Chief Administrative Officers to the central government. That was also the year in which the introduction of multi-party system opened up the political competition, making the National Resistance Movement of Yoweri Museveni more fragile. Although the official rationale of the Amendment was to limit local political influence on the districts’ administration, it also signaled the government’s fear to lose control on its local divisions (Lambright 2014; Nabaho 2013). Meanwhile, donors’ attitudes towards Uganda started to change. The *enfant prodige* of decentralisation and democratisation started displaying “worrisome political trends”, with “raising corruption and shrinking space for political opposition” (Lambright 2014: S40). External support to decentralisation faltered; internally, tensions between national and local interests and the failure of ministries to actually delegate their functions to local institutions further challenged decentralisation (Onyach-Olaa 2003: 109).

The change of trend was particularly visible in Kampala. The only urban centre to be classified as “city” in Uganda, and, as said, a district in itself, the capital of Uganda suffers from faulty service delivery, high insecurity and periodic eruptions of violent street politics. Governance is made shaky by the conflicts between different authorities which contend the control of the city: the central government, Kampala politicians and administrators, the kingdom of Buganda that has its centre in Kampala, civil society, and business tycoons (Baral 2018; Goodfellow 2010; Gore and Muwanga 2206). Moreover, the city mayor “has historically played a principal role as […] outspoken critic of the national government” and has been repeatedly elected among the opposition ranks (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2210; Green 2015, 2018).

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2 I explain the inconsistencies between the workers’ memories and the documents kept by the Kampala Capital City Authority in Baral 2018.
After the 2006 elections, which reconfirmed an opposition candidate but within a fragmented opposition in the new multiparty system, the government had room to strengthen its control on the capital (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2208; see Asiimwe 2016; Kitamirike 2016). In 2010 a Parliament Act established the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), a “national authority to oversee the administration of the city” (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2202).

Within the KCCA, financial power lies in the hands of the Executive Director, appointed by the government with a five-year contract. The elected representatives like the mayor, deputy lord mayor and some of the councilors (the others being appointed through professional bodies: Asiimwe 2016) can only make “recommendations that must be approved by the executive director” (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2212) and have therefore a “de facto unfunded mandate” (ibid.). The Executive Director is also endowed with the task to “ensure proper physical planning” (Government of Uganda 2010, part III, art. 19), therefore becoming the person in charge of restructuring the city not only economically but also physically. The Act also established a Ministry for Kampala, to which the KCCA is directly accountable. There is vast agreement that the recentralisation of Kampala represented a response to the government’s incapability to negotiate power with local authorities, and to retake control otherwise on a “powerful economic and political space that had been out of its reach since coming to power in 1986” (Gore and Muwanga 2014: 2203).

While elected leaders were losing power, private actors increasingly intervened in the management of the city, to an extent that the new KCCA mandate looked more like “corporate management” than “governance” (Asiimwe 2016). This pattern did not go unnoticed among the workers in Kisekka Market, who designated this coalescence of political and economic interests with expressions like “the system” or “the business” (of Kampala). Eliciting the political view of Kisekka Market workers in my daily attendance of the market for eight months between 2014 and 2015, I have consistently, and independently from their personal and variable political views, recorded disappointment for the way the city was governed. “They think they own Kampala”, some would say referring to the KCCA and the government; the KCCA was undeniably seen as an arm of the central government.

Framing the Relations between Municipal Institutions and Market Workers: Solidarity, Modernity, Morality

In 2014, at the time of my fieldwork, Kisekka Market was about to be demolished. A company that was supposed to represent the interests of the workers, but which was suspected of connivance with the government and accused of behaving undemocratically (Baral 2018), secured the land title of the market. The KCCA had played a major role in the project by negotiating with the workers for acquisition of the land title and by being responsible for the correctness of the procedures, in conversation with market workers and construction companies. The project proposed the reconstruction of the market as a six-storied shopping mall, in which Kisekka Market workers would ideally have precedence to relocate. This would guarantee better working conditions, more orderliness and hygiene in this polluted part of the city, and – less officially, but well clear in the mind of my informants – the purge of those groups of poor, uneducated wheeler-dealers for which Kisekka Market was stereotypically famous and that would not have capital to invest in the rent of the new malls’ shops. Such intentions were not kept secret by politicians like Local Government...
Minister Kahinda Otafiire, who vowed to exclude “hawkers and petty criminals” from the project (Daily Monitor, 15/09/2007).

The project promised therefore to beautify, ameliorate and “develop” (a term often heard both at KCCA and among the market’s representatives) Kisekka. The meaning that the workers attributed to it, however, was profoundly informed and affected by the recentralisation trend and its implications. With the KCCA on stage, urban governance was interpreted in a Manichean way, as a struggle between the government, determined to appropriate the city, and the opposition, on the side of the city workers. The elected Mayor and the appointed Executive Director were seen more and more as antagonists rather than collaborators, and they came to stand as signifiers not only of divergent political colors but also of opposite ways to relate with “the people” - more specifically, the informal workers, street vendors and market traders in Kampala.

The current mayor Erias Lukwago (lawyer and MP for the central region, in power also during my fieldwork) was elected in 2011. He had gained celebrity status by consistently taking the vendors’ side in the conflicts around city markets. In the midst of the privatisation trend, Lukwago argued for “giving sitting tenants the first priority” (New Vision, 27/02/2008) and made the struggle for vendors’ rights “his hallmark” (Daily Monitor, 16/03/2011). “The down-trodden of the city formed the bedrock of his support” (The Independent, 18/03/2011), the press recorded, reporting the stories Lukwago told about his childhood in the slums. He was voted by huge sectors of the Buganda kingdom (to which he openly showed support) and informal workers, including those in Kisekka Market, where he shed tears of solidarity with the workers threatened by the demolition of the site.

Lukwago was impeached in 2013, guilty among other things of inciting violence against the KCCA among the market vendors. He would re-win his office in the February 2016 elections. When I interviewed him in the garden of his villa on the outskirt of Kampala in 2014, he accused the Executive Director of plotting against him to discredit, in turn, the whole opposition.

On the contrary, the role of the KCCA and its Executive Director was framed less through cultural and ethnic ties and rather through promises of development and competitiveness. The KCCA aims at making Kampala the business card of the country to the world. The city was presented as “the gateway to, and showcase of, Uganda” (KCCA 2012: 178), an ideal to be achieved through a “symbiotic” relation with the government: “Kampala as a city is dependent on government… with government equally dependent on the City” (KCCA 2012: 181).

However, this symbiosis – completely coherent, I argue, with the will to recentralise Kampala governance – coexists with the encouragement for private investments. In the same KCCA document we read that “To ensure appropriate development, the Government of Uganda’s dominance of the City needs to be balanced by a vibrant, independent, competitive Private Sector” (KCCA 2012: 181). The phrasing pushes the boundaries of public governance towards profit-making and what my informants called, with no intention to nuance their opinion, mere “business”.

In order to create a “vibrant, competitive, thriving” city (as written on the KCCA website), the KCCA needs to clean up the city centre and has done so by violently targeting illegal and informal workers as well (Young 2017). KCCA agents also intervened to target vendors and mechanics on the pavements around Kisekka Market. In the usual urban drama unfolding in the streets of Kampala Central Business District, plain clothes officers
would approach a hawker, followed by agents in KCCA T-shirts pulling punches on the unfortunate victim. In Kisekka Market, workers were proud of reacting to these kind of interventions with counter-aggression, to an extent that the market’s spokesperson had to warn the workers that if they did not stop attacking the KCCA, they would risk losing the market’s land title (Baral 2018: 155).

People in the market understood these interventions in terms of control and coercion. The replacement of marketplaces with fancy shopping malls - what a journalist aptly defined as a “mall epidemic” (New Vision, 01/08/2012), was for them a blunt political attempt to recapture the city and its effervescent working populations. Urban planning became a tool for power and interfered particularly with the informal workers’ lives. Museveni’s political fortunes depend in fact to a large extent on the predicament of informal workers in the capital (Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Lambright 2014; Young 2017), alternately accused of spoiling the city image desired by the KCCA or capitalised upon as loyal support in the electoral campaign. Just before the 2016 vote, for example, the incumbent President released a statement inviting vendors to come and sell in town, contradicting a KCCA by-law that had instead threatened evictions and arrests among hawkers (Daily Monitor, 02/03/2016). On another occasion, the government heavily interfered with the KCCA accusing the Authority of illegally taxing the boda boda (motorbike taxi) riders - an expedient that aimed at pleasing one of the city biggest voting blocs (Gore and Mwanga 2014: 2209; Lambright 2014: S49; Goodfellow and Titeca 2012). The workers knew that the government needed their support, and they saw the recentralisation of Kampala as an increased interference of the government in their lives. Pushes and pulls in different directions, with street traders and informal urban workers exposed to the whims of power, are a common feature of African urban governance, which sees an intersection of private interests, external influences, and incongruous policies (see Hansen 2004; Lindell and Ihalainen 2014).

Such relations were framed as threats and violence. The song “Let’s tell Jennifer” (Tugambire ku Jennifer), by the singer Bobi Wine, expresses these feelings well. The singer, elected opposition MP and violently arrested in August 2018, has successfully capitalised on his identity as a former “ghetto youth”, close to the city vendors. In the song, Bobi Wine criticises the aggressiveness of the KCCA and proposes a reflection on the city governance in moral terms. Using direct and familiar language, Bobi Wine addresses the vendors attacked by the KCCA (“how can I help you, mother?”, “what about you, grandfather?”). The vendors reply with the chorus: “Let’s tell Jennifer to reduce the anger, let’s tell Jennifer that the city is ours!”.

Bobi Wine’s message, reinforced by a video in which KCCA agents harass people in the streets of the city, resonates with how workers in Kisekka framed their grievances with the government - through kinship or moral language. The city poor were described as “family”; the President was accused to be a “father” who has forgotten his children (Baral 2018: 159). The song asks the KCCA Executive Director, Jennifer Musisi: “Why are you doing this, yet you are our sister?”. Musisi is not challenged as an administrator, but as a moral subject that

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3 “Nkuyambe ki, Maama?”
4 “Tugambire ku Jennifer akendeze obukaambwe, tugambire ku Jennifer nti ekibuga kyaffe”.
5 “N’jya luaki okola oto ny’ata ali muganda waaffe”, where “muganda” means not only sister, but more generally a close member of the family; the same word defines a member of the Baganda ethnic group, to which most of my informants belong.
must remember that “if a city has to develop, it has to develop with people in it”. For the workers in Kisekka Market, the Executive Director became “Jennifer”, a stubborn “sister” who had turned the back on “her people”. Recentralisation was experienced as violent prevarication and a breakage of loyalty and solidarity, besides being a failure in development and democracy.

**Competition Around Kampala Markets**

Jennifer Musisi’s vision was to improve markets in peripheral areas of Kampala and other Ugandan towns, and to leave only shopping malls in the city centre - despite obvious proofs that customers find it hard to reorient their shopping habits (Baral 2018). Her ambition to have a clean and organised city center was pictorially summarised in a sentence that I recorded in our interview: “I dream of a day when I can buy my clean tomatoes, well packaged in plastic, only in a nice shop inside a mall” (rather than in kiosks along the streets).

The image of clean tomatoes represents more than a personal caprice; it encapsulates well the intersection between the will of a stronger government’s control on the city and the utopia of modernity flaunted by the KCCA. The way the city is imagined, appropriated and governed is inspired by neoliberalism as ideology of contemporary urban planning. The privatisation and marketisation of the city space, the emphasis on individual initiative and entrepreneurship, together with gentrification, policing of citizens’ behaviors, securitisation and incentives to consume (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 2005; Lippert 2014) are, in a nutshell, what neoliberal planning does to a city. If neoliberalism engenders a “creative destruction” (as famously put by Harvey 2005: 3), implying both a rupture with the past and the creation of a new order, the demolition of a market like Kisekka and its replacement with an impressive shopping mall illustrates this thoroughly.

These transformations have a price, however; the connivance between politics and business on a national and local level has just “fuel(ed) increased competition for land and other resources in Kampala, with negative consequences for the country’s urban poor” (Lambright 2014: S41). The price of planning is in fact paid by workers like those in Kisekka Market and in the other marketplaces that have been caught in the process of “creative destruction”.

In 2007, for instance, the company Rhino Investments obtained the lease of Kisekka Market’s land. The owner of the company, Colonel J. Mugyenyi, was a retired army soldier previously stationed in Eastern Congo, who had remained active in Ugandan politics and business and had financially supported Museveni’s 2006 electoral campaign (Vlassenroot et al. 2012: 12). Media accused him of recycling gold stolen in DRC through real estate projects, including the reconstruction of Kisekka Market (New Vision, 29/09/2007). The workers who had acquired the market land through an association of market members, reacted violently to his attempt to get the land title. An investigation by the Ministry of Local Government revealed that the government had actively supported Mugyenyi; the scandal that ensued, undermined the President’s authority in a city that he was trying to recapture. Museveni therefore had to deliberately act as the traders’ “champion”, as sensed by the press, and ordered an end to the sale of city markets to private investors (New Vision,

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*Ekibuga nga kinakula kirina okukula nga musimu n’abantu*. I thank Rehema Nakandi for helping me with the translation of the song.
16/12/2008; see Goodfellow and Titeca 2012). In the summer of 2008, the commission of enquiry nullified the partnership between Rhino Investments and the vendors’ association in Kisekka (which did not appear to be legally registered) and instructed reimbursement for Mugyenyi. The President at this point encouraged the workers to form a company, rather than an association, in order to be stakeholders in the project.

Similar incidents occurred with city tycoon Hassan Basajabalaba, who bought several market lands that were later reclaimed by the government, after vendors’ protests. On these occasions the media highlighted the strong connection between Museveni and the tycoon (The Independent 10/09/2011), and denounced “a growing practice among shrewd businessmen to win tenders, licenses, and concessions with the aim of not making substantial investments but to fail and get some compensation”, with the connivance of government officials (The Observer, 29/08/2011).

These murky transactions triggered both violent protests and a rife sense of mistrust and insecurity among the workers. Within Kisekka, the spokesperson, the chairman and the members of the company that supposedly represented the workers were constantly accused of conniving with the government to benefit from the reconstruction deal. Musoke, a spare parts trader, very critical of the project, bitterly summarised the problem: “The management of Kisekka is an agent of the municipality”.

**Empowerment and its Failures**

It would be wrong and simplistic to depict Kampala as a play of good and bad guys, like both the KCCA and the workers tended sometimes to define each other. Several interviews at the KCCA revealed an awareness of the complexity of the situation and an appreciation of the workers’ pleas. Undoubtedly, many had skeptical comments on the market’s workers, denoted as rascals and troublemakers (see Baral 2018). Kisekka was mainly framed as a “problem of trade order”, an expression capturing a well-organised, neat and functioning business environment in terms of infrastructure, tax collection, and competition – all factors clearly lacking in Kisekka.

The Gender and Community Services and Production office was in charge of supervising the city markets. J. Lwanga, the head of this office, agreed that Kisekka Market was a “tricky one” as far as trade order and peace were concerned. He rattled off a substantial list of reasons, main among which were “political interferences” and a dubious market’s leadership, since “most markets are led by people who are not educated… Such people are easily manipulated and cannot see far”. However, during the interaction Lwanga smiled, adding that Kisekka was also “an interesting place”. His opinion was shared by a male officer in his early thirties, briskly moving in the office in his blue suite - a good representation of the new generation employed by the KCCA in the effort to rejuvenate and energise the city management. Hearing that I was doing research on Kisekka, he also smiled: “Incidentally, madam, I’m one of those who think that Kisekka is not such a bad place”.

During my fieldwork I realised that the KCCA officers were torn between an official position – informed by the institutional mandate for recentralisation, strong management and competitiveness – and more nuanced personal views as common citizens, aware of the vulnerabilities of market vendors, and customers of Kisekka themselves. Lwanga knowingly talked of the workers’ predicament, and while he was sure that the KCCA’s mission had to be “to clean the city and make it habitable”, he regretted the inevitable side effects on the lives
of hawkers and “illegal vendors”. City incursions by KCCA agents like the one appearing in Bobi Wine’s video mentioned above had increased unemployment without providing people with alternatives to informality or to illegal business. “It’s like the chicken and the egg”, he put it, describing how, in a city with around 8,500 street vendors in the Central Business District in 2011 (Young 2017: 716), it was impossible to realise both trade order and employment. What should come first, Lwanga asked, and what option should be left out? He did not have an answer to this dilemma.

The official position of the municipality’s headquarters on the markets demolition in Kampala was that the process allowed for the “empowerment” of the workers (Baral 2018; Goodfellow and Titeca 2012). In this way, development could be framed as not excluding, but rather incorporating, workers’ rights, hence solving the “chicken and egg” dilemma. By investing in new malls, and by renting out better stalls and shops, the workers – so the KCCA claimed – would take charge of their destiny and livelihoods. This was believed to be true particularly in Kisekka Market; while other markets had been upgraded with the participation of the KCCA (for example Wandegeya Market), in fact, the acquisition of the land title by a workers’ company left a big burden on Kisekka workers’ shoulders. As Lwanga explained, Kisekka Market had been “handed over” to the workers, thus they should “turn it into a modern market by themselves”. The process was framed as an example of successful “privatisation”, and Kisekka was talked about as “private land”. For the moment, Lwanga added, the KCCA could only “watch” the workers from a distance; for some months, Kisekka had not received the KCCA’s cleansing raids and had been exonerated from market dues, in order to avoid agitations. As he spoke of Kisekka, Lwanga pointed distractedly out the window. We both looked outside, towards the valleys, where we knew Kisekka was brimming with liveliness; our look from above and afar was a good representation of the relation between the City Authority and the market.

My fieldwork coincided with the months in which Kisekka workers progressively realised the inevitability of the market’s demolition. It took time for both me and most of those I interacted with to realise that the demolition would actually happen. By October 2014 things precipitated quickly, with the selection of the construction company and the demolition planned for December. The drawing of the future mall hung in the market’s chairman and spokesperson’s offices and portrayed a red building with fancy white and orange embellishments, surrounded by a clean and cleared pavement, new roads with sparkly white road signs, and – to make the estrangement worse – only white customers strolling around it. It was a far cry from the four acres of muddy and crowded site where I carried out my research.

The workers initially related to the promise contained in that picture by appropriating the “empowerment” narrative. Sentences like “the workers are now owners of their destiny” or “the market is ours” resonated in Kisekka corridors. This was a utopia of self-made entrepreneurs, in charge of their own market, organised in a company and thus investing in the improvements that their workplace needed. The limits to this narrative, however, were revealed quite soon.

In reality, few workers got to negotiate the terms of the land acquisition and the demolition and reconstruction plan, since the company was formed by a few dozen workers
against more than ten thousand working on the site. “The company”, as it was simply called, was seen by many as an enemy rather than an ally.

Moreover, workers found it hard to build solidarity across different economic statuses. In July 2014, a guarded meeting took place at the historical Sabrina pub, located behind the market. The market executive committee, sat on a stage behind a long table and in front of a public of hundreds, tried to explain the conditions of the development project, announcing that Kisekka would be replaced with “an ultramodern (okulembe nnyo) market with 2,803 shops, stalls on 3.7 acres of land, developing on 6 storeys”, “the biggest in Eastern and Central Africa”. After an initial enthusiasm, the meeting continued by listing the sums of money that those willing to have a stake in the project were expected to pay. It was soon clear that those with an unstable day-to-day income could not bear the economic burden of entering the company, nor could they ensure a right of precedence in the new mall, since thousands of workers were not registered anywhere.

Privatisation combined with recentralisation started showing its malicious effects: workers became incapable to mobilise across the market and, as it had happened elsewhere, were “made more vulnerable to the whims of both management companies and the City Council” (Lindell and Appelblad 2009: 403). The lack of fully legitimised representative bodies facilitated the intrusion of external agents in the management of city markets, while internal divisions weakened the workers and increased the economic stress on their lives.

Meanwhile, the logic of entrepreneurship backfired for workers’ solidarity. The better-off vendors tended to be more enthusiastic of the plan of “development” because they had capital to invest in it; the poorer ones tried to hinder the project (through street protests and complex interactions with the KCCA) in order to preserve their workplace and source of livelihood. My friend Kasule had no money to invest in the project and was ready to wait until “the rich guys will rent their shops [to the less wealthy workers]”, feeling that this was not yet his time. “It is nobody’s fault”, he wanted to underline: “I have no money to invest now, so I can just do my work and wait for my time to come”. Workers in his position, however, criticised with disdain the groups rioting against the project; when we came across women in the kitchen section ululating in support of one of the most popular rioters, Kasule sarcastically commented: “[the protesters] have never put a coin in the development of this market, what do they want now?”. Blame and moralistic judgments made relationships between workers shift away from solidarity and some were perceived as untrustworthy and undeserving, unable to become modern.

Finally, the presumption that workers should “develop their market by themselves”, as the officer quoted above claimed, was highly problematic. When the government gave up on Kisekka, the provision of services in the market stalled. During a general meeting in August 2014, I sat with hundreds of workers under the white plastic tents put up in the street along the market to listen to the market’s representative talking of Kisekka’s predicament. One of the topics was that the garbage situation had become unsustainable. Companies once hired through the KCCA were no longer providing that service, and the piles of rubbish reached unbearable heights, it was said. “When I went to the KCCA for assistance, they told me that Kisekka Market is now a private property, so they are no longer responsible”, a woman from the Kisekka Finance Committee said. The management had to resort to private companies, but it was made clear that this was an expensive, unsustainable arrangement. These changes seem to confirm that interference of the government in the city management
caused (more or less directly) a deterioration of service provision rather than improvements, a causal relation broadly confirmed by literature (for example: Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Green 2015; Lambright 2014: S40).

Therefore, beyond the promise of owning the future lay precariousness and insecurity, aggravated by the privatisation of services. Workers were now in a limbo; nobody would provide for them, but they could not do much for their own advancement either. Years of decentralisation and private-public partnership have opened the way to forms of neoliberal planning and to its narratives that promised “ownership” of the city; the workers were told that they would eventually manage to influence the city management and the production of the urban space. However, as we have seen, the reality on the ground was very different.

The Violence of Bureaucracy

The result of recentralisation and privatisation is also a massive production of documents (bids, insurances, budgets, contracts with legal firms and so on), which sometimes appeared in the conversations around Kisekka Market. It was also in the relation of the workers to the paperwork that their disempowerment became evident. Their malaise, I have surmised, was expressed not only in riots and street protests but also through (far from smooth) negotiations with the KCCA. Groups of workers, often in factious conflicts with other groups within Kisekka, tried to understand what was happening to their workplace by interrogating the KCCA officers in their headquarters.

Discussing bureaucracy however, was not simple, for the formal structures of meetings and the baroque language of documents that often provoked emotionally charged responses. Hull (2012) points out how documents trigger emotions both in those who administer them and in those who receive them, or who are forcefully defined by them. Bureaucracy can also hinder communications, rather than the contrary, by being opaque and impenetrable. Graeber (2012) calls it the “structural violence” of bureaucracy, which requires heavy “interpretive labour” (2012: 117) on the part of receivers in order for bureaucracy to be understood. This is an urgent need, since misunderstanding or violation of the norms contained in a document may cause violent responses.

The documents related to the demolition and reconstruction project contained the workers’ future. However, workers were rarely enabled to access them, either because of language barriers, or because the documents were kept in centers of power such as offices, ministries and the KCCA with which especially the uneducated had little or no familiarity. Documents were distant and elusive, far from guaranteeing that the workers were stakeholders in the city management as promised by decades of decentralisation, New Public Management and private-public partnerships (see Asiimwe 2016).

If on one side the workers were invited and challenged, sometimes - in my view - cynically, to be owners of their own destiny, in reality they had little cultural capital to tackle the complexities of the process that affected their lives. The fatigue that came from trying to clarify things with the KCCA ultimately exceeded the results, and interlocutors indulged in ignorance, revealing something of the power dynamics between them and the municipal institutions. Documents, Graeber (2012) adds, often do not simplify chaos but rather magnify it, when bureaucracy becomes difficult to interpret.

In good and in bad ways, documents are “socially efficacious” (Graeber 2012: 108), something which became clear during an emergency meeting called at the municipality. A
faction of vendors had threatened to riot if the officers in charge of the plan did not listen to their grievances. I attended the meeting, which took place in one of the KCCA meeting rooms, full to its capacity. Two officers from the KCCA sat with the workers. I knew many of the latter by name, and I had visited one of them in prison the day he was arrested for protests. He spoke in the capacity of workers’ representative, dressed in a neat blue shirt, holding a paper crammed with notes in his hand. His speech was calm but emotional and it summarised the workers’ complaints. The development plan was depriving thousands of workers of an income, he complained, and the market’s management had not been able to offer them any alternative solution. Only the rich workers, he underlined, could afford to invest in, and therefore, in the long term, would benefit from the development project.

As his colleagues clapped and uttered sounds of approval, the officers listened quietly and took notes. When their turn came, the senior officer asked the younger to pass him a folder, which he then dropped heavily on the table. The senior silently pushed the folder forward, in the middle of the space separating him from the workers’ representative. It was at least thirty centimeters thick, and the bands closing it were strained by the pressure of the papers it contained. “Everything is in the documents”, the senior officer said, getting only silence as a response. He repeated how the procedure related to the implementation of the plan had been duly followed by the KCCA, the market’s management and their lawyers. If the workers had any complaints, the officer suggested, they should find a lawyer and file a petition, taking the market’s management (rather than the municipality) to court.

The workers mumbled and discussed amongst themselves for some minutes, stuck as they were in a reality of precariousness and anxiety that seemed to find no response in the bureaucratic language of the officer. Nobody opened the folder. The pile of documents, together with a language that created a gap between the paperwork and the “reality it purport[ed] to represent” (Hull 2012: 255), had silenced the complainants. The technical language and the formalised rituals of bureaucracy that professed to offer solutions to the workers problem, instead stymied any chance of dialogue and conflict with the theatrical gesture of the senior officer.

Fooled into assuming themselves to be entrepreneurs, in the recentralised, neoliberal Kampala, the workers had to accept that very little empowerment would come from the new situation. Kept hostage by powerful stakeholders and tycoons, left alone by the same logic by which they should have felt empowered, the market workers had to come to terms with the idea that the price to pay to have Kampala as a “showcase of Uganda” was for them to be excluded by any decisional process.

Conclusions: The Meaning of Decentralisation and Recentralisation for Market Workers

This article has presented trends of decentralisation, recentralisation and neoliberal privatisation from the perspective of market workers in Kisekka Market, central Kampala. Drawing on the voices of vendors, mechanics and municipal officers, it has shown how the push for privatisation and an aesthetic and ideology of competitiveness have peculiarly intersected, causing increasing interferences of the central government in the city management.

People like the workers of Kisekka Market, already vulnerable, pay the highest price for these contradictory tendencies in administration and governance. Among the participants to my research, the takeover of Kampala triggered insecurity and the feeling of being
betrayed as citizens. Their complaints of a lack of capital, but especially of a lack of voice, contradict the promises of decentralisation (Gore, Mwanga 2014: 2204). Recentralisation, on its part, has induced a massive interference of municipal institutions, central government and businesspersons. Service provision has however shown little or no sign of amelioration. The mix of “politics and business” as informants would frame it, has ultimately affected negatively, the urban poor that do not have the power nor the capital to be competitive (Lambright 2014: S41).

An ethnography of de-centralisation and re-centralisation in Kampala from the market workers’ perspective allows us to observe how administrative and political trends are interpreted and appropriated on the ground, and how new subjectivities (like the entrepreneur and the self-standing citizen) are shaped. In another context, Igreja (2013) has observed how processes of decentralisation are not only administrative and economic in nature but go hand in hand with the construction of local identities and the formation of loyalties or antagonisms towards national leaders. In Kampala, the predicament of market workers seems to confirm that de-centralisation and re-centralisation have had profound effects of disempowerment and discouragement of urban workers.

Recentralisation has also exposed the fragility of the central government (which has become one with the National Resistance Movement, in power for more than 30 years), incapable of regaining control on its capital. The letter of resignation submitted by the Executive Director of the KCCA Jennifer Musisi, that Museveni accepted reluctantly and after a long time, represents a critical peak of tension within the Authority, affected by criticisms, scandals and accusations (especially from the working class and the opposition parties) of providing no real change in terms of service provision and life quality for the citizens.

The “chicken and egg” dilemma posed by the KCCA officer above – who comes first, “development” or “the people”? – remains unsolved both by decentralisation and recentralisation. What should be prioritised – the citizens’ right to the city and to a voice, or the ideal of a modern, competitive capital city? One informant in Kisekka Market, commenting on the upcoming demolition that would put an end to his long career of mechanic on the site, told me that he was not against development per se; he just thought that the demolition would not really bring improvement, since it would leave hundreds unemployed. He actively engaged his colleagues with a megaphone to warn them not to be fooled by the image of a shiny new mall, when the reality was that they would be chased from the site for who knows how long. His worry was that “you cannot have development without people”, resonating vividly with the lyrics of the song by Bobi Wine quoted earlier. Eventually, Kampala will need come to terms with this dilemma: the KCCA still has to decide what comes first – the chicken or the egg – or, even better, how to make the two coexist.

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7 In October 2018, the resigning Jennifer Musisi has been replaced by an interim Executive Director, Andrew Kitaka. His contract has been extended in December 2019 for six months.


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“Tout a été loti!”: Decentralisation, Land Speculation and Urban Expansion in Niamey, Niger

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ABSTRACT In and around Niamey, land has emerged as a central source of economic and political capital and as the object of intense competition. Land speculation has accelerated with the decentralisation of land management including zoning or land subdivision operations (lotissement) whereby rural land such as agricultural fields are transformed into land plots mainly for housing. The multiplication of actors involved in zoning has led to an unprecedented competition over land on the urban fringe, involving a multitude of actors including municipalities, private and public enterprises, private entrepreneurs and individual land speculators, national politicians, customary landowners and other brokers and intermediaries. With the rapid proliferation of public and private zoning operations, zoning and land management have also quickly become central question in local and municipal politics, engendering conflicts, competition and contestation. In this paper we analyse the economic, political and spatial stakes of land management in the periphery of Niamey. We show that land speculation is part of a wider struggle for political and economic influence that is reshaping local political arenas and rapidly transforming the urban periphery.

Keywords: zoning, land speculation, urban expansion, political arenas, Niamey

Introduction

When approaching Niamey, the capital of Niger, by road, several kilometers before reaching the urban agglomeration the sides of the road are dotted by signboards that mark the ownership of land including the number of the land deed or simply the name and phone number of the owner. Larger signs indicate the name of a future housing development like Cité Émergente (the ‘emerging city’) or Cité ONPPC, both located approximately 30 km from the city limit. These signs of a prospective if not immediately ‘emerging’ urbanisation are evidence of the importance of land speculation on the urban fringes of Niamey, a phenomenon that is quickly making urban plans and prognostics obsolete. “Tout a été loti!” [‘Everything has been zoned!’], Kalidou, a long serving civil servant responsible for urban planning and land management at the town hall in Niamey, exclaimed with exasperation before continuing to explain that the territorial expansion of the urban agglomeration of Niamey projected for the year 2020 had already been surpassed in 2011. Kalidou was referring to the proliferation of zoning operations (lotissement) through which farming land situated on the periphery of the capital was being transformed into land plots at an unprecedented speed. Apart from tell-tale signs such as the signboards described above or...
the tracing of access ways, these transformations were in most cases not yet visible. This is not to say that land speculation is a new phenomenon. Rich businessmen, and politicians have a history of buying up hectares of farming land in the vicinity of Niamey, either in anticipation of the extension of the urban agglomeration or for the purpose of large-scale agriculture. However in the past decade two important reforms – politico-administrative decentralisation and the liberalisation of the (urban) land market – have given a new impetus to land speculation on the urban fringe as it has opened up the possibility of carrying out zoning operations, previously the purview of the state, to municipal councils and private actors. New (and old) actors – such as private entrepreneurs, individual land speculators, municipalities, real estate developers, customary landowners and other brokers and intermediaries, as well as the public authorities – are thus competing over rural land that can be transformed into land plots that are put up for sale in the near or distant future. Despite often being located at a distance from the urban agglomeration and far away from existing infrastructure networks, like water and electricity, such land plots are sought after by aspiring homeowners and upward striving urban dwellers. A land plot represents a more secure future through becoming a homeowner and they are also a favoured means of investment that at the same time secures (and grows) savings as the value is likely to increase with urban expansion. Plots are thus likely to change hands several times before someone starts building a house, usually when the urban agglomeration has drawn closer. As the urban limit is pushed outwards, mainly by zoning operations, the built environment on the urban fringe of Niamey is increasingly dominated by residential neighborhoods. This development is not exclusive to Niamey. Mercer identifies the transformation of peri-urban and rural hinterlands into residential suburbs as “[O]ne of the most striking features of contemporary African urbanism” (Mercer 2018: 1). A similar observation is made by Mabin et al. in a review article on African suburbanism where they point to the growth of zones of middle- and upper-income residence on agricultural peripheries (Mabin et al. 2013). Studies of these developments have focused on the ways in which housebuilders in the suburbs are reshaping urban space and identities (Andreasen et al. 2017; Melly 2010; Mercer 2017, 2018; Page and Sunjo 2018). In this article, by placing the focus on the actual production of land plots and on the actors and processes involved in this kind of suburban expansion in Niamey, including the underlying institutional and policy mechanisms, we seek to shed light on the political economy of urban sprawl (Bertrand 2019) in a context of decentralisation. In doing this we build on the work of other authors who have analysed the political, economic and social stakes of decentralised land management in West Africa (Bertrand 2006; Hagberg and Körling 2016; Hilgers 2008).

We start by outlining the historical role of zoning in urban development in Niger, as this is necessary for understanding not only the rapid expansion of the urban agglomeration today, but also the political and economic stakes of urban land development for residential use. Next, we move to the municipal level and discuss the centrality of land in municipalities in and around Niamey focusing on competition over land and controversies around zoning operations. Finally, we address the consequences of the rush for land in villages on the urban fringe, focusing especially on how local actors have responded to the liberalisation of urban land production and pointing to the emergence of locally based mid-level land developers.

The article is based on fieldwork carried out in one arrondissement in Niamey and one rural municipality in the vicinity of Niamey. The fieldwork was carried out in different
periods between 2006 and 2013 and consisted of interviews with peri-urban residents, municipal councillors, traditional chiefs, property developers, Ministry officials and local state agents as well as observations in municipal offices, at meetings of the municipal council and at community meetings.¹

A History of Zoning and Urban Development

In Niger as in other West African countries, zoning has since the colonial period been one of the central mechanisms of state control over land and over urban expansion and development (Bertrand 2004; Hagberg and Körling 2016; Hilgers 2008; Njoh 2006). In a Nigerien context zoning can best be defined as the process through which the ‘raw material of rural land’ is transformed into ‘urban land’, resulting in the creation of land plots for housing, industry, commerce and public facilities (Belko Maiga 1985: 61). The first zoning operations in Niger were planned and carried out by the colonial administration, the land tenure law of 1959 declaring that land in urban areas should be progressively zoned. During the colonial period zoning regulations imposed racial spatial segregation such as the separation of ‘native’ and ‘European’ districts where the latter were privileged in terms of the use of space, their location and the provision of infrastructure (Njoh 2006: 548). Njoh argues that in the post-independence period this segregation has morphed into a socio-economic segregation which privileges well serviced elite residential areas that are also considered to be the model for urban development (Njoh 2006: 554). Moreover, in the literature on Niamey, many authors point to the absence of a coherent and holistic strategy of urban planning in the face of rapid population growth and spatial expansion (Gilliard 2005; Seybou 1995). Instead, zoning operations have remained the main form of urban planning and investment which has led to a one sided and expansive urban development that has favoured the class of urban dwellers who can afford to buy a land plot leaving the poor to find refuge in informal settlements (Motcho & Adamou 2014). The imposition of urban norms and a particular urban aesthetics through building codes regulating the types of material that can be used for construction as well as the privileging of a particular spatial layout also has the potential to further exacerbate urban inequalities. At the same time, zoning operations in many cases do not conform to the state’s own norms and regulations. For instance, many publicly zoned neighbourhoods lack even the minimum of infrastructure and servicing such as access roads, a drainage system and water and electricity networks, the provision of which is stipulated in urban planning regulations. Nonetheless, zoning has remained ‘the dominant instrument for controlling land use’ and the most important tool in urban planning and management (Njoh 2006: 549). Through determining the spatial layout and use of new urban spaces, including the imposition of building codes and regulations, it has remained a central mechanism of state control. Moreover, zoning also changes the status of land bringing it into the fold of state controlled ‘modern’ land management leading to the gradual disappearance of customary land tenure (Motcho 2010: 25). Less obviously land is also through this process transformed into an important economic and political resource

¹ Körling carried out fieldwork in Saga and Municipality 4 in the framework of the project Spheres of Opposition? Democratic Culture and Local Development in West African Municipalities headed by Sten Hagberg and funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Moussa Ibrahima carried out fieldwork in Liboré in the framework of the African, Power and Politics program funded by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
for state authorities and for local and national political elites (Bertrand 2006). Firstly, as pointed out by Njoh, in bringing land under state control zoning provides state authorities with a means of turning land into revenue through the sale of land plots, and through the imposition of the payment of different fees and taxes with the formalisation of land transactions (Njoh 2006: 554). Similarly, Giraut has argued that the land question in Niger has for a long time been dominated by a race to carry out zoning operations, driven by the need for authorities to raise resources for the daily running of their services, while neglecting to invest in the required infrastructure such as roads, water and electricity networks, sanitation etc., leading him to refer to such zoning operations as ‘subsistence’ or ‘pay the bills’ zoning operations (‘lotissements alimentaires’) (Giraut 1999: 22). Secondly, at the same time as the monetisation of land has supported the daily function of the state administration, it has also served to strengthen political alliances and networks through the distribution of land plots. For instance, Belko-Maiga points out that the colonial administration distributed land to local notables and partners, and the first national political parties (Sawaba and RDA/PPA) subdivided and sold land to their political clientele (Belko Maïga 1985: 200). In the post-independence period, the sale of much sought after (publicly produced) land plots has continued to be surrounded by opacity and clientelism. Thirdly, zoning operations have continuously been used by public authorities to prevent social unrest. This last point is illustrated in operations like the 2002 ‘land plots in exchange for salaries’ (‘parcelles contre arriérés de salaires’) campaign. During the campaign 13,500 land plots were distributed to civil servants in Niamey in order to cancel out 11 months’ worth of salary arrears accrued during the 1990s (Motcho and Adamou 2010: 213). Critics of this operation note that it led to the unplanned proliferation of non-serviced neighbourhoods and further fuelled land speculation as recipients in need of cash sold the land plots which they had been awarded (Motcho and Adamou 2010; Issaka 2013). Civil servants in other parts of Niger, including the military, have also benefited from similar operations.

Zoning and Municipal Politics Niamey

The gradual movement towards liberalisation and decentralisation in the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s loosened up the state monopoly on the production of urban land plots. A new urban policy was introduced in 1997 following an overview of the existing laws and regulations many of which dated back to the colonial period. The law clarified the definition of zoning as well as the procedures to be followed. In doing this it also opened up for the possibility of private zoning. A lotisseur was defined as a landowner, or any other public or private juridical person or body (e.g. a professional developer, landowner, municipality etc.) who had the necessary land title to carry out a zoning operation on the land in question.2 Although the new law was passed in 1997 it was not until 2008, with the implementation of a new policy on urbanism and land management, that private zoning

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2 All zoning projects should follow the same procedure consisting of the putting together and submission of a dossier (including for instance a proof of the appropriate land titles, a topographic plan, a plan for the provision of water and electricity, the division of plots, and a map showing the location of the area etc.) to the appropriate local and national authorities. All new zoning projects have to be approved at both municipal and national levels (e.g. by the Ministry of Urbanism) and the zoning projects have to conform to the urban ‘master plan’ or land use plan in place in the locality in question. Significantly the lotisseur or developer is also responsible for development of the site (including a road network, water, electricity, public lighting etc.)
took off. By this time the nationwide decentralisation reform had also been implemented following the first the local elections that were held in 2004. As part of the move to bring decisions regarding town and country planning closer to the people whom it would concern the most the prerogative to carry out zoning operations was transferred to the municipality. The encouragement of zoning by private developers, in effect liberalising the sector, had in its turn been justified by the high demand for urban land plots and by the hope that private zoning would contribute to promote processes of formal urbanisation through the production of registered land plots serviced by road, water and electricity networks. In the new context of decentralisation, private zoning operations were also meant to improve the revenues of municipalities.

In Niamey, decentralisation meant that power was transferred from the Urban Community of Niamey (CUN) to five independent and autonomous municipalities (each headed by an elected municipal council). In this new configuration the CUN was supposed to play a coordinating role in the management of the capital. However, right from the start the transfer of power from the CUN to the municipalities was filled with tension and conflicts over access to resources, decision making, and public authority in the daily governance of the city. Not surprisingly land management and zoning was at the heart of these conflicts. The CUN had previously overseen zoning operations however the decentralisation reform transferred land management, including the prerogative to carry out zoning operations, to the newly created municipalities. Despite this, the CUN maintained that in order to ensure a harmonious development of the city, the government through a radio message had ordered the municipalities in Niamey not to initiate any zoning operations. The CUN claimed that this was decided out of concern with the potential ‘abusive use’ of zoning operations. There was thus a conflict between the decentralised management structure put into place in the capital according to which, as expressed by an official at the town hall, the municipalities and not the CUN should control their territory, and the de facto interdiction of municipalities to carry out zoning operations. As time passed tensions increased especially as the new municipalities created with few resources were struggling to raise revenues limiting their scope of action and possibilities of investing. For cash strapped municipalities zoning promised to at least solve some of their financial problems. Municipality 4 where Körling did fieldwork found itself in the middle of the tug of war with the CUN over zoning operations. The municipality, situated in the eastern part of Niamey, encompassed mainly peri-urban neighbourhoods and five villages. The mayor was quick to point out that the municipality had the most farming and village land available for zoning operations. For the mayor the possibility of short circuiting the CUN and carrying out their own zoning operations quickly became a central concern. The mayor and other municipal councillors talked about this period as a war with the CUN that they also accused of withholding state subventions. In 2007/8 the municipality decided to ignore the warnings of the CUN and started to plan a public zoning project on land situated on the north-eastern outskirts of the capital. The municipality managed to push through their zoning project and other projects

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4 Communauté Urbaine de Niamey
followed. According to the head of land affairs, a total of 4 zoning operations – counting a total of 4421 plots – had been produced during the mandate of the first municipal council. During the same period, they had also authorised more than 20 private zoning operations. In Niamey as a whole, this period saw a rapid increase of both public and private zoning operations. Meyer cites an anonymous report that suggested that the rhythm of zoning operations had increased from two per year between 2000 and 2005 to 40 per year after 2006 (Meyer 2018: 214).

However, the decentralisation reform in the capital would prove to be short lived. In 2011, following a period of military transition after the coup d'état on 18 February 2010 the administration of the capital (alongside that of Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua), was reorganised with the motivation that it would make urban management more effective. The five municipalities were transformed into arrondissements placed under the authority of the City of Niamey (the former CUN). The arrondissements would still be headed by an elected council however many of the powers that had previously been delegated to the municipalities were now returned to the City of Niamey. The arrondissements were supposed to play a consultative role to the City of Niamey for instance by submitting suggestions for investments. This meant that (the former) municipalities in Niamey lost all control over land management with the exception of the registration of customary land deeds. The land question, no doubt, played an important role in the decision to recentralise the management of the capital. The municipalities in Niamey were taxed as incompetent and accused of having carried out an excessive number of uncoordinated zoning operations (Meyer 2018: 199). While in the middle of the effervescence of land transactions in 2008 the land affairs office in Municipality 4 bustled with activities and was full of stacks of folders, in 2012 the same office was conspicuously quiet and the desk of the chief land affairs officer was empty as almost everything had been moved to the central town hall. This contrast reflects the alternation between effervescence and paralysis in the rhythm of municipal life that Bertrand describes in the case of Bamako where the state shifted between a permissive and repressive attitude in terms of the freedom given to municipalities to handle land questions (Bertrand 2006: 189).

Private Zoning Operators and Local Political Dynamics on the Urban Periphery

In the rest of this article, we will explore the impact of the opening up of land management on social and political dynamics in Saga and Liboré, two localities situated on the urban periphery of Niamey that found themselves at the heart of the competition for land. Saga, a former village located five kilometers from the center of Niamey, is the chef lieu of the canton of Saga. With the expansion of the city Saga has become completely integrated into the urban agglomeration. The area encompassed by the canton of Saga houses Niamey’s industrial zone and the international airport, and farmland has gradually been transformed into residential plots, the new neighbourhoods welcoming a diverse urban population. Saga is administratively part of Arrondissement 4 (former Municipality 4). The second field site

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5 Cantons, headed by canton chiefs, were created during the colonial period for administrative purposes. In creating cantons, the colonial power sought to use the authority and legitimacy of the pre-colonial chieftaincy, but the extent to which the canton mirrored local pre-colonial political structures and divisions varied greatly (Olivier de Sardan 1999: 141). The system of cantons and canton chiefs were maintained after independence and formed the basis for the territorial divisions made in preparation for the decentralisation reform.
Liboré is also a canton. In fact, the two cantons are contiguous to one another. Following the decentralisation reform in 2004 Liboré became a rural municipality that regroups 17 villages. In the run up to the decentralisation reform during discussions about administrative and territorial divisions Liboré was suggested as the sixth municipality in Niamey which would have formed a zone of extension for the urban agglomeration (Motcho 2004: 120) however local actors had opted out fearing that the inclusion into the Urban Community of Niamey would mean that the independence promised by decentralisation would be circumscribed. Yet given its proximity to Niamey the urban agglomeration has spilled over into Liboré with the emergence of densely inhabited peri-urban neighborhoods and the implantation of infrastructure such as the customs bureau and the fuel storage facilities of SONIDEP (Société Nigérienne des Produits Pétroliers) along the national highway. Other parts of the municipality situated at a greater distance from the urban agglomeration have remained mainly rural in character. Agriculture, including the cultivation of rice in the hydro-agricultural scheme which they share with Saga, livestock keeping, and fishing are still important economic activities. However, land speculation in an around Niamey has led to a rapid alienation of farming land the full consequences of which are yet to be seen.

In the following sections we will focus on how local actors in Saga and Liboré have responded to decentralisation and to the liberalisation of urban land production. The emergence of large-scale property developers and zoning operators like rich businessmen and traders has been documented in previous studies in Niamey (Issaka 2013, Meyer 2018) and in neighbouring Bamako (Bertrand 2019). However, as we will show in the following portraits of three kinds of emerging private zoning entrepreneurs, private zoning operators are a diverse group including many mid-level actors driven by different motivations who manage to pool political and economic resources to be able to develop land.

The Traditional Chief

In 2008, Körling was doing fieldwork in Saga. Interested in the history of urban expansion and its effects on village land she was talking to a village chief about the question of expropriation in the case of public zoning operations. Since 1995, customary landowners receive 25% in compensation for land used for zoning or other forms of public utility. Prior to that they had received a derisory amount and at times nothing – like the one symbolic franc offered in exchange for land by the colonial administration – for land expropriated by the state. Public zoning operations have remained a point of contention as compensation has many times proven to be unreliable. The chief underlined that sometimes the compensation is withheld for long periods and he claimed that the authorities tended to give customary landowners the least attractive land plots far away from the main access roads or on uneven terrain. For many customary landowners parcelling out and selling land on the parallel land market independent of the public authorities was a way of protecting their land from the claims of the state and from urban encroachment. Subsequently, in the shadow of the state monopoly on urban land management, the allocation or sale of land by customary landowners from peri-urban villages has been an important dynamic in the growth of the city ever since the start of formal zoning operations during the colonial period in the 1950s (Belko Maiga 1985). Importantly, the parceling out of land by customary land owners has

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6 The parastatal Nigerian petroleum products company.
made it possible for urban residents with limited economic resources to become homeowners as land plots sold by customary land owners are cheaper and more easily accessible than plots sold by the state/municipality or by private property developers (Körling 2013, 2020). In Niamey chiefs and customary landowners have thus played a similar role in the ‘opening up’ of urban borders as described by De Boeck (2020) in Kinshasa. However, authorities consider this practice of parcelling out and selling land as ‘illegal’ as it does not follow urban land regulations and complicates the planning of the city. The neighbourhoods that emerge from such ‘informal’ zoning operations thus find themselves in a legal limbo (Körling 2020).

During their conversation the chief pulled out a map of a subdivision and explained that he had recently submitted a private zoning project to the municipality and was now waiting for the decision of the urban commission at the Ministry. He had been alerted to the possibility of initiating a private zoning operation by a relative who used to work at the municipality and who according the chief “knows all of the circuits”. The land in question was situated in the vicinity of one of the few villages that had yet to be reached by the urban agglomeration and that was also coveted by the municipality. The zoning project would transform 12 hectares of farming land into 199 land plots (each measuring between 300 and 500 square meters). To put together the application for the zoning operation the chief had paid for the services of an expert at the Ministry who also assisted the municipality in preparing zoning operations. In order to get the application (including the cadastral plan) ready to be submitted to the municipality he had paid the ‘consultant’ 1,000,000 FCFA (1,524 euros). The chief pointed out that it had been a long and costly processes, that also included the informal distribution of land plots to officials, but that he had been helped by his numerous ‘relations’ at the municipality and the Ministry of Urbanism.

Private zoning offered an opportunity to professionalise, formalise and rescale the practice of parcelling out land. Although private zoning provided a new means of ensuring control of inherited land - in the face of growing pressure for zoning from the municipality and from external private entrepreneurs, the quite onerous procedures for carrying out zoning operations posed a hinder for most customary landowners who did not have the necessary resources and connections. It was thus no coincidence that one of the first local private zoning operators came from the traditional chieftaincy. Given that land prior to being zoned was regulated by customary land tenure, the chiefs held an advantageous position in this new configuration. Rural land tenure laws in Niger give the traditional chieftaincy a central role in attesting customary landownership and granting private property rights. Although the Code rural – an extensive land tenure reform drawn up in the late 1980s and adopted in 1993 – sought to modernise and democratise rural land management through the creation of land commissions - the fact that the granting of property rights was made with reference to customary rights and to ‘collective memory’, meant that an important role was given to the traditional chieftaincy – the canton chief – as the central authority (Lund & Hesseling 1999: 136). In sum, the case of the village chief illustrates the privileged position of the chieftaincy with the opening-up for new economic opportunities through large scale land development and land plot production.

The Politician-Entrepreneur

In Liboré private zoning operations and the rapid alienation of farming land became a central question in the municipality. Land transactions were a source of revenue for the municipality.
For instance, in 2010 the municipality gained around 15,000,000 FCFA from the signing of 600 land transfer deeds (at 25,000 CFA a piece). However, the rapid transformation of land would prove difficult to control. The proliferation of privately initiated zoning operations meant that competition over land was fierce sometimes blocking the municipality’s own zoning projects. At a meeting (of the municipal council that Ibrahima observed in 2011 land was a central topic of discussion. Participants raised concern about what they considered to be an excessive alienation of agricultural land in what was still a predominantly rural municipality which was compounded by the fact that most private zoning operations had been carried out without the necessary infrastructure networks and investments. Moreover, many private zoning operations were surrounded by conflicts and opacity. Land disputes both within the municipality and with neighbouring municipalities had increased and few zoning operations had followed the required administrative procedures many lacking the necessary authorizations from the Ministry. During the meeting the canton chief expressed his concern over the rapid alienation of land and the increase in land disputes (and warned about the consequences of irregular private zoning operations “All I know is that what we are doing now will catch up with us either sooner or later.” However, in the end no actions were taken to limit or improve the control of the local authorisation of private zoning operations. In fact, some of the municipal councillors had themselves become private zoning operators or property developers and deftly manoeuvred in the debate. One municipal councillor exclaiming “…we are ourselves developers. Even if we stop, other people will continue.”

The trajectory of the municipal councillor Zakou illustrates the emergence of these politician-entrepreneurs who had managed to take advantage of the decentralisation and the liberalisation of the land market. Zakou who was in his fifties had worked as a tax collector in one of the central markets in Niamey. He entered the municipal council the first mandate following the implementation of the decentralization reform in 2004 when he was elected as a municipal councillor in Liboré through the IBL (Mouvement des indépendants bâtisseurs de Liboré) (‘the movement of the independent builders of Liboré’), a local independent party that controlled the municipality during the first municipal mandate. Zakou had used his position on the municipal council to build up a business through the acquisition of public contracts, at first for the delivery of stationary and other similar products to the municipal office and later for larger contracts including the construction of classrooms, the delivery of desks and chairs, and even the construction of the municipal office. In 2007-8 when private zoning started to take off he decided to launch himself into the property development business, setting himself up as an estate agent in the same 30 square meter office as his building company. His first foray into the property market was carried out in collaboration with other ‘mid-level’ land buyers and customary landowners who together owned six farming (millet) fields that made up 22 hectares of land situated in a prime location close to the national highway. Through the zoning operation the fields were divided up into 454 land plots. Having already managed to start a successful business with the help of his political position private zoning represented an opportunity for the expansion of his entrepreneurial activities building on already established networks. Thanks to his position as municipal councillor Zakou was well placed to procure the necessary papers and signatures and managed to draw on his position to transform political capital into economic capital.

In Liboré, the participation of municipal councillors like Zakou in private zoning operations put them in conflict with the interests of the municipality as public and private
interests collided. At the same time as municipal councillors were supposed to regulate land development and zoning in the municipality, they were in their role as land speculators, entrepreneurs and developers central actors in fuelling land transformations illustrating the imbrication of politics and land speculation.

**Village youth**

The emergence of a land market also opened up economic opportunities for new categories of actors including youth who became intermediaries, resellers and even private zoning entrepreneurs. This was particularly evident in Liboré where the creation of the municipality had set off an increasing return of the quite sizeable diaspora enticed by the opportunities of investment proffered by decentralization. The land market offered a rare investment opportunity in a context marked by a dearth of economic opportunities and a difficulty of finding employment and of raising capital even for small scale business ventures. As natives of Liboré they had access to farming land through negotiations with their extended family allowing them to get started in the land development business without a lot of economic capital. Furthermore, thanks to their formal education they were able to navigate the administrative and technical procedures. The emergence of youth as new private zoning operators is exemplified in the case of Souleyman (with a degree in banking) and Seydou (a returning migrant).

Momouni who was in his forties had studied banking in Cameroon. On his return to Niger he had gotten an internship at a bank in Niger. This was also when he had entered the ‘real-estate business’. To do this he had created a company that specialized in private zoning with some friends of his who contributed with economic capital, their knowledge of the administration and land. Souleyman underlined that in order to succeed as a private zoning operator you needed to be generous (altruistic) to collaborators including associated customary landowners and municipal agents, be willing to take risks and anticipate the actions of the municipality and the state. Seydou another emerging private zoning operator was also in his forties and had lived in the UK. He interspersed his speech with English expressions such as ‘I mean’ and drove a car with the steering wheel on the left-hand side that he had brought with him from the UK. On a visit back home Seydou had realised that the value of land was increasing rapidly. He had launched himself in private zoning by using land that belonged to his extended family. The family had entrusted him with the task of getting all the necessary papers together, including the proof of customary ownership, and had given him the mandate to carry out the zoning operation. This first zoning operation proved successful and Seydou decided to continue in the business of private zoning by buying farming land and cooperating with other midlevel land speculators, including customary landowners and resellers. He eventually succeeded in expanding his operations to neighbouring municipalities in the same Department (Kollo) and beyond (for instance in Dosso) and created his own successful real estate business. For Seydou private zoning provided an opportunity to return home by building up a profitable business. When talking about the start of his business Seydou used the Zarma proverb ‘one should start training to become a butcher using one’s father’s cow’. In using this proverb Seydou underlined that in starting a new activity it was best to use one’s own resources to avoid being indebted to someone in case the new venture would fail. Whereas Seydou launched into a career as property developers other one-time zoning operators used the profits to buy cars or to open
a new business. These young entrepreneurs from the urban periphery could build on family relations and other connections in negotiating access to farming land which quickly had become a prime commodity.

In becoming private zoning operators, the village chief, Zakou, Seydou and Souleyman all managed to take advantage of decentralisation and the liberalisation of the urban land sector. However, the quite onerous procedures for carrying out zoning operations posed a hinder for many customary landowners who did not have the necessary economic resources and connections in the administration. As pointed out by Neimark et al. the possibility for customary landowners in peri-urban areas to participate in the formalisation of land and to benefit from the transformation of farming land into housing plots is dependent on their access to knowledge of administrative procedures, economic resources and political power (Neimark et al. 2018). The portraits of the three types of locally based mid-level zoning operators is thus also revelatory of the stratification of opportunities to capitalise on liberalisation of the urban land market.

Conclusion

The future of cities in Africa is in large part determined by what happens on the urban fringe, as peri-urban spaces are “one of the fastest growing geographical locations in the global south” (Neimark et al. 2018: 320). In Niamey formal urban expansion into peri-urban areas has in the past and today been driven by zoning operations through which rural agricultural land has been transformed into urban land plots. Hence, in order to understand urban expansion in Niamey it is necessary to understand the history. Zoning has since the colonial period been a central mechanism for the control of urban space and the imposition of a set of urban norms that through the creation of residential neighbourhoods mainly cater to the middle and upper class. The problems and contradictions in this form of urban development has been exacerbated by the political and economic stakes of zoning operations which has led to an excessive creation of land plots to finance the operations of central and regional authorities and satisfy a political clientele. Political decentralisation and liberalisation while opening up urban land management that was previously firmly in the hands of the state to municipal councillors and other non-state actors has done little to remediate this situation. Although it does mark a shift in the exercise of public authority over urban development and expansion there are also many continuities. As we have seen, land (through zoning operations) has continuously played an important role as a political and economic resource, first for the state and regional authorities and then for the newly created municipalities, and finally for the diversity of actors who have capitalized on the liberalization of land management. Although the multiplication of zoning operations has facilitated access to urban land - for those who can afford it – it will do little to attenuate the housing crisis (Issaka 2013: 2). Instead, it could be argued that it has heightened the importance of peri-urban land as source of economic and political capital leading to a competition over farming land that has fuelled urban expansion and that has had important consequences for the reconfiguration of local political arenas. While inadvertently strengthening old power holders like the traditional chieftaincy, the urban land reforms also created opportunities for new groups to emerge as in the case of the young zoning operators. Municipal councillors, in particular in Liboré, also emerged as key players, their private projects putting them in direct conflict with municipal policies and ‘public interest’. While opening up new opportunities
for customary land owners, whose room for action in the past in the face of urban expansion was limited to the informal parcelling out of land, as well as previously marginalised actors (like the young entrepreneurs in Liboré), to benefit from the formal transformation of farming land into urban land plots, the rapid proliferation of zoning operations has mainly served the elite at the local and national level through the imbrication of economic and political interests.

Finally, although municipalities in and around Niamey have been important actors as both zoning operators and as regulators of private zoning operations, they seem to be increasingly marginalised in the face of a poorly controlled liberalisation. As private zoning operations have become ubiquitous, large-scale private zoning entrepreneurs, usually well placed in the national political machinery as important financial backers to political parties, have taken the upper hand over public zoning actors (Issaka 2013; Meyer 2018). A similar development has been observed by Bertrand in the case of Bamako where “individuals or private companies beat the public authorities at their own game of housing development” (Bertrand 2019: 278). In Niger, as both public and private zoning operations in urban agglomerations around the country multiplied zoning quickly became a topic of debate at local and national levels, often in association with scandals of corruption or mismanagement. At one point in 2010, during the military transition, all zoning operations were suspended. A suspension that was justified by the excessive number of public and private zoning operations on the peripheries of urban centres that did not respond to a real need for urban land. However, the suspension was soon lifted. Since then the need for a more effective regulation of zoning operations has frequently been discussed. Finally, in 2018 the Minister of Urbanism announced that private zoning operations would be prohibited and that only the Ministry and the municipalities would be able to initiate zoning operations. It remains to be seen how effective this decision will be as the future of the urban periphery hangs in the balance.

References


Diaspora-Driven Development and Dispute: Home-Area Associations and Municipal Politics in Mali

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ABSTRACT This article is about a rural municipality where the diaspora is supporting local development, while simultaneously fueling dispute. The Kiban municipality of Mali is dominated by Soninkés with a long history of migration and trade. Despite the presence of Bambara and Fulbe in villages, Soninkés are in the majority in Kiban, making municipal politics and local development is basically “a Soninké affair”. The Kibanais diaspora are engaged in trade in the Malian capital Bamako, as well as, in countries like Angola, Congo Brazzaville, China, France, Belgium and the USA. We elaborate on how two home-area associations in Kiban. First, the home-area association Soumpon was founded in Bamako in the 1940s to invest and support people in Kiban. Second, the home-area association Soninkara was founded in 2000 after a conflict between Soumpoun and the then mayor; the latter considered that the diaspora should support “the municipality”, whereas Soumpoun wanted to support “the population”. Since then, these associations have been competing in municipal politics in Kiban. This article shows that while diasporas are certainly drivers of development, they are also drivers of dispute.

Keywords: diaspora, development, decentralisation, ethnicity, Soninké

Introduction
This article primarily revolves around a rural municipality in Mali and how the decision-making and the daily running of the municipal council are influenced by people living in the diaspora.1 It is a study of municipal politics in a small rural town off the main road that is integrated to global migration and trade by means of a particularly active diaspora and their local involvement at home. The diaspora populations – and ‘their’ associations – are indeed supporting local development and social change, and in times of crisis they play a critical role to improve the socio-economic living conditions of the residents. Yet they are simultaneously fueling conflict and dispute by playing the role of initiated outsiders and critical friends. They are involved in municipal politics in various ways. The article revolves around the ambiguous role of people in the diaspora being both drivers of development and dispute.

1 This article is the outcome of our joint scholarship on municipal politics in Mali, particularly in Kiban and Kalaban-Coro. First and foremost, we would like to thank Moustapha Diakité, the mayor of Kiban, for his willingness to share strategies and practices in electoral politics with us. Earlier versions were presented at Nordic Africa Days, Uppsala, in September 2014, at Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, in October 2014, and at African Studies Association, Washington, in November 2016. We are grateful for insightful comments and critical remarks made by several colleagues, particularly Maria Grosz-Ngaté and Rosa de Jorio, as well as two anonymous reviewers of kritisk etnografi.

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Our ethnographic account is about the municipality of Kiban. It is part of the Banamba cercle – the Malian administrative unit above the municipality (la commune) – dominated by Soninkés, an ethnic group with a long history of migration and trade (Manchuelle 2004). Even though Bambara farmers and Fulbe agro-pastoralists also reside in villages of the municipality, Soninkés are in majority in the town of Kiban. Governing the municipality of Kiban is indeed monopolised by Soninké residents as few non-Soninkés are on the municipal council. Hence, municipal politics and local development are basically “a Soninké affair”.

Many Soninkés originating from Kiban are engaged in trade in the capital Bamako, as well as in all other regions of Mali. Some have also established themselves in countries like Angola, Congo Brazzaville, China, France, Belgium and the USA. The Soninké diaspora are well-known for being involved in business, mostly as talented big businessmen (Grégoire and Labazée 1993; Mbodj-Pouye and Le Courant 2017). The Soninkés are also well-known to preserve a strong bond back home as each family has members who continuously reside in Kiban. In general, the Soninké diaspora of Kiban are well-organised and maintain strong links with people in the hometown.

In the article, we describe how two home-area associations in Kiban are vehicles of development and dispute. First, the home-area association Soumpou was founded in Bamako in the 1940s to invest in infrastructure and to support people in Kiban. Second, the home-area association Soninkara was founded in 2000 after a conflict between Soumpoun and the then mayor; the latter expected that the diaspora should support “the municipality”, whereas Soumpoun wanted to support “the population” of Kiban town. Since then, these two associations, both of which are led from Bamako albeit with local representatives in Kiban, have been competing, especially with respect to municipal politics. In other words, while the diaspora is certainly a driver of development, it is simultaneously a driver of dispute as well.

Two conceptual clarifications need to be made right from the outset. First, while the Soninkés are generally known to be traders and pious Muslims with a long history of migration, we do not wish to essentialise any Soninké identity. We focus on the Kiban municipality in order to explore how Soninké actors act and interact locally, nationally and internationally. Residents in Kiban are dependent on the connections with Kibanais in Bamako and abroad, but not all of them are individually supported by family-members outside of Kiban. Although many men are traders with rudimentary schooling in Qu’ranic schools or Medersas, there are also some civil servants and other people with a university degree originating from Kiban. In other words, not all Soninké men travel across the world and not all of them are wealthy traders. Second, a conceptual clarification is needed with respect to the Kibanais diaspora. On a general level, we find that the concept of diaspora applies quite well to the Soninkés of Kiban as a people scattered around the world with a strong sense of home/homeland and of ethnic/religious belonging (Cohen 2008). Yet to complicate matters a bit in the case of Kiban people do not use the concept of diaspora, but rather talk about ressortissants, that is, sons and daughters of Kiban who live outside of the town, but who continue to define Kiban as their home-area. The French term ressortissants implies urbanity and community bonds. But for people with whom we are working, no clear distinction is made between Kibanais living in Bamako, and those living abroad – they are all ressortissants. In this article, our use of the concept of diaspora is inspired by the fuzzy distinction between different Kibanais residing outside of Kiban, because for people living in
the municipality it makes little sense to distinguish between these different Kibanais. We use the term ‘Kibanais diaspora’ and ‘diaspora’ loosely to indicate those originating from Kiban, maintaining a sense of home and belonging to the town.

We have structured the article as follows. First, we describe the last 20 years of decentralisation policies in Mali to highlight the conditions under which mayors and councilors seek to run the municipal council. Second, we introduce the municipality of Kiban with particular emphasis on the role of the diaspora. Third, we provide an ethnographic account of the two associations – Soumpoun and Soninkara – and describe how they have come to co-exist in Kiban and Bamako. Fourth, we discuss the articulation between party politics and associational life in Kiban to demonstrate the ambiguousness of the Kibanais diaspora as a driver of development and dispute. In conclusion, we argue that the case of Kiban municipality indicates the importance of not confining local politics solely to the municipality but instead integrate national and international networks – here illustrated by the home-area associations – in the analysis of municipal politics and local development.

Democratic Decentralisation and Local Development

In the wake of democratisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, African governments and international agencies manifested a renewed interest in decentralisation. Decentralisation would be a means to alter the over-centralisation of political decisions at the top of the state, and transfer power from the centralised State to local institutions and structures (Hagberg 2010). Decentralisation was referred to as ‘democratic decentralisation’ (Crook and Manor 1998) in contrast to previous authoritarian regimes’ attempts, including the decentralisation within the one-party state (Deridder 2019). Despite the vast literature on decentralisation policies and their political and economic implications (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Crook and Manor 1998; Hagberg 2010; Hagberg et al. 2019; Fay et al. 2006; Kassibo 1997; Laurent et al. 2004; Mback 2003; Sawadogo 2001; Seely 2001), detailed ethnographic studies of party politics and local development in West African municipalities are still needed. Empirically, decentralisation is best understood as a series of political, economic and cultural practices currently at work in local arenas and centered around the municipality and its council (Hagberg 2010). Hence, in villages and neighbourhoods the municipal council represents a new institution to which citizens must relate; for local political actors it represents access to power, development initiatives, and institutional mediation.

The research that we have been undertaking in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger seeks to study decentralisation practices by means of an ethnographically grounded analysis of how political parties reach out and are represented – and by whom – in municipalities (Hagberg et al. 2019). While democracy does represent a breach with authoritarian regimes, an ethnographic analysis lays equal emphasis on political continuities and political ruptures.

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2 Within the framework of this research programme funded by the Swedish Research Council (VR)/the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in selected municipalities in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The specific fieldwork carried out in Kiban and on Kibanais in Bamako, Mali, has been conducted by the authors since 2008. Other team-members who have occasionally participated in the fieldwork in Kiban include Yaouga Félix Koné, Gabriella Körling, N’gna Traoré, Karin Elving, and Bassidy Dembélé. Due to the security situation in Mali, we have also been obliged to change research strategy (Hagberg and Körling 2014; Hagberg et al. 2017).
The traditional chief may well still be very influential in the municipal council, and the former revolutionary leader may have turned into a democratic one. In other words, while working with formal democratic processes, one also focuses on other forms of power and political influence.

In Mali, decentralisation was a key policy for President Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2002) who came to power in the multiparty elections following the overthrow of President General Moussa Traoré (1968-1991) and the political transition led by General Amadou Toumani Touré (1991-1992). For President Konaré decentralisation was politically motivated by an urge to deal with “the Tuareg question” (Seely 1999). In the 1990s, democratisation in Mali became a prime example of a successful transition on the African continent, and decentralisation was in turn one of the building blocks of Malian democracy (Kassibo 1997; Fay et al. 2006; see also Hagberg 2010). A very interesting process of grounding local democracy in popular notions and concepts was initiated where decentralisation was described as “power returns home” (mama ka segi so, in Bambara). The very territorialisation of Malian municipalities meant that many micro-communes were established (Kassibo 1997; Koné 1997b; see also Hagberg 2010). Such municipalities were born more out of political attempts to get a municipality than of economic viability of the administrative unit.

The first municipal elections were held in 1999, followed by elections in 2004 and in 2009. Due to the political crisis in Mali resulting from the coup d’état in March 2012, the ethno-nationalist Tuareg uprising, and the subsequent Islamist takeover of the North (Hagberg and Körling 2012), the next municipal elections were postponed and took place on 20 November 2016.

Since the early 2000s, Malian municipalities have acquired three specific competences from the central State in terms of public services. They are in charge of primary and secondary education, of health and social services, and of rural water provision. Many civil servants like teachers and nurses are employed by the State but the daily running of the services is the responsibility of the municipality. In practice, however, municipalities do not have enough funding, including tax revenue, to run these services smoothly, and development projects, NGOs, home-area associations and well-placed individuals from the municipality living elsewhere are investing in these public services.

Decentralisation in Mali has led to widespread scholarly debate and many interesting studies have been published on various aspects (Kassibo 1997; Fay et al. 2006; Djiré and Dicko 2007; IIED and Uppsala University 2004). Many master and PhD theses have also been produced on Malian decentralisation (e.g. Deridder 2014, 2019; Hetland 2007; Koné 2017, Koné and Hagberg 2019; Traoré 2013, 2019). Thanks to these studies, we do know much better about the intricate workings of local politics in municipalities in Mali, even though specific ethnographic case-studies rather than comparative analysis, dominate. While there were lots of enthusiasm and energy, as well as funding available in the 1990s under Konaré’s presidency, the election of Amadou Toumani Touré (2002-2012) – at the time the hero of Malian transition 1991-1992 – slowed down the decentralisation process. It was no longer a central element in government policy. If one adds the fragile socio-political and security situation since 2012, it is safe to say that Malian municipalities ‘make do’.

3 The very dealing of the Tuareg rebellion in the North around 1990 had undermined Traoré’s regime, paralleling political developments that led to the coup d’état in March 2012 (Hagberg and Körling 2012; Lecoq et al. 2013; Konaté 2013; Brunet-Jailly et al. 2014).
rather than function well. In the following section, we will illustrate how decision-making and daily running may look like, by describing the rural municipality of Kiban.

The Municipality of Kiban

The town of Kiban is the centre of the municipality of Kiban in the Banamba cercle located some 165 km to the north-east of the capital Bamako. The municipality is composed of only six villages: Kiban; Dialakoro Bambara; Dialakoro Peuhl; Bako; Mpiabougou and Tiérola. According to the National Census of 2009, the population was 12,389 inhabitants (INSAT-RGPH 2009). Even though, for good reasons, no “ethnic census” is done in Mali, it is well-known that the majority population of Kiban municipality is of Soninké ethnicity (also labelled Sarakollé or Maraka). Other main ethnicities are Bambara and Fulbe.

As already stated in the introduction, the Soninkés are well-known migrants in the history of West Africa (Manchuelle 2004), and the Kibanais are no exception. One way in which they maintain the links back home is through polygyny. It is often the case when a Kibanais man resides abroad that he has one wife living with him in the new locality and another remaining in Kiban. The most common case for a man is to have one wife in Bamako and one in Kiban. In that way a successful Kibanais keeps a very close and tightly knit bond back home. The other side of the coin is nevertheless that many young wives stay alone in Kiban waiting, as it were, for their husbands to return to Kiban.

The Soninkés of Kiban are not just migrants going on adventure, but many are very successful traders and businessmen. There is a lot of money available and invested by Kibanais in Bamako, and in Kiban. Investments in mosques are perhaps the most prominent feature, as there are several big, impressive and beautiful mosques in town. Some Kibanais are extremely wealthy and successful. In January 2014, we were invited to a kind of “house-warming-party” in one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods of Bamako. The owner of the newly built house was a man from Kiban, who allegedly was the second biggest gold trader of Mali. His house was of a great luxury with a three-floor villa for each of his two wives, and a third three-floor house for his mother. Another part of the house hosted a mosque, and there were big living rooms and film-rooms etc. The house-owner is the nephew of one of our key informants. As a maternal uncle of such a wealthy man, our key informant depends on the money provided by his nephew. At the same time, the maternal uncle takes care of the nephew’s deeds and investments in Kiban.

In the first municipal elections in 1999, three parties entered the municipal council in Kiban. The seats were occupied as follows: eight councilors represented the Parti pour l’Unité la Démocratie et le Progrès (PUDP), eight councilors represented the then ruling Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali/Parti Africain pour la Solidarité et la Justice (ADEMA/PASJ) and there was one independent candidate. The majority (9 against 8) that succeeded in getting the position as mayor was obtained by PUDP with support from the independent candidate. It is worth noting that the PUDP’s leader, Mamadou dit Maribatourou Diaby originated from Kiban, a fact that explains why this relatively small party at the national level had such a stronghold there. The mayor of Kiban 1999-2004 was Mandala Diaby.

4 In terms of beautiful mosques in the Banamba cercle the town of Touba seems to keep the record of big and expensive buildings. Islamic brotherhoods such as the Wahhabites (locally called Sunnamogow), the Tijjanya, and the Hamalists have built gigantic, impressive, clean and well-maintained mosques in the town of Touba, at the same time as roads and streets of the town are completely degraded and dirty.
In 2004 and following a law adopted by the National Assembly, the number of councilors in Kiban was reduced from 17 to 11. The reason was that Kiban was such a small municipality, and this meant increased competition as the council was shrinking. A few days prior to the municipal elections in 2004 some important political manoeuvres took place. The Kiban leadership of PUDP, including the mayor Mandala Diaby, changed political affiliation and joined the Parti pour la Renaissance Nationale (PARENA). This move was motivated by a rupture between the politicians of Kiban and the PUDP’s leader Maribatourou Diaby. It seems that the rupture was linked to the funding of the electoral campaign. More precisely, the politicians of Kiban claimed that Maribatourou Diaby would not have invested much in his home town to get votes. Instead, he would have spent his money in other localities. This was badly received in Kiban, saying that he had neglected his own peers. After this rupture, three party lists of candidates were presented to run for the elections. Yet two of the lists were invalidated by the Court of Banamba, allegedly due to the fact that these lists had former councilors who had left the council prior to the end of the previous mandate. According to the law, candidates who had been councilors and had left—popularly called démissionnaires—could not present themselves in the subsequent elections. This decision nevertheless meant that it was only one valid electoral list that remained in Kiban, that is, the list of PARENA. Hence, the PARENA became the only party in the municipal council 2004-2009. But despite these party political manoeuvres, it was the same mayor during these two mandates, namely Mandala Diaby. He was mayor of PUDP 1999-2004, and mayor of PARENA 2004-2009. In 2009, he lost power to Moustapha Diakité.

In the 2009 elections, the PARENA was the only party that entered the council, even though other parties and independent candidates competed too. Hence, between 2004 and 2016, there was only one party represented in the municipal council of Kiban. Out of eleven councilors 2009-2016, nine were Soninkés, one Fulbe (from the village of Dialakoro Peuhl) and one Bambara (from the village of Bako). The gender disparity was huge with only one woman councilor. The ethnic composition of the municipal council illustrates the statement that Kiban politics is a ‘Soninké affair’. And, yet, the two non-Soninkés councilors represented other important populations: first, the Bambara councilor represented the hosts as the area’s first-comers were the Bambara of the village of Bako; and second, the Fulbe councilor was mediating between the important Fulbe populations in the villages, and the Soninkés in the town of Kiban.

In the 2016 municipal elections, the PARENA won again and Moustapha Diakité remained the mayor of Kiban. This time, however, the number of councilors had once again increased to 17. The following parties entered the council: eleven councilors for PARENA, five for URD, and one for CNID. Interestingly, Diakité’s defeat in the 2013 legislative elections did not impact his political career as such (Koné 2017; Koné and Hagberg 2019).

Thus, the mayor of Kiban since 2009 is still Moustapha Diakité, a successful trader and businessman, who for long time has been financing investments in Kiban: public health,
Franco-Arabic schools (*medersas*) and mosques. Diakité was for longtime living in Angola doing business there and in the 1990s he was appointed honorary consul for Mali in Angola. But since 2002, he is back in Mali, and involved in politics. Diakité is simultaneously living in Bamako and Kiban – or perhaps better, he spends every weekend in Kiban while doing business in Bamako during the week.

In the remaining part of the article, we develop a specific case of municipal politics in Kiban, namely the ways in which the home-area – or diaspora – associations intervene in the town and in the daily running of the municipality.

**Home-Area Associations Soumpoun and Soninkara**

The first voluntary association of people from Kiban is Soumpoun. The association was formed in 1945 following an initiative of *Kibanais* living in Bamako, and one of the founders was named Amadou Diallo. The name Soumpoun, meaning 'children of the same mother' in Soninké language, came much later, because initially this was a home-area association of Kiban people in the capital, similar to what has been described elsewhere from that period (Meillassoux 1968; Little 1965). Soumpoun was established in many countries as people from Kiban travelled and settled across the world. But for some 50 years it remained an association without any formal legal State recognition. In fact, it was only in 1996 that Soumpoun became a formal registered voluntary association with a registration certificate (*récépissé*).  

"Previously, we did not need paper [to have an association], but things have changed. Today you may do nothing without the papers", the Secretary-General of Soumpoun Malé Diakité asserted. Today, Soumpoun has representatives in Paris, New York, Brazzaville, Luanda, as well as in cities of neighbouring countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. People living there maintain bonds back home through Soumpoun. They also raise funding for specific support to Kiban. Soumpoun is not just present in Bamako and abroad but has representatives in all regions of Mali.

The basic idea of Soumpoun has always been that the *Kibanais* diaspora send money to people in Bamako who buy rice, sugar, salt, oil etc. there and then send the foodstuff and other basic necessities to Kiban. The association then stocks the products in a store at the marketplace in Kiban. The products are to be sold locally. In that way, Soumpoun is making money, helping members to make ends meet and also diminish the vulnerability of fluctuating prices. Soumpoun is founded on the principle of *Kibanais* diaspora supporting their relatives back home. And the support has been substantial. For instance, as early as the late 1950s, Kiban had several telephone lines belonging to private individuals, whose better-off relatives lived in Bamako or abroad.

The association is truly a home-area association which made substantial financial investments in Kiban: improvement of the road linking Banamba and Kiban, the construction of *medersas*, and the closure of the cemetery, and the provision of equipment to the dispensary. When NGOs intervened asking the populations to make a contribution to a development investment, Soumpoun paid the village contributions, collecting money from members in the diaspora. However, things started to change with the creation of the municipality in 1999. For the then newly elected mayor Mandala Diaby, the association Soumpoun would

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7 For a discussion on the importance of *récépissé*, see Hagberg's (2004) study of the hunters' association Benkadi in Burkina Faso.
naturally be a key partner in developing the municipality. Yet at some point things turned for the worse between the mayor and Soumpoun. A Soumpoun member explained:

“Decentralisation arrived here. We entered it without understanding too much. We contributed to investments in Kiban. But the mayor wanted that all projects go through the municipality.”

In other words, the mayor wanted to control the funding provided by Soumpoun, whereas the association wanted to stick to its autonomous status as part of civil society. Following these tensions, a second association named Soninkara started to take form. It was grown out of a specific conflict between the mayor and the Soumpoun. The mayor wanted Soumpoun to pay the community contribution (600,000 FCFA — approximatively some 915 euros) to the construction of a school sponsored by the international NGO, Plan International. However, due to the already strained relations with the mayor, Soumpoun decided to pull out and not pay the community contribution. This was seen as a treason by many. Therefore, individual Kibanais decided to mobilise funding and succeeded in paying the requested 600,000 FCFA. It was after this incident that the new association, Soninkara, was founded.

The idea with Soninkara is to help the municipality to function effectively. A Kiban-based leader of Soninkara asserted: “The municipality is weak, and it is thanks to our association that things function”. Since the early 2000s, there are two main home-area associations – Soumpoun and Soninkara – that gather different groupings of Kiban, often on the basis of kinship relations.

Even though these two associations are central to associational life in Kiban, the mayor since 2009 (Moustapha Diakité) is not really involved in any of these associations. Diakité is rather, a private donor who finances investments in the municipality. He is a wealthy trader who spends a lot of money to support Kiban. The most striking example of his generosity is that, during the two years, he privately funded the salary of the doctor at the public dispensary in Kiban. In other words, the mayor took a personal responsibility to cover the doctor’s salary. Due to political problems, the doctor nevertheless had to quit his function and nowadays there is no doctor in Kiban. Moustapha Diakité is not alone in being a private donor, because Kiban is to a large extent built on financial contributions from the diaspora. But Diakité is clearly the most well-known and biggest one in today’s Kiban.

Although these financial and personal contributions are easily referred to as ideal commitment of the diaspora, it is also evident that they complicate local arenas, and municipal politics. A complaint often heard by people in Bamako is that the relatives back home are just waiting for investments and do not take initiatives themselves. Another one is that those in the diaspora, through their active and sometimes patronising involvement, are actually putting people in Kiban against each other, and even dividing the town. In a very concrete sense, the diaspora of Kiban is clearly a driver of development. People living in the diaspora do provide substantial financial and food contributions both on an individual basis and also – as in the case of the two associations Soumpoun and Soninkara – on an associational one. But the Kibanais diaspora is also a driver of dispute, as representing people

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8 The name Soninkara means the umbilical cord in Soninké language.
9 Bintou Koné’s Master thesis on kinship and politics in Kiban particularly focuses on the 2013 legislative elections (Koné 2017; see also Koné and Hagberg 2019).
10 These “political” problems were allegedly due to the strained relationship with the former mayor Mandala Diaby, who had become president of the Health Management Committee.
who combine substantial contributions and socio-political involvement with local stakes grounded in family, household and neighbourhood belongings.

**Municipal Politics and Associational Life**

The political landscape in Kiban gives the impression of one party dominating municipal politics without any opposition whatsoever. Despite the transfer from the PUDP to PARENA just prior to the 2014 elections, the then mayor Mandala Diaby could stay in power. Similarly, between 2004 and 2016, there is no party other than the PARENA that is represented in the municipal council. Yet this impression is not entirely true, because there is indeed a socio-political opposition in Kiban, albeit articulated elsewhere than in party politics. In the following, we analyse the ambiguous role of the Kiban diaspora when it comes to municipal politics and associational life.

First, the cleavage between the associations Soumpoun and Soninkara is a clear articulation of a socio-political opposition. The active members of Soumpoun are generally in opposition to the municipality and the ruling political class in Kiban. Despite assertions from both Soninkara and Soumpoun that “today the problems are finished and now we understand each other”, the cleavage is articulated vis-à-vis infrastructure investment and political campaigning. Some actors hold that it was especially during the 10 years of office of the mayor Mandala Diaby (1999-2009) that people were divided. The public dispensary is one example where opposition is expressed. When Mayor Diaby lost power in 2009 he soon became president of ASACO – the Health Management Committee – and after a while he was accused of sabotaging Mayor Diakité’s rule by obstructing the smooth running of the dispensary. While such allegations could of course not be taken at face value, they do indicate the political stakes involved. In these allegations Kibanais diaspora is clearly central: on the one hand, they are financially mobilising resources to invest or at least pay “community contributions”; on the other hand, they are fueling conflict in the town, and give instructions to their supporters/relatives back home. Another expression of the cleavage concerns where to invest money. For Soumpoun members it is the town of Kiban – and thus the Soninké community – they would like to support, whereas the municipality is in charge of all the six villages, most of which have Bambara and Fulbe populations. Hence, the cleavage between the town and the municipality translates into a potential ethnic divide. There is a political continuity to be detected here: both Maribatourou Diaby (the President-founder of the PUDP) and the current mayor Moustapha Diakité, have been accused of spending too much money elsewhere and neglecting the town of Kiban. While this could be a variant of “no prophet is accepted in his hometown”, it is indeed interesting to see how investing substantial amounts of money also demands sophisticated political skillfulness.

A second clear articulation of the opposition follows from this and relates to Mayor Diakité himself. He has for long time been sponsoring infrastructure investments and is considered to be very rich. Diakité ran for MP in legislative elections three times without being elected, despite investing substantial amounts of money in his campaign. Some people claim that even though Moustapha Diakité is the mayor of Kiban he does not fund enough investments in the town; instead he supports water-points and mills and other activities in villages even in other municipalities, such as Madina-Sacko. When we interviewed him in January 2014, Diakité asserted that he is not interested in “buying voters” by distributing money to residents, but that he would like to invest in concrete development actions. In the
2013 elections when he was campaigning to become an MP, he disbursed some 60 million FCFA in his electoral campaign.\textsuperscript{11} Some would argue that he had not invested the money wisely as he was also criticised for not supporting his core voters; and for not “considering” his own relatives enough (Koné and Hagberg 2019). To some extent, however, Diakité belongs to a typical \textit{Kibanais} diaspora, who would like to support people back home and run for the elections, while grossly underestimating the real stakes and considerations among voters. So, even though Moustapha Diakité is leading PARENA in Kiban and is the mayor since 2009, there is an opposition to him, and it was particularly articulated in the aftermath of the 2013 legislative elections (Koné 2017; Koné and Hagberg 2019).\textsuperscript{12}

A third articulation of political opposition in Kiban can be detected in women’s political participation and affiliation. While there was one woman municipal councilor in Kiban 2009-2016 (Masitan Diaby), at first sight illustrating a typical kind of female alibi for making politics, a closer look shows that women are important actors in party politics in Kiban and that Masitan Diaby is an important woman leader. There are many associations and women groups in town with a political affiliation. In Kiban, the PARENA has a number of women groups that are mobilized for any action to be undertaken by the municipality. For instance, when we did fieldwork in October 2013 some women groups were involved in sensitisation training on the theme “Wash your hands” funded by a foreign donor. The training took place in a school and the pupils attended the session. A group of PARENA women were involved and were paid allowance for participating. These women received financial compensation for participating in the training, thanks to their party affiliation. Just in Kiban there were 13 women’s associations supporting the PARENA in October 2013, one month before the legislative elections. Other women groups were affiliated to other parties, notably the URD. After the legislative elections in 2013 in which URD was part of the winning alliance some URD women groups were very angry. One women leader told us that they had not received all the funding given by their MP-candidate to their women’s group, because a male political actor had “taken care of” [that is, embezzled] the lion’s share of “women’s money”. This incident illustrates that candidates need women’s mobilisation – and their votes – but that the funding provided by electoral candidates to support women may well be deviated by other local political actors.

A fourth articulation of how the \textit{Kibanais} diaspora intervene in municipal politics is linked to ethnicity. Kiban politics is very much a Soninké politics in town, because Bambara and Fulbe populations living in the villages are marginalised. Still, the political candidates need to ensure support from people living in all villages. In that way, the municipal councilor from the village of Bako (2009-2016) represented Bambara farmers’ interests generally, and more specifically the autochthons as people in Bako are the first comers and hence the ritually important masters of the earth. And the municipal councilor from Dialakoro Peulh is a Fulbe man with the primary task to mobilise the many Fulbe agro-pastoralists in the municipality. Both these councilors represented the PARENA, but they also represented the opposition to Soninké hegemony. Both these councilors ventured criticism about the mayor and his staff, and in the 2013 legislative elections, the Fulbe councilor left the PARENA for the URD. It is as if people living in the villages need concrete development investments rather than partaking in the running of the municipality. The Bambara and Fulbe councilors

\textsuperscript{11} 91,600 euros
\textsuperscript{12} In the 2020 legislative elections Moustapha Diakité was finally elected and became MP of the PARENA.
could well be ethnic “alibis” without real political influence, and ethnic opposition to Soninké power in the municipality of Kiban.

**Conclusion**

In this article, we have tried to demonstrate how the diaspora of people from the town of Kiban is simultaneously drivers of development and dispute. With very substantial funding from **Kibanais** living in Bamako as well as abroad, Kiban municipality enjoys a privileged position in comparison to other rural municipalities in Mali. They have “sons” and “daughters” working elsewhere with the capacity and willingness to invest back home. These **Kibanais** are tied together by a sense of home and belonging to Kiban, and also through religious networks. Yet they are also concretely linked to home through polygynous marriage; it is not rare that successful traders have one wife in Bamako (or in Lusaka, Brazzaville, Paris, Brussels), and another in Kiban.

But the tremendous influence of **Kibanais** diaspora is also engendering dispute and tension. Different families and groupings are naturally trying to influence the ways in which the diaspora intervenes. It was particularly with the creation of the municipality – and thus as part of the Malian democratic decentralisation – that open conflict emerged. The home-area association Soumpoun refused to be used instrumentally by the mayor and insisted instead to make independent decisions about what, where and how to support in the municipality. Soumpoun wanted to focus on the town of Kiban, whereas the mayor had a responsibility of the whole municipality. The association Soninkara was created in 2000 following the dispute and the subsequent breach between Soumpoun leaders and the mayor, Mandala Diaby.

In this vein, the **Kibanais** diaspora seems to be more prone to investing in the town of Kiban or in the Soninké community, whereas the municipal council must develop the whole municipality. On the one hand, the position of **Kibanais** diaspora appears to be unproductive and uncompromising. But, on the other hand, the home-area association Soumpoun is part of civil society and should be able to make its proper decisions. As such, the associations should not be dictated by the public authorities, such as the municipal council and the mayor. Hence, the difference in focus and scope is not merely a question of institutional level, but of accountability and of control. The association Soninkara was founded to counteract this position, and despite that assertions made by the leadership of Soumpoun and Soninkara that “we work hand in hand”, the cleavage between Soumpoun and Soninkara, and between the municipality and the **Kibanais** diaspora, is more fundamental than just a question of misunderstanding and temporal conflict.

The municipality of Kiban may be extreme in its financial and social dependence on the diaspora, but the case does indicate interesting stakes involved in municipal politics in Mali and Africa more generally. While the policy discourse promoted in the 1990s asserted that democratic decentralisation will bring local development because “power returns home”, the study of Kiban highlights the importance of not confining politics and political involvement to the municipality, but to integrate diaspora populations in our analysis of local politics and municipal democracy. Hence, the **Kibanais** diaspora is significantly present, but often physically absent, political actors who, taken together, are drivers of development and dispute. They are the successful sons/husbands abroad who not only support, but also dictate how investments should be made and money should be managed.
References


From Refuge to Rights: Majnu ka Tilla Tibetan Colony in New Delhi

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores the history of collective claims made over the land in Majnu ka Tilla (MT), an informal colony of exiled Tibetans in New Delhi. Tibetans have now lived in India as stateless people for 60 years. This protracted exile has produced simultaneous narratives of refugeehood and citizen-like claims over land in MT. The article focuses on the role of the Residents Welfare Association (RWA) of MT in negotiating precarities of urban informality in Delhi. This RWA, in existence since 1965, has provided the residents of MT with an institutional form located outside of the formal process of Tibetan rehabilitation. This has allowed them to shift from the rhetoric of refuge to deploying a language of rights in safeguarding their claims over land. This language of rights is unavailable to other Tibetans in India and creates subgroups within the Tibetan exile community on the basis of material relationships with and claims over land. This is a crucial component defining exile experience and identity for Tibetans in India.

**Keywords:** Tibetan Refugees, RWAs, unauthorised colonies, regularisation, urban informality

**Introduction**

Majnu ka Tilla (MT) or New Aruna Nagar Colony as officially renamed in 2000, is an informal refugee colony of Tibetans in New Delhi. We argue that it has a singular discourse of rights to the city that emerges as much from the protracted history of statelessness as it does from a sense of belonging in the city. In this, Majnu Ka Tilla is a unique repository of Tibetan exile experience not replicated in other Tibetan settlements in India. MT was established in 1963, on directions of the Ministry of External Affairs, to accommodate Tibetans fleeing from the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency to Delhi during the war between India and China. They were initially accommodated in Ladakh Budh Vihar, a transit point for Ladakhi pilgrims on the outskirts of Delhi. Budh Vihar was, however, not equipped to handle the inflow of Tibetans leading to overcrowding and insanitary conditions. Responding to this, the Ministry instructed local Ladakhi and Tibetan leaders to identify tracts of land along...
the banks of the Yamuna and the refugees were moved there. However, there was no formal handover of the land to the Tibetans here and the colony continues to have a precarious claim to land. This is in contrast to other settlements set up on leased land within a central rehabilitation regime governing the Tibetans in India.3

In response to the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, India evolved a rehabilitation regime shaped by its political and moral considerations vis-à-vis Tibet. India received the Dalai Lama as an ‘esteemed guest’ and granted him asylum as a revered religious and spiritual leader. India also assured refuge to Tibetans who followed him across the border4. Referring to the widespread public sympathy for the Tibetans, in a letter to Saiyid Fazl Ali, a Member of Parliament from the erstwhile Bombay state, Prime Minister Nehru stated, “The strength of public feeling in India is so tremendous on this subject that no government can ignore it” (Nehru 2013: 437). India also recognised the political importance of hosting the Dalai Lama in negotiating its border feud with China. Therefore, even as India continued to consider Tibet as a region of China, it facilitated the establishment and functioning of the erstwhile Tibetan Government in Exile, now known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and Tibetan settlements (Shakya 1999: 330). Dharamshala is the seat of CTA that was set up in 1960 as a continuation of the Lhasa government. It has since evolved into a full-fledged refugee administration led, staffed by and responsible for all Tibetans in exile. While the CTA has no political recognition as a government, it performs the functions of one in delivering welfare to all Tibetans in exile (McConnell 2016). Key departments of the CTA are legally recognised as registered societies under India's Societies Registration Act allowing them to function as NGOs. This includes the Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC) that is effectively the CTA's Department of Home. The committee is headed by an official referred to as the Home Kalon or “Home Minister” of the CTA, and works closely with India’s Ministry of Home Affairs to affect India’s Tibetan rehabilitation regime.

Since the 1960s, India has set up ‘designated’ settlements across the country under its Tibetan rehabilitation regime. In prioritising its security concerns, these settlements are spread across the country and not in proximity to one another. These settlements are typically bounded spaces with a dedicated infrastructure of Tibetan schools, monasteries, cultural institutions and facilities for healthcare and livelihoods. The CTA exercises substantive administrative powers in the settlements. It functions through a network of Settlement/Welfare Offices in each Tibetan settlement that are the local administrative bodies responsible to the CTRC. Over the decades, this rehabilitation regime has acquired an enduring presence in the bureaucratic processes of the Indian government at the Central and state levels with a firm political commitment towards Tibetan rehabilitation.

However, in the 1960s, these designated settlements, usually set up on land leased from state governments, were inadequate in accommodating the refugee influx from Tibet.

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3 Currently, Tibetan settlements can be classified into three categories on the basis of land tenure. These are a) designated settlements established on land leased from state governments b) settlements established on land purchased through Tibetan registered societies and c) spontaneous settlements established on land that is informally inhabited and used without handover. MT falls in the third category.

4 Since India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, all refugees, including Tibetans, are legally categorised as ‘foreigners’. However, in all bureaucratic and political discourse, Tibetans are referred to as refugees.

5 According to the records of the Central Tibetan Relief Committee, there are currently 39 Tibetan settlements in India. This includes both designated and spontaneous settlements.
This led to the growth of ‘spontaneous’ settlements outside of the formal rehabilitation framework. ‘Spontaneous’ settlements such as Majnu ka Tilla, were often established on government land with tacit knowledge of the local administrative bodies, but with no formal claim to the land. These settlements are usually self-administered through community organisations, such as the Residents Welfare Association (RWA) in MT, located outside of the bureaucratic structure of the CTA.

This article focuses on the role of the RWA, the institutional location of the history and politics of the colony, in negotiating precarities of urban informality. The structural conditions of informality relate to lack of access to land titles and resultant lack of access to municipal services. This is rendered more complex by overlapping claims of state agencies over the land occupied by MT. MT’s land is formally owned by the Central Ministry of Urban Development but is under the care of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), a municipal agency. This arrangement is not specific to MT and is found in many other locations in Delhi. In responding to these conditions, MT has evolved associational forms and deployed strategies that energise the rhetoric of refuge and increasingly the language of rights. We argue that this trajectory is specific to MT within the Tibetan exilic experience as well as in relation to other urban informal dwellers. In analysing conditions of informality, Chatterjee argues that refugees and the urban informal dwellers are constructed as “objects of governmentality” rather than as citizens with full-fledged rights. Here, the refugees and informal urban dwellers are “populations” accessing state welfare irrespective of their membership in the civic or republican body of “true citizens” (Chatterjee 2004: 47). However, Chatterjee does not examine how refugee identity impinges on negotiations with the state in staking formal and substantive claims.

Refugee settlements, such as MT, have specific conditions of statelessness that impact upon their negotiations in claiming their right to the city. Studies on refugee urbanism have examined the link between spatiality and complex political subjectivities of residents in refugee settlements/camps. Sanyal (2012, 2014), Ramadan (2012) and Oesch (2017) have critiqued Agamben’s theorisation of camps as spaces of pure bio-politics and bare life, and explored assertions of agency by refugees. Oesch’s (2017: 111) study of Palestinian refugees in Jordan views them not as “assisted subjects and beneficiaries, but also as autonomous and productive subjects, as well as entrepreneurs and consumers”. MT, as a thriving centre for commercial, cultural and political reproduction in exile is a tangible embodiment of this agency. We focus on the agency of the residents of MT in deploying strategies of refuge and rights in Delhi.

The article builds on ethnographic research and interviews conducted with multiple field visits between May 2016 and October 2018 in Majnu ka Tilla, Delhi and Dharamshala. We interviewed a former Home Kalon and other high-ranking serving officials in the Central Tibetan Relief Committee (CTRC). In Delhi, the former and the incumbent Pradhans (chiefs) of the RWA, the Tibetan Welfare Officer in MT, the Secretary of the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and officials of the DDA were interviewed. These interviews were supplemented by relevant documents from each office used to reconstruct the history of negotiations between MT and the municipal, state, and central ministries. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to long term residents and owners of commercial establishments in MT to chart the trajectory of the colony and map current debates within the community regarding land titling.
The article is divided into three parts. First, it outlines MT’s history as it has evolved over the last 60 years. The second section focuses on the RWA as a major institutional actor and examines its strategies in addressing the precarities of urban informality. Drawing on existing literature on urban informality, this section argues that MT’s specific location as a refugee colony allows it to deploy a unique rhetoric of refuge to safeguard itself from eviction and demolition orders. It then examines MT’s shift to a language of rights through the municipal process of regularisation. Here MT distanced itself from a refugee identity and engaged with the state at par with other urban residents of Delhi. The final section of the paper discusses the impact of this shift on Tibetan refugee identity and debates within the community on the issue.

Exile and Resettlement: The Making of Majnu ka Tilla (MT)

Since 1959, more than 100,000 Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile, most never to return. Tibetans now live across the globe including India, Nepal, Bhutan, Europe, US and Australia. Given this protracted exile and the global spread of the exiled Tibetans, there are complex positions on citizenship within the Tibetan community. This includes an active refusal of citizenship on the part of many Tibetans particularly in South Asia (McGranahan 2018). The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) has an ambiguous position on taking citizenship in India. As CTA’s President or Sikyong, Lobsang Sangay explains, the CTA “neither encourages nor discourages taking citizenship in India” (Sikyong [President of CTA], interview, September 14, 2016). CTA’s position emerges from the political project of exile that sees return to an autonomous Tibet as its endgame. Given that the largest number of Tibetans are in India⁶, the CTA views this population as a key resource in the struggle to return. Taking formal citizenship or even staking citizen-like claims in India is therefore viewed as antithetical to this project. Even as the Tibetan Charter or the CTA’s “Constitution” provides for Tibetan taking citizenship in host countries, the moral discourse of exile privileges statelessness (Gupta 2019: 338).

In material terms, this ‘refusal’ implies that Tibetans enjoy delimited privileges but not rights in India, including the right to property. Tibetans, as refugees, cannot buy property without the sanction of the Indian government. This process is cumbersome, effectively rendering their legal access to property moot. Tibetans have been granted temporary claims of land use within settlements on grounds of refuge, albeit in an uneven manner. Unsurprisingly, as their economic status has improved, Tibetans have used extra-legal arrangements such as benami⁷ and informal means to perpetuate generational land claims. Though these practices emerge in response to the anxieties of protracted exile, they are similar to those undertaken by urban informal residents in India who lack secure land titles. This facet of the exile experience and its complicated relationship with the formal rehabilitation process and Tibetan exile identities is underexplored in the existing literature on the Tibetan community in India.

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⁶ According to the last Tibetan Demographic Survey of 2009, there are 94,000 Tibetans in India. However, since then, the number of Tibetans in India is steadily declining and unconfirmed reports currently estimate the number of Tibetans in India to be around 85,000. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/tibetan-refugees-down-from-1-5-lakh-to-85000-in-7-years-5349587/

⁷ Benami transactions are those where the property is registered in the name of one person but is paid for by someone else. The property is held by the former individual for the immediate or future benefit of the person who has paid for it. This is prohibited under Indian laws.
The Tibetan community in India has generated sustained and wide-ranging academic interest, documenting identity formation, political processes and nationalism in exile (Anand 2000; Diehl 2002; Houston and Wright 2003; Yeh 2007; Falcone and Wangchuk 2008; Tarodi 2011; McConnell 2016; Basu 2018; McGranahan 2018). Within this, studies on MT range from anthropological enquiries into diasporic identity (Shih 2013; Le Houérou 2017) to political and urban geographers locating MT within politics and institutions of exile (McConnell 2016; Brox 2016). Many scholars have also highlighted MT’s economic success as evidence for the resilience of the Tibetan community under conditions of protracted exile (Saklani 1984; Pulla and Kharel 2014). However, there is scant enquiry into processes of land governance that are crucial conduits for delivering CTA’s and Indian state’s shared regime of bio-political control. This regime entails close monitoring of the Tibetan population in settlements through a complex web of bureaucratic practices including identity documents, travel documents, land survey and lease documents. It stretches across multiple scales of government including municipal, state and central processes that effect this regime. Moving the lens to municipal processes allows us to examine the micro-politics of this engagement and link it to the broader questions of identity.

We refocus the enquiry on MT as an informal colony in Delhi to examine the interaction between the politics of refuge and rights located within an exile identity. Muku et al. (2016) explore MT within Delhi’s municipal processes arguing that discriminatory planning decisions intensified the ghettoisation of MT, impeding its right to the city. In contrast, we argue that the Residents Welfare Association (RWA) has leveraged the formal municipal process of regularisation of unauthorised colonies to its advantage to lay legitimate claims to the city.

Majnu ka Tilla (MT) was not a planned Tibetan settlement and developed mainly through kinship and other affective networks. Unlike other designated settlements, people from across the Himalayan belt sharing a Tibetic/Buddhist identity are inhabitants of the colony. MT has always depended on charismatic local leaders to access benefits of rehabilitation, cultivating relations of patronage with local Indian political and bureaucratic leaders. The RWA, elected from among the residents, established in 1965, is the institutionalisation of this charismatic authority. The history of the association is intertwined with the evolution of the colony. The former Pradhan of the colony stated that unlike other Tibetan settlements, MT had a “unique relationship with the MCD and the NDMC” (that is, the two main municipal bodies that administer Delhi). He emphasised that MT “was able to represent issues faced by the community directly to the Indian authorities” rather than go through the CTA’s channels. We demonstrate that since the RWA functions outside the hierarchy of the CTA, it has enjoyed greater manoeuvrability in its negotiations with state agencies.

Over the years, MT like other spontaneous settlements, was brought under the CTA’s governmental gaze through the establishment of a Tibetan Welfare Office in 1984. Prior to this arrangement, the RWA was exclusively responsible for administering the settlement and therefore it continues to command greater political capital within the colony. This is in contrast to designated settlements where the role of the TSO has been increasingly strengthened over time. The association is, however, not necessarily in a hierarchical relationship with the Welfare Office. We establish how both actors often seek and co-opt the legitimacy of the other to strengthen MT’s negotiating position in engagements with state authorities. Therefore, in contrast to other unauthorised colonies, MT’s nested administrative structure provided an additional channel in its negotiations of urban informality. This institutional
history forms an integral part of MT’s narrative of self-reliance foregrounding its commercial and financial success while being outside of the formal rehabilitation process.

Unlike other designated settlements that provide livelihood through agriculture or handicrafts, MT’s residents have had to depend on their entrepreneurial skills to survive. Today, MT is the commercial capital of the exile community and a transit point for Tibetans in India travelling to and from other parts of the country (Samphel 2006). The colony is bustling with entrepreneurial activity. There are large shopping complexes housing travel agencies and shops selling designer chubas, smaller makeshift shops selling clothes, bags, shoes and incense. Alongside, there are a large number of upscale cafés, restaurants, guesthouses apart from food stalls selling Tibetan fast food. The buildings, décor and products sold here are intended to affectively produce the space as dominantly Tibetan and are also consumed similarly by non-Tibetans who frequent the colony.

It was, however, not always a desirable location for Tibetans to live in. Older residents of the colony recalled that in the first two decades of its existence, the colony lacked basic amenities like water and toilets. It had a disreputable air and they characterised it variously as a “graveyard”, as a “dumping place”, a “shanty town”. Its main economic activity was selling chhang, homebrewed Tibetan barley liquor.

At that time, very few families were there. And it was all selling chhang on the road. There was not much traffic also at that time. Once you reached there, you could smell the chhang…

Even to travel to Majnu ka Tilla, we were too scared to travel at night because it was so dark and quiet…So it was a small place, never expected it to be so big. (Older resident of Majnu ka Tilla).

Up to the 1970s, Tibetans believed that exile would be a temporary phenomenon and they would soon return to Tibet. As a result, people did not build permanent structures and continued to live in makeshift housing. However, as the possibility of return to Tibet began to look distant, residents here sought to perpetuate their claims over land and construct concrete structures. As this happened, the RWA codified norms for exchange and leasing of these structures. These norms prohibited the residents from renting/selling residential or commercial space to non-Tibetans. From the 1980s onwards, MT incrementally entrenched itself resembling any other unauthorised colony in Delhi. New buildings were constructed as and when local bureaucratic and planning processes provided windows of opportunities. For example, in 1981 Delhi undertook a slum clearance drive in preparation for the Delhi Asian Games. As part of this process, the Dehli Development Authority (DDA) identified 33 houses in MT to be demolished, offering them an alternate site for resettlement. A new camp on an adjacent tract of land was set up increasing the extent of the colony by 1.1 acres (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 1). This handover did not grant ownership rights to these 33 families and merely granted them the right to possess and use the land without “prejudice to the rights of the DDA” (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 1). However, this provided a sense of security among the residents and spurred the first round of permanent constructions in the colony. Former Home Kalon in the CTA recalled,

Mentally people felt that they were in a stronger position now. By this time, our people had also saved some money and they started building their houses. This is how our first constructions in the real sense began. (former Home Kalon)

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4 This document is an informal timeline maintained by the Tibetan Settlement Office of MT. It maps the evolution of the settlement and all negotiations between the settlement and government authorities.
The nature and extent of these early constructions depended on financial resources at the disposal of the residents. For example, a popular restaurant which operates from the ground floor of a residential unit was the first *pucca* structure in MT. The proprietor of the restaurant shared:

> When my parents moved to the new camp and built their house, they didn't have enough money to build pillars to support the house. Even now there are no load-bearing pillars here. As and when they saved some money, they added floors to the original house. (Resident of Majnu ka Tilla)

**Negotiating Informality**

As the colony expanded, the residents faced quotidian challenges of lack of access to municipal services arising from the colony's inherent informality. While MT had limited access to municipal water and electricity connections since the 1960s, in the 1980s, the RWA led the efforts to improve access to these services throughout the colony (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 2-3). Through the process of pursuing these claims, the community consolidated and reinforced their claims to live on the land.

Being an unauthorised settlement, MT was subject to periodic eviction and demolition notices. In the early 1990s, the Ministry of External Affairs considered disbanding MT to resettle the residents in designated Tibetan settlements outside Delhi. Majority of MT’s residents were not in favour of this. The CTA, bound by its location as refugee administration politically dependant on the Indian state, advised that Tibetan refugees must comply with the order of resettlement. Recalling the event, one of the key Tibetan negotiators shared that since it was a direct order from the Ministry of External Affairs, the CTA demurred from any formal participation in negotiations, allowing the RWA to exercise other strategies. The association, being outside the formal rehabilitation process, was not bound by the same concerns as the CTA. It mobilised popular support and began to approach different central ministries requesting them to take a sympathetic view of the matter. It set up a committee formed of the Pradhan, members of prominent NGOs, and two members of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile and approached the Ministry of Urban Development. Through 1993-1994, this committee primarily employed the strategies of petitioning political and bureaucratic leadership at the central, state and municipal levels. In response, the Ministry of Urban Development requested the Welfare Office at MT to submit information on land use within the colony. Again, it was the RWA that put together the requested information from their own property records and forwarded it to the Ministry through the Welfare Office. Finally, the matter was resolved in keeping with the enduring political commitment to Tibetan rehabilitation. The Ministry opined that since Tibetans were refugees in India, they should not be displaced yet again. While the Ministry did not grant the residents of MT legal title to the land, it gave an assurance that the existing colony would not be disturbed (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 2).

Similarly, in June 2006, two notices were issued by the Public Works Department and the Delhi High Court respectively that challenged the existence and geographical extent of the colony. To widen a national highway running adjacent to MT, the Public Works Department issued a notice of demolition to the RWA to remove certain structures within 150 meters from the median of the road. In the second case, the Delhi High Court order directed the Delhi Development Authority to remove all structures that fell within 300 meters from the edge Yamuna’s riverbank (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 3). Under this, MT
like other informal colonies on the banks of the Yamuna was earmarked for demolition. These notices heightened the precarity experienced by residents. In the words of a restaurant owner:

There was a lot of fear and anxiety among the people. People were scared. We had built up our houses and businesses over time. If we are evicted, where would we go? There was also a financial concern. (Resident of Majnu ka Tilla)

The RWA approached the Delhi government for resolution of these issues and successfully deployed the narrative of seeking refuge to combat these eviction/demolition orders. In the case of the demolition notice issued by the PWD, Delhi’s former Chief Minister, Sheila Dixit referenced popular tropes of Tibetan identity as the grounds for staying the proposed demolitions. She stated: “Having the Tibetans in Delhi will have a peaceful influence on the city and we will not let anyone destroy the colony” (Phayul.com 2006). Mr Parlad Singh Sawhney, a member of the Delhi Legislative Assembly, argued that: “he will not let any action that would make the Tibetans, refugees for the second time” (Phayul.com 2006).

Presenting its case against eviction from the banks of the Yamuna in the Delhi High Court, the RWA referred to the earlier assurance given by the Ministry of Urban Development, strengthening their claim to continued residence on the grounds of refugee identity (former Home Kalon, interview, September 23, 2018). The Delhi Government recognised that the demolition of MT, a refugee colony, was a sensitive issue and would contravene India’s long-standing public commitment to Tibetan rehabilitation. The Ministry of External Affairs, which was also named as a party in this dispute by the High Court, took the same view and argued that MT deserved special consideration as it was a refugee colony (Tibetan Welfare Office n.d.: 6). While many other similar settlements along the banks of the Yamuna were demolished and people resettled (Dupont 2008), MT escaped this fate. Here, the enduring Indian political commitment to Tibetan rehabilitation overrode the municipal orders of demolition.

As evident above, the RWA deployed formal strategies of negotiating urban informality whilst being an informal actor, unrecognised by state processes. This locates the association across the binaries of civil and political society that are investigated as reified categories within the literature on urban informality.

**RWAs as Political Actors**

Conceptual frameworks of participatory politics in the Global South, mainly informed by the binary notions of civic action and politics (Chatterjee 2004; Harriss 2007), have often over-emphasised the distinction between the two. Here RWAs, as civic associational actors, are seen as operating within an invited participatory space opened up legitimately by the state or donors (Kundu 2011). On the other hand, confrontational strategies often deployed by the urban poor and grassroots organisations remain outside of this invited space. These mobilisations carve out an ‘invented space’ to engage with and resist the state (Harriss 2005; Harriss 2007). In their study on RWAs in Delhi, Lemanski and Lama-Rewal (2013) draw on Miraftab (2004) and other critical analyses of negotiating strategies of urban dwellers (Coelho and Venkat 2009)⁹ to challenge the binary categorisation of political constructs of

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⁹ This analysis is informed by Roy’s critique of urban informality as a separate sector located in the cities of the global south, populated by urban poor and characterised by poverty, criminality and disruptive political mobilisation (Roy 2005, 2011). Roy and AlSayyad (2004) reconceptualise informality as a mode that functions as an “organising logic, system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself” (Roy 2005: 148).
‘invited space’ and ‘invented space’. They argue that urban politics demonstrates a fluidity between invented and invited spaces. Here RWAs are the key associational actors located across the invited and invented spaces of participation, drawing on strategies of both.

This aligns with MT’s negotiating strategies through the decades. Through its RWA, MT was able to leverage bureaucratic processes within which they had no legitimate membership. In 1993-94, during the negotiations on eviction, the CTA deliberately disengaged from the negotiations, strategically allowing the RWA to take the lead as the representative body of MT in presenting a case for refuge. Again, in the court case regarding removal of encroachments from the banks of the Yamuna, even as the association had no formal representation in the matter, it piggy-backed on the central ministries who were recognised as legitimate parties to the dispute in order to request for special consideration.

In each of these negotiations, MT’s RWA drew on the rhetoric of refuge that demands a non-confrontational engagement with the state to energise its sympathetic consideration. They primarily used instruments of civic action like forming associations and committees, petitioning and letter writing. At the same time, the rhetoric of refuge allowed the Tibetans to access and appeal to higher levels of the central bureaucracy that are often not available to citizens struggling against similar precarities.

It is apparent from the multiple strategies identified above that the RWA resourcefully used available opportunities to entrench their claims to residence. These strategies were considerably successful in staving off threats of eviction/demolition. However, they were limited in their scope as they concerned themselves with the effects of informality but had no recourse to address the legal status of the colony. MT’s lack of formal recognition as an authorised colony meant that their claim to the city remained precarious. This changed when the Delhi government announced a new regularisation drive for unauthorised colonies in 2002. The RWA saw an opportunity here for formally entering into negotiations with the municipal government to alter the legal status of the colony. The following section encapsulates this process.

**From Refuge to Rights: Regularisation of Majnu ka Tilla (MT)**

Unauthorised colonies are a structural feature of Delhi’s urbanisation as the government has failed to provide adequate housing to the city’s ever-increasing population. An unauthorised colony is defined as a “development comprising of contiguous area where no permission of concerned agency has been obtained for Layout Plan and/or building plan” (Delhi Development Authority 2008: 7). Currently, there are two kinds of unauthorised colonies categorised by the Delhi Government; those that occupy private land and those that occupy government land like MT. Both types of colonies violate zoning norms according to the current Delhi Master Plan. In addition to flouting zoning norms, the colonies located on government land, also lack formal title to land, placing them in additional precarity. The regularisation process rationalises zoning violations and grants individuals ownership rights over their built structures. Once the regularisation process is complete, the DDA intends to begin examining the land titles of those colonies that are currently informally established on government land (Delhi Development Authority 2008: 9).

There have been four waves of regularisation of unauthorised colonies in Delhi in 1961, 1969 and 1977 and 2002 each coinciding with elections promising regularisation of these

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10 According to the estimates of the Delhi Government about 25% of its population lives in unauthorised colonies.
colonies. In each of these, the state has incrementally legitimised collective action channelled through RWAs as the preferred form of engagement. Under the current regularisation drive, RWAs are the sole representatives of unauthorised colonies in municipal processes (Lemanski and Lama-Rewal 2013). This allowed MT’s RWA to transition to a legally recognised actor, capable of engaging with municipal processes independent of central government intervention. Significantly, this opens up the possibility to seek permanent rights over land rather than temporary accommodations on grounds of refuge.

Given that Majnu ka Tilla (MT) satisfied the formal criteria of the Delhi Development Authority for regularisation, the local Member of Delhi’s Legislative Assembly, Mr Sawhney, encouraged the RWA to submit an application in 2004. He argued that the government would sooner or later regularise all colonies in Delhi and it would be to MT’s advantage to participate in the initial drive of regularisation to pursue and entrench their claims over the land. His support for the RWA’s application for regularisation can be explained with reference to vote-bank politics. While other unauthorised colonies have employed ‘competitive electoral mobilisation’ as a key strategy for claims-making, (Chatterjee 2004: 139), the availability and efficacy of this strategy for MT are constrained by Tibetans’ legally liminal status as voters in India. (Gupta 2019). Given this, residents of MT have participated unevenly in the Indian political process. This participation has yet to gain legitimacy within the exile community and has a controversial relationship with the CTA’s discourse of statelessness. While this has prevented Tibetans from exercising their voting rights as a pathway to press their claims, they continue to be cultivated by political parties as a potential vote-bank. This has provided the RWA with opportunities to tap into local electoral politics to court support for their claims, though without positive guarantees of inclusion.

To participate in the regularisation process, the RWA registered itself as a society under the legal provisions of the Societies Act in 2004. This converted its status from an informal actor located outside governmental processes to a legal entity, formalising its role as a representative of MT in municipal negotiations. MT, which was essentially a colony of refugees, could now legitimately stake claims similar to Indian citizens even as its residents did not possess formal citizenship. The RWA has since 2004 consciously constructed a narrative of citizen-like claims as evident from the following statement of the former Pradhan.

Who is regularised? Only citizens are regularised. Now they are regularising us too. Our colony, it was a refugee colony earlier. Now it has become New Aruna Nagar Colony.

(Former Pradhan)

Similarly, in a letter to the Department of Urban Development, MT’s local Member of Delhi’s Legislative Assembly argued that, “Majnu ka Tilla is one of the old colony in Delhi which remained unnoticed and never listed in the earlier list of unauthorised colony” (Delhi Development Authority, n.d.: 46).

Here MT is presented as similar to other unauthorised colonies, rather than as a refugee colony. To support the claim of long-term occupation, MT’s application for regularisation provided details of municipal services like water and electricity connections that had been made available to the residents over the decades, pictures of the 2000 ceremony where the
former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit renamed the settlement as New Aruna Nagar Colony, blueprints, layout maps of the colony and the registration papers of the RWA as a society under the Societies Act of India.

Like other unauthorised colonies, MT also drew on specific rhetorical strategies to strengthen its claim. It employed the neo-liberal rationality of paying for municipal service provision (Ranganathan 2014) in making its claims visible to the state. In addition, the RWA in MT used the ‘discourse of respectability’ (Lemanski and Lawa-Rewal 2013) by adopting a voluntary ban on the brewing of chhang liquor in 2004. This was done specifically to reconstruct MT’s image as a safe residential space to counter popular and bureaucratic imaginaries of the colony as dominated by motifs of criminality, poverty and illegality.

It is, however, important to note that the regularisation process of the Delhi government does not concern itself with the formal citizenship status of the residents and only addresses the issue of planning violations. A highly placed official within the DDA when asked about the relevance of refugee identity in the regularisation process explained:

The regularisation policy was open to everyone. There was no bar for any community to apply. The fact that Majnu ka Tilla was a refugee colony did not matter. There were no special difficulties they faced on account of being a refugee community and they did not receive any special considerations either. (Official at Delhi Development Authority)

In 2008, a provisional regularisation certificate was issued to the Residents Welfare Association including MT in the list of unauthorised colonies currently awaiting regularisation. This was indeed quite a coup for the association but complicated its relationship with the formal rehabilitation process for Tibetans.

Refuge or Rights: The Dilemma

Claiming and providing refuge has been the preferred institutional strategy of both the CTA and the Indian government when it comes to settling land issues faced by Tibetans in India. Until 2004, MT consistently reiterated that it is different from other colonies that have encroached on government land. It presented itself as a refugee colony, established with the tacit approval of the Ministry of External Affairs, therefore deserving of special consideration. The municipal government, usually directed by Central or state governments, accommodated this claim and made exceptions for the Tibetans in Delhi.

With regularisation, it is apparent that the RWA has transitioned from deploying claims of refuge to staking citizen-like claims to the city. This transition alters the relationship between the residents of MT and the state. Here, the site of formal negotiation shifts from the Central government to the municipal government that does not concern itself with the refugee status of the Tibetans. While the process of regularisation holds the potential promise of formal inclusion within Delhi’s planning processes, this is at this point only a possibility. As of the writing of this paper, the process of regularisation had not moved beyond the 2008 issuing of provisional certificates to unauthorised colonies, including MT. It appears that the issue of unauthorised colonies is brought up routinely during election periods with little change on the ground in between election cycles (Sheikh and Banda 2014). In the 2019 Delhi state election too, the issue resurfaced as a tussle between main opposing political parties promising regularisation without however providing a road map to it. The association, in its assessment of its claim, remains confident that MT will eventually
be recognised as an authorised colony, much like all other similar informal colonies in Delhi. Meanwhile, there is a debate within the Tibetan exile community about the possible outcomes of regularisation.

Given that MT’s land title will continue to be in question even after regularisation, any resolution of precarities would require engagement with the question of individual land ownership. The leadership of the RWA is of the view that conferring individual titles of land in MT would not be a difficult exercise, as the regularisation processes will only formalise ownership practices already in place. The association maintains detailed blueprints, records of property tax and its records of property transfer amongst residents as material evidence of ownership practices within the colony. In addition, the RWA actively encourages new and existing constructions within MT to be in compliance with building norms. While this functions fairly unevenly subject to internal politics, there exists an understanding that being in compliance with municipal laws will facilitate greater security of land tenure.

In contrast, some CTA officials argue that regularisation has limits in terms of granting tenure security. Referring to the demolition order of June 2006, one CTA official pointed out that the only reason MT was not demolished was because of its identity as a refugee colony. Bracketing away this identity to align more closely with other urban residents is likely to make the colony more vulnerable to future demolition drives of the municipal authorities. However, the RWA is of the view that being part of the regularisation process actually provides more security as MT cannot be singled out for demolition. The current Pradhan argues, “It is difficult to move thousand plus colonies. Where would you relocate?” (Pradhan, interview, October 1, 2018).

MT’s specific history as an informal colony also does not align with current Indian policy on centralisation of land tenure of Tibetan settlements. In 2014, the Government of India, in consultation with the CTA, codified a new Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (TRP) mainly to address land-related issues in Tibetan settlements. The main recommendation of this policy is to standardised land tenure in Tibetan settlements in India by leasing the land to the CTA’s Central Tibetan Relief Committee. While the TRP primarily applies to designated settlements, there is also a discussion between CTA and state authorities to use the TRP as a template to resolve all land disputes/issues involving Tibetans. For example, there is an ongoing dispute in Dharamshala involving 218 families who informally settled on forest land and have been served notices of eviction. In resolving this issue, the CTA has yet again deployed the narrative of refuge asking for special consideration for these families. It is possible that any eventual resolution of this matter will involve the leasing of the disputed land to the Central Tibetan Relief Committee rather than providing titles to individual residents.

There is a difference of opinion on whether MT would gain from the TRP, with the RWA arguing that MT has been and should continue to be an exception to the formal process of rehabilitation with regard to land. On the other hand, some officials in CTA argue that MT’s claims to land are best safeguarded under the TRP which is an enabling policy of the Central government formally sanctioned for Tibetans to address issues of land tenure. However, any implementation of the TRP in MT will require ascertaining who among the residents are included in the category of de-facto Tibetan refugees. Given its history, MT is home to Tibetan refugees, Indian and Nepali citizens sharing a broad Tibetan Buddhist identity, hailing from the Himalayan belt. More importantly, having asserted citizen-like claims to land, most residents of MT do not wish to retreat to a narrative of refugeehood that precludes individual claims of property ownership.
Beyond formal processes, the issue of property ownership also complicates the politics of exile identities. The moral discourse of exile has consistently privileged a narrative of return to Tibet. Exile is, therefore, a temporary condition, despite its protracted nature. This narrative valorises hardships of exile and promotes foregoing material benefits of citizenship, such as property ownership. Here return and refusal of citizenship are framed as moral choices affirming political commitment to the Tibetan struggle. Consequently, many view acquisition of property in exile as having an inverse relationship to the political commitment to the struggle for Tibetan independence/autonomy. A casual worker in a clothes shop in MT says, “People who want to live in India build houses. I want to return to Tibet so I didn’t” (Casual worker, interview, May 19, 2016). Elaborating this further another CTA official says, “While individuals might benefit from buying property, it will be at the cost of the country. The movement will weaken” (CTA official, interview, October 1, 2018).

On the other hand, for many others, property ownership does not necessarily preclude participation in the Tibetan struggle or the desire to return. Rather, it serves as a crucial material resource to further the struggle. A resident in MT argues,

Without money and without land, there is no struggle... Owning property in India doesn’t mean you won’t want to return (Resident at Majnu ka Tilla)

Others, who envision returning to Tibet, believe that permanent ownership rights over land will enable them to preserve the legacy of Tibetans who lived in exile and Tibetan spaces in exile. The former Pradhan asserts,

If I take ownership here, people won’t tear the buildings down. The Tibetan colony will still be alive even after I return to Tibet in the future. (former Pradhan)

The prospect of return also brings up specific anxieties of having to make a fresh start yet again for people living as a displaced population. Some Tibetans see themselves as continuing to live in India, the country of their birth, rather than moving to a country they have only heard about and imagined but never seen. For example, a shop owner in MT argues,

If Tibet becomes free, I will go back for a short visit. But we need to be realistic about this. We cannot leave behind the lives we have here. Also, there is uncertainty about resettlement. How will it play out?

This multiplicity of voices points to the complexities of lived realities of protracted exile. The RWA’s attempts to categorise these voices to evolve strategies have met with contentions from within and outside. These contentions emerge both from individual as well as political positions on the issue of property ownership. The RWA drawing on its legitimacy as an elected body has successfully evolved a dominant view in favour of the language of rights. This creates an enclave of Tibetans unmediated by the authority of the CTA, specifically in addressing land tenure.

Conclusion

Being an urban unauthorised colony that has remained outside India’s formal Tibetan rehabilitation processes, MT has an atypical trajectory of claims within the exile experience. MT’s history is one of fluid negotiations between formal/informal spaces, helmed by its RWA. With the regularisation process, it is now accommodated within formal municipal processes and its fate aligned with residents of other unauthorised colonies in Delhi. In doing this, it has recast its claims as rights rather than appeals for refuge. While the regularisation
process has not yet legalised its claims, the RWA remains confident that this strategy will eventually provide greater security of tenure. On the other hand, alignment with Delhi’s urban residents contradicts the dominant Tibetan refugee identity that is the basis of MT’s genesis and survival over the decades. Further, the regularisation process will eventually necessitate engaging with the issue of individual land ownership. This runs counter to the standardising logic of the current Tibetan rehabilitation regime, creating groups within the Tibetan community with different relationships with land. This contradiction and fracturing are outcomes of protracted exile that produce a multiplicity of identities of refugee and resident that seek overlapping structures of legitimacy to negotiate everyday precarities.

References


Local Politics in Controlling Commercial Sex in a Philippine Municipality

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**ABSTRACT** At the most local level, Philippine political structure relies on two institutions. The smallest political unit is the barangay, which has its own elected council and a barangay Captain. Sabang, the tourist town in focus in this article, constitutes together with twelve other barangays the Municipality of Puerto Galera. Sabang has since the early 1980s developed into a thriving international sex tourism town, which has brought the population lucrative business opportunities, but also a reputation of seediness, immorality and a place of illegal and illicit activities. Although prostitution is nationally illegal in the Philippines, it is also controlled and monitored by the municipal and barangay authorities. From the mid-1990s and forward, the municipal government of Puerto Galera have made several attempts to control the perceived “lewdness” (as it is formulated in official documents) of Sabang, in particular the behaviors and activities of the go-go bars. These attempts have been highly controversial and led to unprecedented events in municipal politics. I explore these charged issues in Puerto Galera ethnographically: who and which institutions are entitled to a) identify, and b) control “lewdness”? These questions inevitably draw attention to municipal policy-making and the various local responses to particularly controversial municipal policies.

**Keywords:** tourism anthropology, sex tourism, municipal politics, the Philippines

**Introduction**

Something hitherto unheard of took place in the Philippine municipality of Puerto Galera on 9 October 2006: an ordinance approved by the municipal council was for the first time as long as anyone could remember, vetoed by the Mayor. The subject of the ordinance was highly controversial as it demanded a complete shutdown of all establishments relating to a lucrative area of business, namely that of commercial sex.

In this article, I highlight issues of local tourism development and its relevance for municipal politics. Tourism and commercial sex tourism have become powerful subjects in municipal politics – including issues of tourism dependency and defining “morality” and “immorality” – a subject which will be explored through one particular political proposition: The Lewd Shows Ordinance. Before that I will establish the issue of municipal authority, and what kinds of powers municipal authorities may have when facing a problematic issue such as international sex tourism.

The article deals with policy formulation and the debates surrounding it and its consequences for local political debates and municipal politics in one specific municipality in the Philippines, and doing so by examining the development of sex tourism and its relation to political power of one particular tourist site, namely the town of Sabang.

The legal concerns of commercial sex is and has long been an issue of debate amongst feminist activist in the various shapes and forms as long as feminists have recognised the
Commercial sex is illegal in the Philippines. The Republic Act No. 10364 (2012) defines prostitution as: “any act, transaction, scheme or design involving the use of a person by another, for sexual intercourse or lascivious conduct in exchange for money, profit or any other consideration”. The illegal status of prostitution also involves trafficking, pimping and child prostitution (of persons under 18 years of age). It is illegal to sell sex and it is illegal to act as a third party by pimping or providing contacts between buyers and sellers of sex. It is not illegal to pay for sex.

The issue of whether or not, or in which ways any forms of commercial sex could, should or should not be legalised and the various consequences of the different ways of formulating the legal frameworks of commercial sex are matters that go beyond the scope of this article (see Jahnsen and Wagenaar 2017; Vuolajärvi 2019; Östergren 2017). Instead the details of how control over commercial sex is debated in the Municipality of Puerto Galera are closely examined.

It should be noted that although selling sex, trafficking and pimping is nationally illegal in the Philippines, commercial sex has a long history of being monitored, controlled and regulated. It is commonly the task of the different municipalities to regulate commercial sex. The nationally illegal status of prostitution and the municipal obligation to control the same might seem paradoxical. It is nonetheless a widespread practice that dates back to the era of Spanish colonialism (Ekoluoma 2017; Eviota 1992; Wiss 2005). The municipality of Puerto Galera has both the possibilities of approving commercial sex by issuing the permits and licenses required in order to work as a sex worker or run establishments offering commercial sex and at the same time to order the police to conduct raids in order to capture offenders of the national law: the sex workers and the owners and managers of places where pimping take place. The inhabitants of Sabang rarely express concern for the illegality of commercial sex but are instead worried of the potential moral consequences of hosting an international sex tourism scene. People in Sabang have developed various strategies to make sense of moral contradictions arising from morally condemning commercial sex while at the same time making it acceptable by emphasizing their dependency on sex tourism. For example, people in Sabang oftentimes rely on notions and practices that primarily delineate and contain what is considered immoral in order to guard themselves from potential moral degradation (see Ekoluoma 2019).

The Lewd Shows Ordinance or the long and heated debates on it did not deal with issues of illegality of commercial sex in Sabang, a circumstance that may reflect how taken for granted commercial sex has become de facto legal. Instead, the debates regarding Lewd Shows Ordinance centered around two main issues: the potential negative effect of the locals’ sexual morality, and of tourism dependency.

**Becoming a Sex Tourism Town**

The debate of “lewdness” in Puerto Galera centered on the commercial sex scene in Sabang. Sabang is a barangay, which is the smallest unit of the Philippine administrative system, and it is located by the northern coast of the island of Mindoro. Sabang is one of the 13 barangays that constitute the municipality of Puerto Galera. In the latest official records, in 2010, the municipality of Puerto Galera had a population of 32,521 (NSO 2013). Though mainly due to poor infrastructure, Mindoro has remained a rather obscure island, at least in terms of contribution to national economy and centralised Manila politics (Schult 1991).
However, through tourism the municipality of Puerto Galera and in particular barangay Sabang has become part of the globally spanning tourism sector. Since tourism to barangay Sabang has become central for the municipality as a whole and since the debates of the Lewd Shows Ordinance are either explicitly or implicitly centered on this barangay, Sabang and its tourism is presented in some detail.

Until the early 1980s, Sabang was a small, poor fishing village, but thirty years later it had become a popular site for primarily Western male tourists, seeking scuba diving during the daytime and commercial sex in the nighttime. The barangay now hosts approximately 5,000 inhabitants and has become identified by tourists, international travel guides, and local Filipinos as a sex tourism town. There are no official estimation of the number of tourists that visit Sabang but the municipality as a whole receives some 250,000 tourists yearly, a number which was as indicated by an announcement made public on posters throughout the municipality by the authorities in 2015. A majority of the tourists are Filipino holidaymakers during national holidays and the summer month of April, and they tend to stay at White Beach (barangay San Isidro). Sabang, on the other hand, receives tourists throughout the year and is almost exclusively visited by international tourists, mainly from Europe, Australia, USA, and South Korea. Sabang might not be the most visited tourist site in Puerto Galera, but it is considered of central importance in terms of revenues as foreign tourists tend to stay longer and spend more money there. Sabang was in focus of the debates regarding the Lewd Shows Ordinance as it is also identified as a place of dubious morality, commercial sex, binge drinking and general lewd behavior.

Some of the first tourists, who were Western men, married local women and settled in Sabang. Later they opened tourist-related businesses, such as accommodations and dive shops. When the number of tourists increased, inventive local Filipinos saw the opportunities to expand the activities of the nighttime, as diving is primarily a daytime activity. Sabang’s commercial sex scene was thus initially a local Filipino endeavor and, on their own initiative (Wiss 2005: 21-24). This aspect was, however, vehemently denied by most of my local Filipino informants, who strongly emphasize that commercial sex is something “from the outside”. Indeed, by the mid- to end of the 1990s, the local Filipinos who had owned, run and controlled the local sex scene had largely withdrawn from direct involvement in the go-go bars. The go-go bars are central venues in the organised commercial sex scene as they function as meeting points for sex workers and the clients (Ekoluoma 2017; Wiss 2005). The exact number of go-go bars have varied between three and six throughout the years of my fieldwork and they have been controlled and not been allowed to operate outside a specific area (central Sabang) nor have the number of go-go bars been allowed to increase. By the turn of the millennium Western foreigners had taken over the running of all but one of these bars, and a decade later Korean expats had established themselves as the principal owners of the go-go bars.

This transition from a pattern of local ownership to a situation where mostly foreigners own them is important for the locals today. For local Filipinos, the ones who lived in Sabang before tourism, there is now a clear division of “Us” versus “Them” with regard to the commercial sex industry. The responsibility of the demand and presence of commercial sex is placed on “Them”, the outsiders, for the current developments, such as the risk of spread of “immoral” behavior. As many of the locals told me: “We had no prostitution before the tourists came here, so it is a problem of tourism”. From a local perspective commercial sex
is something that involves outsiders; foreign tourists and women who do not originate from Sabang, i.e. sex workers (see Wiss 2005). This is not entirely accurate in practice as local men also engage in commercial sex but the perception that “we are the moral and they are the immoral” touches upon many of the sexual and moral boundaries that the locals apply in order to protect their collective moral integrity. This will be further explored with regard to the in-many-ways exceptional discussions on the proposition of the Municipal Ordinance regarding “lewd behavior”.

Method

The ones identifying themselves as “locals” are generally Filipinos with pre-tourism ties to Sabang. However, a significant number of Filipinos living in Sabang are domestic migrants who often come from poorer areas of the Philippines and seek work within the tourism sector (as babysitters, hotel maids, beach vendors, or sex workers). The tourists are mainly from Europe, Australia, USA, and, more recently from South Korea, who come to Sabang for vacations. Another significant group is the ‘expats’ (short for expatriates) of Western origin who form a community of their own. These men – over the last 15 years I have met less than a handful of female expats – run various tourism related enterprises in Sabang. They may also rely on pensions or other forms of social benefits from their home countries. Typically, the expat is often married or in long-term relationships with a Filipina.

It was with these individuals – local Filipinos, domestic migrants, foreign tourists and Western expats – that I worked while conducting ethnographic field studies in Sabang for a total of a year and a half, between the years 2003 and 2015. My stays ranged from 8 months to weekend visits. Over these years, I gradually learned more about the delicacies of municipal politics. I interviewed mayors and other elected politicians and talked to people involved in various interest groups and the different categories of people living in Sabang.

Municipal politics was often a topic of discussion, mainly with local Filipinos and expats. Many expressed disappointment with how the municipality and Sabang were governed. While foreign expats often would often publicly comment derogatively on Filipino national and local politics, locals tended to express their thoughts and opinions to me in confidence, in subtle terms and in hushed voices. This is certainly a simplified depiction of a general difference between what I saw as foreigners’ sense of entitlement to openly criticize local rule, and Filipinos’ fears of retributions if one’s opinions did not please the men in power.

By getting to know people in Sabang, being able to follow political initiatives such as various development projects and the Lewd Shows Ordinance from start to end, by talking to politically active individuals and to people who did not say a word of critique directed at barangay or municipal politics or politicians. I also learned about which families are often said to be indisputable leaders of the barangay and the municipality and which families are rarely engaged in local politics I have gained a long-term view of barangay and municipal political discourse.

With the evolution of politics over time, the families have emerged in a pattern of division; namely those who are in politics against those who are not. However, as the debate of the Lewd Shows Ordinance will show, the people in Puerto Galera do not abide by a simplistic and stagnated gap between “the rulers and politicians” and “the people”. The Lewd Shows Ordinance was widely discussed and the whole process of debating, voting and finally setting aside such a controversial ordinance that suggested closing down commercial
sex in the municipality, is a fitting example of how a community handled pressing concerns of intersecting interests: that of concerns of tourism dependency and sexual morality.

**Barangay Sabang in Puerto Galera’s Municipal Politics**

There are a few extended families in the central part of the municipality of Puerto Galera, which are generally regarded as the “native inhabitants” of Puerto Galera. They tend to trace their ancestry back to Spanish colonial time and they have their Spanish last names to prove their historical claims to the area (effectively dismissing pre-colonial populations). These families constitute a municipal affluent elite, continuing the structure of colonial organisation, and have managed to develop prominent businesses, gaining wealth, reaching high-ranking positions not only in municipal politics, but in other areas as well, such as in church organisation, heading various committees, occupying high-profile positions such as municipal Chief of Medicine or Chief of Police.

The municipality of Puerto Galera is a comparatively thriving one due to its ever-growing tourism industry. One survey of local demography defined six of the totally 13 barangays as tourism barangays (Cola and Hapitan 2004: 5). Aside from direct involvement in the tourism sector, common occupations throughout the municipality are farming, fishing, transportation, administration and clerical jobs, and running businesses such grocery and sari-sari-stores (small convenience stores), eateries, or mechanical shops.

Nowadays Sabang is generally considered a well-off barangay by most people I have met in the municipality, although statistical information to corroborate this perception has proven to be hard to obtain. A survey published in 2004 did indeed find that the mean income is significantly higher in tourism barangays (Cola and Hapitan 2004: 13). It is not only through a new economy of tourism that the people of Sabang are considered to be wealthy but also through the close association with foreigners (mainly Westerners) and there is a “rub off effect” – if the foreigners are identified as wealthy so also are the people associated with them. The success stories of Sabang and White Beach are not uncontroversial.

Jun is a local man in his 50s, who holds multiple positions in Sabang. He is involved in barangay politics, runs a small grocery store and is employed by a Korean expat as a general manager in one of the go-go bars. Jun phrased the shift in the general social status of Sabang:

These people in town [barangay Poblacion], they were the rich people in the 1970s. They were dealing with people from the other barangays like they were the kings of Puerto Galera. That was during the time that Puerto Galera didn’t have any tourists yet. The people from Sabang were fisher folks and in White Beach, I don’t know what they were doing, they were just quarrying sand and sent it to Manila for aquariums.

Jun continues to explain what happened next: “And then the tourists came [to Sabang] and now the rich people come from Sabang and White Beach. So, these people in town, they are jealous”.

What Jun refers to is the fact that as a whole, Sabang has become a comparatively well-off barangay. However, Puerto Galera is still considered “provincial” by many locals. Even though some families have been able tap into the lucrative tourism industry, the fortunes of these families can’t be compared to the affluent elites of the major cities. Associating oneself with the upper class or even the middle-class of Manila is not a viable option, not even for the more well-off inhabitants of Sabang (see Pinches 1999). Locally, they may be considered
newly rich and influential, but rarely has this resulted in influence outside the barangay or even in municipal politics. Sabang and its inhabitants thus continue to have limited political influence, although their social status within the municipality has been elevated.

Sabang had until the mid-2000s, only one single member in the highest circles of municipal politics: Rafael. After having served as a barangay Captain for many years, he was elected to become a municipal councilor. His political success, it was argued by people I talked to, was a result of him having managed to turn the wealth he had acquired from the sex industry into political power. He told me that he wasn’t very happy about his choice to enter municipal politics though. He planned to only serve one term, because “it was too much politics, just talk” while as a barangay Captain he had “more power”, that he wanted to be more involved in decision making in a more practical sense, which he felt he could do as a barangay Captain. He was nevertheless an active member of the Municipal council during the time of the controversies surrounding The Lewd Shows Ordinance, and I will return to his role in this historical event shortly.

Tourism and New Sources of Influence

For tourists the allure of Sabang as an untroubled paradise-like site in the tropics is considered to be under threat. The locals are well aware of the significance of Sabang’s appeal and ability to continue attracting foreign tourists but managing control over tourism development is not an easy feat. Tourism is a highly charged matter since controlling tourism also means controlling the industry upon which the people of Sabang, as well as the municipality as a whole, are dependent. There are underlying conflicts which go beyond the conventional local versus foreigner-divide, between different groups of local Filipinos, as well as the broader categories of Filipinos and foreigners; these surface when attempting to identify responsibility, problems and solutions to the issues of deterioration of a sense of home, continuity, and physical environment.

Power, economics, and politics in relation to tourism development and sex tourism might be the most researched areas in tourism studies across the disciplines, including tourism anthropology (Gregory 2014; Hall 1994; Macleod and Carrier 2010; Richter 1989; Smith & Robinson 2006; Williams 2013). This is not surprising given that tourism development has the potential to disrupt established forms of power and influence. Tourism and the economy it brings can incite substantial changes in the countries or communities where it develops. In the municipality of Puerto Galera and Sabang tourism has indeed ignited new political debates and opened up new platforms for change.

At a first glance Puerto Galera offers no exception from any schematic depiction of Philippine local and national politics, where representation in, and control of political local leadership has largely remained in the hands of a small number of elite families (Roces 2001; Sidel 1990, 1997). As noted previously, the municipality of Puerto Galera as a whole has since long been governed by a limited number of powerful families, originating predominantly from central barangays. Their control stems both from a typical “patron-client pattern”, where the mayors and the barangay captains describe themselves as “benevolent fathers” and “authority figures”. Political leaders as well as the general population tend to express an ideal of a peaceful and harmonious patron-client-like relationship between political leaders and their constituents. However, in practice, these informal agreements of patterns of responsibility and loyalty may be unstable, for example popular support
for particular political representatives may lessen if unpopular ordinances are supported. Although a municipal councilor is elected to represent the whole of the municipality, they are often closely associated with the barangay from which they originate which also is the barangay from which they gained electoral support. Rafael was seen by members of the whole municipality, and certainly by the people of Sabang, as a representative of Sabang and was expected to identify and support ordinances and other political issues in terms of what would benefit that particular barangay. This proved to be more complicated than he had initially thought, he told me in one of our talks, since people in Sabang do not have uniform experiences or ideas of how to maintain and develop the community.

New Platforms for Political Influence

Tourism has opened up alternative channels through which one can reach powerful positions without entering the conventional political arena, and there are new actors now who have the power to dictate local developments. Through tourism new platforms for organisation has been created and this has caused some concern among the traditionally powerful families. Several organisations have cropped up on the political arena, in the form of local interest groups, NGOs, and international aid foundations; these organisations have become increasingly involved in local discussions and development projects, primarily directed at environmental preservation (PEMSEA 2008, 2009; WWF 2005). Sabang has been in focus of this emerging environmental discourse in a manner none of the other 12 barangays in the municipality has.

The discussions of the future development of the municipality were increasingly intertwined with tourism development, especially in case of the barangay of Sabang. The discussions of two kinds of environments were of particular concern; those of the natural environment and issues of ecological sustainability, and those of the moral environment which directly points at issues relating to commercial sex, namely the Lewd Shows Ordinance. I will now turn to the latter.

Many divergent ideas of future development are manifested in the case of the Lewd Shows Ordinance. In short, the main idea of the ordinance was to close all establishments associated with what was viewed as commercial sex and replace them with what considered more morally appropriate alternatives. The public debates surrounding it mainly took place between the years 1996-2006. Several attempts had been made prior to the Lewd Ordinance from 2006 which have been mentioned in this article; for instance, several proposed ordinances to ban commercial sex and at the least regulate behaviors and degrees of clothing/nudity in the go-go bars between 1996 and 1999 (Wiss 2005: 15-24, 151-158). Some of these were adopted but unsuccessfully implemented or only implemented for a short period of time. A local journalist reported that while one of these new regulations were in place, the women working at the go-go bars were dancing on stages with full-lengths shirts and jeans and long dresses, in order to comply with one of these initiatives to curb “lewdness” (PGF 1997 2: 1). These attempts were reportedly rarely long lived. Yet, there seem to be continuing efforts to control and regulate commercial sex and how people behave and dress within the municipality.

From what I have learned since I last visited Sabang in 2015, the issues of exercising control over “lewdness” have still not been completely laid to rest, and a vast majority of my informants are convinced that this is a discussion that will continue as long as barangay
Sabang remains a sex tourist site. This signals that people in Sabang are deeply divided on the issue of maintaining or closing down the sex scene. In particular, the municipal authorities were held accountable for this failure. However, attempts to regulate commercial sex are very controversial since the people of the whole municipality fear any form of regulation leading to a drastic decline in tourism. Everyone in Puerto Galera is aware of the financial significance of sex tourism to Sabang, but sex tourism also represents something many see as highly immoral. Debates on the Lewd Shows Ordinance show how attempts were made by people in the municipality to take control over the tourism development and demand changes. The ordinance created partitions between the elected leaders of the municipality and led to political twists and turns that were previously unheard of.

**The Proponents: Protecting the Morality of the People**

In 2006, voices of protest were raised against the existence of go-go bars; never before had the protests against the local sex scene been so clamorous. A municipal ordinance authored by a member of the municipal council was proposed, titled “An Ordinance Prohibiting Lewd, Bold and Indecent Shows in Establishments for Entertainment and Providing Penalties for Violations thereof” (M.O. 2006. No. 06-09). The Lewd Shows Ordinance, as it became known, was the most comprehensive, detailed and well-defined local municipal ordinance I have come across. It soon became highly controversial and widely debated. In the ordinance it was stated that:

> It shall be the policy of the Municipal Government of Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro to adopt and implement measures designed to protect and promote public morals. […] The Municipal Government will prohibit all forms of entertainment, activities and business that contribute to the deterioration of the moral character of the people, particularly the youth. The Municipality […] will undertake measures to prevent […] activities that adversely affect the moral well-being of the people. (M.O. 2006. No. 06-09)

The focus of the Lewd Shows Ordinance was threefold: to identify and prohibit places of lewdness, to regulate nudity/clothing of the women working in various establishments which may be deemed of dubious morality, and to control particular movements of their bodies. The main proponents of the earlier ordinances were the Parish Pastoral Council of the Catholic Church, and members of other church-affiliated organisations, such as the Catholic Women's League. Their primary concern was the protection of the morality of the public, and, in particular, the effects the immorality of the bars could have on the local youth. The goal was to compel businesses to provide, as stated in the ordinance: “wholesome family entertainment such as restaurants, music lounge and sing-along bars, coffee-shops and other decent forms of activities”. At a hearing at the Municipal council one of the pro-ordinance speakers said: “Morality issues are more important than monetary issues”. The speaker acknowledged that the passing of the ordinance might be a setback for the tourism industry, but the resultant benefit would be a more moral community.

In the ordinance, activities in the establishments are defined in detail. For example, bold, lewd and indecent shows are identified as “any exhibition featuring women and/or men either totally nude, wearing transparent clothes, showing private parts of both sexes and provocative sexy dances. It also includes sex acts performed by women with the same or opposite sex”. Provocative dancing is defined as:
any exhibition of dance intended to sexually stimulate any member of the public and conducted in an entertainment facility. […] Performances or dances commonly referred to as table dancing, couch dancing, taxi dancing, lap dancing, private dancing or straddle dancing.\textsuperscript{1}

It should be noted that rather than being concerned for the welfare of the sex workers or their customers, it is actually the effects commercial sex may have on the host community, particularly youth, which inspire the proponents’ arguments. The main motivating factor lies in protecting the morality of the people outside of the go-go bars, not protecting the ones working inside them. The bars, and the behaviors inside them, are identified as sources of risk of immorality for the general population. It is explicitly stated that commercial sex as such is seen as something immoral and that the youth should be shielded from these kinds of establishments as allowing places such as the go-go bars in Sabang to operate would mean one accepting and naturalising it, and the Lewd Shows Ordinance is thus, foremost a way for the youth to flourish and develop into morally intact individuals.

The Opponents: Protecting the Tourism Industry

Not surprisingly, the opponents of the Lewd Shows Ordinance were predominantly owners of go-go bars and other business owners in \textit{barangay} Sabang, who feared that a ban or restrictions of the bars would have a profoundly negative effect on the tourism sector. In response to the proposed Lewd Shows Ordinance, a “Petition of the People of Sabang” was composed, an open letter to the Mayor signed by the six go-go bars and 32 establishments and 154 residents of Sabang, requesting \textit{barangay} Sabang to be exempted from the suggested regulations (Anonymous 2006). The opponents’ arguments center around their conviction of Sabang’s tourism being dependent on the go-go bars.

In the petition, readers are reminded of the already established rules and regulations in place to control the sex industry, and that if these were followed the sex scene would not be as offensive to other locals. People involved in commercial sex argue that it is in fact the municipal government’s failure to implement existing rules and regulations, and not reluctance on the part of the bars to comply with them. It was pointed out to me that mandatory bi-weekly gynecological check-ups for sex workers had not been enforced properly by the municipality, and that if such regulations had been implemented then those testing positive for STDs would have been dealt with accordingly; sex workers would not have been allowed to work unless and until testing negative for an STD. The opponents to the ordinance also argued that in Sabang, the go-go bars adhered strictly to the rules prohibiting local women to work as sex workers and local men from entering the go-go bars as customers. These informal regulations had long been in place – but not always implemented – in order to protect the \textit{barangay} from the perceived negative physical and immoral influences of the go-go bar.

In the petition of Sabang’s opponents of the ordinance, fears are expressed in rather dramatic terms that the people of Sabang will again suffer from poverty if the go-go bars are closed, since the go-go bars provide entertainment, thus providing “something for the tourists to do”. It is also argued that if Sabang is to retain its image as a popular tourist site

\textsuperscript{1} Even though I have spent some four months in Sabang’s go-go bars and equally many months in go-go bars in other parts of the Philippines, many of these detailed forms of performances were not something I’ve ever witnessed – the dancing that takes place in the go-go bars are generally on a stage, with no physical contact with the audience
(which includes commercial sex), then new investors will be attracted to open up businesses in Sabang (PGF 2006 4: 4, Sept. 16-30: 5).

The petition centers around the right to conduct businesses and the anticipated adverse effect such a ban would have on the tourism industry, and it is written in a frustrated tone:

What you are going to do is directly defeating our rights as people of Puerto Galera to have a business, to work and to live [and it is pointed out that] there already are rules and regulations in place, which allow for such businesses. [...] Because what you are going to do is directly killing the tourism industry, which you know is the main source of income of most people in tourism, in our barangay and even the people of every barangay in your area.

The sense of dependency of commercial sex is evident in the quote, for example in formulating a ban of commercial sex as a way of “killing tourism”. It is also suggested that the need for enforcing existing formal and informal regulations rather than banning the activities of the bars is seen as superfluous as there already are ordinances in place, and the letter states: “in accordance with this is the strict prohibition of the said lewd shows which is better than starving most of the people and giving them a chance to do crimes and take bad jobs just to earn a living”. All in all, the opponents do not directly go into a discussion of whether commercial sex should exist or not, only that it already does – and that it can be regulated in a manner that would make it less offensive to locals. This was, nonetheless, not what the proponents sought, instead they called for a complete ban of all forms of commercial sex, regulated or not.

**Political Turbulence**

On the day of the vote of passing or rejecting the proposed Lewd Shows Ordinance, nine out of ten councilors of the municipal council were present at the voting session. Eight were in favor of passing the ordinance, while one opposed. Rafael, the only one of the council’s representative originating from barangay Sabang was not present, and it was generally assumed that he was acting strategically by being absent. According to the people I talked to in Sabang as well as in other barangays this was expected but it was also interpreted as a sign of weakness, and some claimed that he had made up an excuse about being on travel for official business in order to avoid having to take a stance. Had Rafael been present at the voting he would have had to take a side and publicly declare his view on the issue of banning or consenting to commercial sex, something he had to that point efficiently refused to do. Rafael had few options, either vote for, which would go against his barangay’s economic interests, or against, which would risk branding him as supporting immorality.

The Lewd Shows Ordinance was passed by the municipal council on 27 September 2006. However, for an ordinance to take effect the Mayor has to sign it. But for the first time in living memory, the then Mayor Teo Atienza refused to sign a proposed ordinance, thus vetoing the ruling of the municipal council regarding the Lewd Shows Ordinance. This was a political option and maneuvering of power that wasn’t questioned: it was within his right to veto the Lewd Shows Ordinance, but it was an unexpected move. On 9 October 2006 the Mayor made the decision official through a letter to the public. In this letter he expresses a fear of the potentially negative effects on tourism a close-down of the bars would entail. The Mayor argues that he would not go into a discussion of morality and immorality:
Lewdness and obscenity may well be a state of mind in a specific situation. But for the business in Sabang, for instance, this situation is not lewdness and obscenity but entertainment. […] My veto of this ordinance is not a question of what is morally right and morally wrong. Rather, it is based on the pragmatic assessment of the conditions of the business industry and the influx of tourism, without disregard to the mandate to safeguard the moral fabric of the community. There must be a balance between absolute restriction and enlightened entertainment acceptable to our visitors.

By calling it “enlightened entertainment” rather than commercial sex, the Mayor effectively evaded the issue of the existence of commercial sex. In the letter, he did not define the difference between the enlightened entertainment or what he would consider lewd. He also specified Sabang, out of 12 other barangays, which would suffer the consequences. He noted that this form of entertainment would be directed at tourists, making a distinction between local immorality and a foreign one. The Mayor turned to notions of dependency of commercial sex and called for a stricter adherence to existing regulations. The Mayor continued:

If the concern of the council is to nurture moral values and prevent early moral degradation among the youth and the member of the community, then perhaps it can be simply work along the line of limiting access to these establishments and/or imposing guidelines on the hiring of entertainers and artists.

He thus referred to the practice of not allowing local men to enter the bar or local women to be hired as sex workers, rules that, at least according my experience, were being enforced already.

The municipal council considered the possibility to override a Mayor’s veto, but in the end the ordinance was laid to rest. When asking people why the Lewd Shows Ordinance was not pushed through people shrugged and said that election time was coming up and because of that no politician would want to take on this very charged subject. Amihan, an elderly local Filipina was not surprised of the outcome, that in the end nothing really happened, despite all the discussions. She suspected greed and corruption to be at the root of the problem: “Nothing, you know, this [showing her fingers with a money sign] prevails, and you know our government. […] Those high leaders should decide on things, but I think they can’t, you know what I mean”.

These kinds of reactions were the common among Filipinos and foreigners alike: that such a controversial subject as banning all forms of commercial sex was simply too risky a move to take within the municipality as the generally held view was that Sabang’s sex tourism was of central importance for the municipality as a whole.

However, this particular attempt to close down or regulate commercial sex in Puerto Galera went further than previous attempts. Out of ten municipal councilors, eight had in fact voted in favor of the Lewd Shows Ordinance. This time the question of a ban reached the second highest echelon in the municipal political power structure.

In the transcript of the voting session it is noted that Rafael was “On Official Business” and as his absence was classified as such he could not vote either “In-favor”, “Not in-favor” or as “Abstain”, which were the three options councilors had, and his position on the issue was thus not recorded (Minutes of the Regular Session of Sangguiniang Bayan 2006). I tried to contact Rafael to ask him about his absence from the voting session, but I was unsuccessful. He was well aware of my fieldwork in Sabang. I had recorded one interview
with him, and we had talked on countless occasions since he was the owner of a karaoke bar that I often frequented as it was a popular pick-up spot for sex workers who worked outside the controlled go-go bars (see Ekoluoma 2017). But every time I thought I saw Rafael he soon disappeared from my view. I could not help but wondering if he was actively avoiding me because he knew what I would like to talk to him about and that he wasn’t comfortable doing so. When doing fieldwork in Sabang I mostly felt that being candid with my staying in Sabang and with my research interest as an anthropologist working as a way of getting to talk to people, that people wanted me to hear about their thoughts, knowledge and opinions of tourism. But I was not able to talk to Rafael again after this particular voting session. Partly because he might have initially avoided me and later because he fell fatally ill. I never learned about his thoughts of the Lewd Shows Ordinance.

One of the immediate effects of the discussions of the ordinance was that a karaoke-bar in the central part of Puerto Galera, which was known to be a front for commercial sex for Filipino men, was closed down. However, in the years that have passed since the days of the stormy debates regarding the Lewd Shows Ordinance nothing much has changed in Sabang. Or, at least, there was no decrease in commercial sex. On the contrary, more go-go bars have opened since 2006. The previous ambition of keeping commercial sex what is locally considered as discreet, for example by having non-descript and rather innocuous signs and covering the entrances to the go-go bars with thick curtains in order to prevent passers-by from being “exposed” to the activities inside have increasingly been abandoned. During my last visit, in 2015, blinking lights, loud music and more bold signs had become more commonplace, making the commercial sex scene more noticeable than ever. People outside barangay Sabang tended to emphasize the importance of “containing” the immorality to Sabang specifically, but discussions of lewdness and morality and what kinds of behaviors could potentially be banned and which ones can be deemed acceptable have continued, in particular in relation to Filipino tourists behaviors and forms of entertainment in White Beach (Virola 2012).

Conclusion

Although the Lewd Shows Ordinance in the end was abandoned, the debates on the ordinance showed that Puerto Galera in general and barangay Sabang in particular hosts a politically active environment and people do not silently embrace or reject the go-go bars, but discussions are continuously undertaken. The ordinance itself, the petition written by people involved in Sabang’s go-go bars, the Mayor’s historical veto of the ordinance, the public hearings, newspaper articles and general talk of the town all revealed how sensitive and at times also infected the issue of living in a sex tourism town may be.

The ordinance was an attempt to take control over what some considered being an undesirable feature of the municipality, and this ordinance also highlighted issues of which actors held the upper hand in struggle over tourism, morality and political power. The conventional political elites and proponents of conventional Catholic morality did not have the ability to push through the Lewd Shows Ordinance. Although prominent politicians such as a vast majority of the members of the municipal council and members of several church-affiliated organisations strongly supported the proposed ordinance, in the end this form of political power was not sufficient. The municipal Mayor based his decision to veto the ordinance by referring to the risk such the proposed restrictions regarding lewdness
would pose to the tourism industry. The Mayor argued along the same lines as many others did in Sabang: that any kind of prohibition or further regulation of “lewd, bold and indecent shows” and commercial sex would result in a financial catastrophe for Puerto Galera as a whole. Ordinary and official seats of power were forced to give way for economic interests, and in these struggles between “old power” and a strong sense of dependency of sex tourism, the latter was given priority.

The Lewd Shows Ordinance illuminates issues of tourism and its potential political effects, how tourism may lead to changing sources of status, significance and influence and may alter political power structures leading to new events in municipal politics.

References
Divisive Democracy, Urban Trade, and Small-Small Politics in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT  Political governance in Tamale, Northern Ghana, is complicated by the conflict between the two royal lineages within the traditional Dagbon state that culminated with the killing of the paramount chief in 2002. The major political parties have in turn politicized this division and thus contaminated the national government with the Dagbon political predicaments. The Ghanaian constitution amplifies this bifurcation through its winner-takes-all system that vests great power in the president. Based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork, this article explores these entanglements by analyzing small-scale street and market traders’ relation to the political parties. Although politically interested and engaged, traders often find political parties as polarizing and responsible for the conflict. While this distrust toward political parties and the government risks undermining the entire project of decentralization, it also brings traders together. This perspective thus challenges common understandings of democracy by showing how social cohesion and a sense of community can be formed in response to democratic processes and development projects rather than resulting from them. This article simultaneously shows how, alongside the conflict, there has always been a peace process beyond that initiated by the political establishment and the eminent chiefs. This peace process manifests itself in the long-term economic and social relations that underpins the moral economy of small-scale urban trade.

Keywords: Ghana, democracy, conflict, trade, citizenship

Introduction

In Dagbon, the traditional Dagbamba state in Northern Ghana, there are two royal branches (called gates): the Abudus and the Andanis. Both aspire to the paramount chieftaincy title, Ya Na, which has led to divisions and violence. In 2002, Ya Na Yakubu Andani II and his court was killed by a group of Abudus resulting in more violence, disorder, and divisions politicised by the dominant political parties. It was not until January 2019 that a new Ya Na could be selected and installed (or enskinned as it is called in Dagbon).

Since 1992, Ghana has gone through a fundamental democratisation process in which the country went from being an authoritarian and extremely poor country run by military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s to become a liberal democracy with a burgeoning welfare system. Ghana is often uncritically described as “a model of democratic peace in Africa” (Afolayan 2010: 117) and measures high on democratic evaluations such as Freedom House or Polity IV. The democratisation has of course brought many possible developments to the Ghanaian population. Yet in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region, and the largest

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1 In Freedom House’s Freedom in World Scores (2017), Ghana measures 1/7 on Political Rights and 2/7 on Civil Liberties (1 is most free, and 7 least free), and has the highest aggregate score on the continent (Freedom House 2017). In the Polity IV democratic index, Ghana scores 8 on a 10 (full democracy) to -10 (autocracy) scale (Center for Systemic Peace 2011)
city in Dagbon, it also formed a deeply politicised environment, which added to the already critical and at times violent conflict within the traditional chieftaincy politics. In Tamale and in many other places around Ghana, the political parties thrive on similar divides and rely on what Comaroff and Comaroff (2016) describe as ID-ology (Identity-ology as opposed to idea-ology), which challenges the idea of a representative democracy in the Western liberal sense. The confluence of local traditional governance with democratic procedures and national party mobilisation created a context in which democracy as a political system appeared divisive and conflict-creating.

Meanwhile, the government of Ghana is in the middle of a formalisation process that among other things aims to better control and tax certain economic activities and improve urban planning. This direction rests on a politics of informality in which spaces, people, and activities first have to be defined as informal by the state in order to be formalised (Jennische 2012, 2018). Through the implementation of welfare services, the state has directed new rights to a segment of the population that was previously excluded.

This article attempts to shed new light on these processes of democratisation and formalisation by analysing how small-scale traders act and perceive these developments. Small-scale everyday trade now fills the streets, gutters, pavements, traffic islands, open areas, and planned marketplaces in all Ghanaian cities. Traders have become important nodes, fulfilling essential functions in the maintenance of the city. They are everywhere, where people move and where authorities are unable or unwilling to prevent their presence. In this respect, their activities make up an indistinct and expanding marketspace. Meanwhile, the economic restructuring that Ghana undertook to become a part of the global economy also led to an increasing number of people finding their means of survival along the streets and public spaces. As Bayat (2013: 33) describes, developing countries, because of the global restructuring, have seen a “double process of, on the one hand, integration and, on the other, social exclusion and informalization.”

In this article, I argue that in the context of formalisation and democratisation, traders within this expanding marketspace formed their own view on development and democracy, and positioned themselves in a moral mode of disappointment and distrust against the state’s performance. They subversively stated claims to the government demanding that their ability to make a living and to progress must not be threatened by neither corruption and polarisation nor political interventions and development projects. These sentiments derive from the norms and values of the moral economy and the traders’ outlook on society. I frame these responses as a small-small politics; a productive engagement with the national political discourse and projects, that enabled traders to dismiss and condemn the government while it simultaneously laid the foundation for an alternative form of citizenship that was more inclusive and trustworthy. Small-small is an emic term that I have previously allowed to frame the specific moral economy of small-scale trade in Ghana (Jennische 2018). It builds on two sets of norms on how to behave and conduct business. First, business should be about gradual progress, rather than quick profits. Small-small thus encapsulates the morally infused temporality of business expansion as well as the size of the markup. Second is the norm of letting others in, which concerns both the obligation to allow others to buy and sell goods on credits and to share selling places along the streets and marketplaces.

This article is made up of parts from different chapters of my doctoral thesis in social anthropology (Jennische 2018).
Simultaneously enabling and restrictive, small-small generates solidarity and trust among traders. This perspective thus challenges common understandings of democracy by showing how social cohesion and a sense of community can be formed in response to democratic processes and development projects rather than resulting from them.

The study is based on an ethnographic fieldwork of participant observation and interviews between September 2012 and June 2013 among small-scale urban traders in Tamale. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from several parts of the state – politicians, tax-collectors, public officers from various departments, the regional police and security coordinator. I have also interviewed two centrally positioned Dagbon chiefs and numerous representatives of different trader associations. Although the material spans over several topics, a central theme is the relation between the state in its many forms, local traditional politics, and small-scale trade. The presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2012 and its long legal aftermath were the central political events during the fieldwork.

**The Dagbon Dispute and Party Politics**

The enskinment of the Ya Na Abubakari Mahama II in January 2019 that rests on an agreement between Abudu and Andani leaders, will hopefully in time end the conflict that has stifled the Dagbon state for decades. After all, the conflict derives from the power invested in the paramount chief. Much has been written about the complex entanglements of the Dagbon conflict (see Ladouceur 1972; Mahama 2009; Tonah 2012; Awedoba 2009; MacGaffey 2006b, 2013). The purpose here is to go through the most significant events in order to contextualise traders’ position toward local and national politics and to explain how party politics in Tamale cannot be separated from the divisions caused by the Dagbon conflict.

Since the colonial period and the British’ indirect rule, Ya Na, who resides in Yendi, controls large areas of land. The Abudus and Andanis are the two competing royal lineages, or gates, who aspire that power. The Dagbon chieftaincy structure is largely a patrilineal system consisting of hundreds of hierarchically ordered chiefs. MacGaffey (2013: 22) argues that before the formation of the Northern Territories, Dagbon was not very state-like at all. Hierarchies of division and subdivision were not as distinct as the colonial rule saw them to be. But through the implementation of indirect rule, the authority and power of Ya Na expanded.

The history of the conflict can be traced back to the mid-19th century, and the death of Na Yakubu in 1864. Two out of his many sons, Na Abudulai and Na Andani, were able to exclude other sons of previous Ya Nas from becoming legitimate kings. All Ya Nas since then are descendants from either Abudulai or Andani. The lineages have ever since been involved in several violent disputes over power (See MacGaffey 2013: 54-57). At first the conflict was mostly of local concern, but after independence, the conflict reached the highest political level of the young Ghanaian nation. In 1960, President Nkrumah established the Legislative Instrument 59 (LI 59) to solve the conflict between the Abudus and Andanis. It stated that the two houses would alternate holding the position of Ya Na. Although the two houses view alternation as a legitimate method of succession, it has never really been fully in play. The LI 59 maintained peace until the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966. In this process, the Abudus and Andanis had become aligned with the dominant political parties, who in
turn promised support for their votes. The Andanis lined up with Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP), later the National Alliance Liberals (NAL) and finally the National Democratic Congress (NDC). The Abudus lined up with the Progress Party and later the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (MacGaffey 2013: 62-68; also see Tonah 2012).

The conflict has turned violent in Yendi and Tamale on many occasions, but the most dreadful event took place after the elections of 2000 when NPP won and many Abudus in Yendi believed things would change in favor of their cause. In March 2002, violence broke out which culminated with the murder of Ya Na Yakubu Andani. To further aggravate the situation, Ya Na’s body was dismembered and parts of it used as trophies when the perpetrators paraded through the streets of Yendi (Awedoba 2009: 206). 30 people were killed and 36 houses along the palace were burnt down.

The killing of Ya Na and his court thus peaked a long ongoing dividing process between the Abudus and Andanis and their supporters. The killing was followed by a long-term curfew and state of exception in Tamale and Yendi. Tamale’s General Assembly was dissolved until the next election. Meanwhile, the metropolis was governed by a 12 member Interim Management Committee, supported by different technical departments (UN-HABITAT 2009). The Andanis received strong support and help from the NDC and its founder, former President J.J. Rawlings, while the Abudu on the other hand received promises from NPP. Since Ya Na was killed during the NPP regime, many Andanis claimed the party played a part in the murder. The lack of security and the inability to convict the perpetrators during its time in power further deepened these perceptions. The government’s commission of inquiry clearly stated in its report that the police never made a proper investigation of the murder, but also blamed both parties for provocative actions. Later, two men were tried for the murder of Ya Na, but the evidence did not hold in court. A committee of Eminent Kings headed by the Asantehene (the paramount Asante chief) was appointed to mediate between the parties. In 2006, Ya Na was buried, and his son was appointed as regent but without the ability to appoint chiefs or alienate land. The committee’s conclusions, a “Road Map to Peace” and later a “Final Peace Agreement” did not settle the matter. After NDC’s victory in the elections of 2008, Andanis were hoping that Ya Na’s murderers would be punished and a new Andani Ya Na enskinned. In April 2010, the military arrested 30 men in Yendi of which fifteen were put on trial. One of them escaped and the other 14 were acquitted. In Yendi, where a majority are Abudus, people were celebrating, while in the Andani-dominated Tamale, Andani youths attacked NDC offices, and the city was placed under another curfew (MacGaffey 2013: 65-68).

The acts of political violence were directly connected with the intermingling of Dagbon chieftaincy with national politics. This, in turn, manifests itself in a division of urban space. The city of Tamale is divided in line with political party affiliations. Neighborhoods, streets, and mosques are often associated with one of the major political parties. Some Andani informants even feared entering the NPP/Abudu stronghold of Aboabo. Palaces were also seen as either NPP or NDC. When it is time for Damba celebrations there was a perception among some that the Abudus and the Andanis gather at different palaces. According to MacGaffey (2006a, 2006b) the biggest mosques are also connected to different sides, a separation that goes back to the 1950s.

Abudu and Andani divisions interact with other forms of belongings, such as that between Dagbamba and other ethnic groups. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000) argue that belonging, ethnicity, and regionalism are key features of African parties. They argue that
democratisations in Africa have led to a rather non-liberal emphasis on cultural differences, belonging, and autochthony. In many situations, a new divide between those acclaimed to be autochthons and those perceived to be allochthons (strangers or newcomers), have emerged, constituting a new form of ethnicity. Although ethnic or regional belonging were at times important when accessing a place to sell in Tamale, that behavior was then always condemned, and regarded as examples of “tribalism”. Also, local and national trader organisations had mobilised against some of the foreign traders who ignored the morally regulated roles of the market networks by selling imported goods directly to the end consumers. Yet, in most cases the relation between Dagbamba and others was not politically infected and did not generate any wider form of mobilisation. Traders thus formed a community based on moral norms and shared experiences in this context of division and conflict. Those who did not conform to the norms, no matter of whichever ethnic belonging, were often morally condemned and accused of being greedy.

**Democracy Increases Polarisation**

The Abudu–Andani dispute is further amplified by a democratic political system that vests almost all powers in the President. Ghana is a politically divided country. NDC (in power 1993-2000 and 2009-2016) controls the north, the coast and the east. NPP (in power 2001-2008 and 2017 onward) controls the middle regions, and especially the densely populated and rich Ashanti region, with its capital Kumasi. This divide goes back to the time of independence and the days of Kwame Nkrumah. But there are also many places around Ghana that have strong political tensions within them. As in Tamale, this is often the case where there are chieftaincy disputes (see for instance, Lund 2003, Lentz 2006). In a way, the democratisation has provided a space for conflicts such as that between the Abudus and Andanis to be played out.

The local governments of the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDA) are, as stated in the Constitution, designed to be “non-partisan” (Nyendu 2015), in the sense that its assemblymen must not be associated with any political party. The assemblymen are either elected as individuals representing an electoral area or appointed by the President in consultation with traditional authorities and other local interest groups. The purpose behind the nonpartisan form of local government is to allow members to act independently, rather than following the interests of the political parties that are believed to create disunity and divisions. But, the President of Ghana still has great power over MMDAs since he is allowed to appoint some of the assemblymen as well as the Metropolitan Chief Executive (MCE, often referred to as mayor). The system is widely debated, and critics have argued that because of the role of the President, the assemblies are in fact already partisan (see Nyendu 2015). In this article, the government, unless specified, refers to the local and the national government. Since the President is so deeply involved in the formation of all local governments, they better represent the President than the districts’ citizens. This means that the local and national governments are often conflated, and traders rarely distinguish

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3 “A candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit shall present himself to the electorate as an individual, and shall not use any symbol associated with any political party.” (Ghana, 1992 Constitution: Article 248, p 1, in Nyendu 2015: 58). “A political party shall not endorse, sponsor, offer a platform to or in anyway [sic] campaign for or against a candidate seeking election to a District Assembly or any lower local government unit.” (Ghana, 1992 Constitution: Article 248, p 2, in Nyendu 2015: 58).
between them. The politics of Tamale Metropolitan Assembly is often projected onto the national government and vice versa.

The importance of winning the presidency creates in turn a “winner-takes-all system” in the sense that the opposition will have almost no representation in the local government even if a majority of its residents have voted on them. The winner-takes-all is a frequently occurring description of Ghanaian democracy, especially among Ghanaian political scholars (see for instance Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh 2012; Gyampo 2016; Abotsi 2013) and the news media. The Constitution Review Commission (2011) also recognised the tensions, acrimony and conflicts associated with these political mechanisms. The winner-takes-all system is further boosted by the government’s ability to allocate public sector jobs, construction contracts, consultancies, and directorships. After a turnover in government, major reallocations are done based on party loyalty. Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh (2012) describe how this polarising winner-takes-all competition becomes particularly critical in the light of Ghana’s recent oil findings. They see in this regard, a “toxic politics,” with political parties becoming merely campaign machines dependent on “foot soldiers” who uncritically do their party’s dirty work, and in which political “control of the state provides the part in power with enormous material and political resources and advantages over its rivals” (Gyimah-Boadi and Prempeh 2012: 101).

The national government’s decentralisation ambitions, which occur in large through the MMDAs (Nyendu 2015), has thus further intensified the polarisation. Buur and Kyed (2007) discern a trend starting with the numerous democratisation processes around Africa in the early nineties in which traditional authorities in various ways have regained their legitimacy and been given a new importance (see Bierschenk 2006, and Hagberg 2007 for ethnographic examples from Benin and Burkina Faso). While chiefs in Ghana are prohibited from being actively engaged in party politics (Article 276 of the Chieftaincy Act of the 1992 constitution), the Dagbon conflict and the killing of Ya Na illustrate how chieftaincy cannot be taken out of the context of political parties. The assemblies’ increased power has led to local conflicts, such as the Dagbon dispute, becoming national political affairs, which may potentially undermine the decentralisation project (see Debrah 2014).

Therefore, from one point of view Ghana is a democratic role model in Africa. The leading position in African political developments is important for Ghana’s self-image as the first sub-Saharan nation to become independent; marketing itself as the “Gateway to Africa”, and having one of the continents highest growth rates. But from another point of view, that of how democracy vernacularises (Michelutti 2007) in local understandings and practices, we see a political situation that is potentially volatile. We see a toxic winner-takes-all form of competition that in Tamale infiltrates social life and enables local chieftaincy disputes to be played out on a national political arena. The tensions within the Dagbon state work underneath other forms of politics which thus complicate politicians’ ability to rule the city.

Trading Across Divisions

Trading takes place in the context of polarisation, violence, and divisions. But among traders, those divisions are harder to discern. Abudus and Andanis trade together, they claim

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4 In 2011 Ghana was even the second fastest growing economy in the world (in terms of % GDP growth) after Mongolia (Pasquali 2015, Nov 01).
selling places together, and assist each other in their daily work. While Dagbamba traders do see themselves as either Abudu or Andani, within small-scale trade those identities are not allowed to dominate and influence economic and social life. They are deemphasised by a moral economy of inclusion and solidarity that I frame as small-small (see Jennische 2018). Instead, Abudus and Andanis are joined in their critique against dividing mechanisms. Drawing on Fassin’s (2009) understanding of moral economy, small-small refers to the norms, values, and obligations that are produced, circulated, and used by actors in the marketspace. Hence it defines what is good and bad. It sets up standards, procedures, and rules. It is a relational code of conduct, and a prescriptive, normative outlook on the world that guides behaviour, forms politics, and legitimises critique and resentment.

The small-small builds on two sets of norms, it is about gradual progress rather than quick profits, and it is about the inclusive norms of sharing, giving credit and enabling further trade on the commodity. These norms along with traders’ obligations and dependencies to one another through the many layers of credit relations and the sharing of space, help to generate trust and solidarity that bind traders together in shared social and relational conditions despite their different economic possibilities. This community furthermore thrives on the disappointment against a corrupt state. In relation to this, I thus see small-small politics evolving. It is a form of local politics, injected with disappointment against a polarising, obstructive and unreliable government. The moral economy thus necessitates and exists in a relation to the state.

When traders and security personnel talked about the years of violence, they described the marketplaces as the only institutions in town working as intended. The conflict did not affect the loyalties and trust within the supply chains of the market networks to the same extent as it did outside of the market. Few changed who they traded with. In fact, some traders thought the years following the killing of Ya Na were quite successful. For instance, Hajia Fati, an experienced vegetable seller with a stall along a major street in the city, argued that the conflict and the curfew did not affect her business in any way, people from both sides still came to buy her carrots, cabbage, and onions. But traders were mindful in reaching their home before the curfew which during its strictest hours demanded that everybody were home before 6 pm.

The Tamale Central Market had since democratisation become a practically independent part of the city, a self-taxed place with its own regulations and moral rules, which among other things allowed for traders to rebuild and extend their shops against the regulations of the local government. As the city’s political governance were practically non-existent during the years following the murder of Ya Na, this also reinforced the “independence” of the Central Market. However, the conflict deeply affected the work and organisation of the trader associations in Tamale, since they were often aligned with the political parties. The surviving associations were in 2013 merely remnants of what they used to be in terms of organising power, influence, and attractiveness (see Jennische 2018).

In the following section, we will see how traders maintained their business during these political difficulties. Relying on good terms with customers and fellow traders, and on the small-small moral economy that values gradual progress and inclusivity, traders criticised the government for letting politics obstruct their ability to trade. Traders believed the incumbent and previous governments had polarised the town and country and blamed the disruptive political parties and the bickering political climate for hampering the development. We will see how this relation to the government and the political parties was expressed during the
2012 presidential and parliamentary elections and in relation to the corruption and greed that traders argue, characterise the political establishment. As argued, these shared sentiments emerge out of the moral economy of small-scale trade. I see this productive engagement with the regular political levels as a small-small politics, which lays the foundation for a more inclusive form of citizenship.

**Electoral Disappointment and Economic Standstill**

Before the elections of 2012, party campaigns inundated the marketspace. The elections were planned for Friday the 7th of December. But, due to malfunctioning verification machines, the elections had to continue on the following Saturday as well. However, on Friday, results were already coming in that leaned toward a victory for National Democratic Congress (NDC, the government party). Yet, representatives from the opposition, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), held a press conference on Saturday afternoon claiming that reports they received from their polling agents all over the country predicted their much-wanted victory. On Sunday, the Electoral Commission (EC), declared NDC the winner. In the parliamentary election, the NDC won a majority of the 275 seats (148 seats as opposed to 123 for NPP, 1 for PNC and 3 independent candidates). In the presidential election, John Mahama obtained 50.7 % of the votes against Akufo-Addo’s 47.7 %. Speculations were rife. Were the reports given to NPP false, or had NDC been able to defy the new biometric verification machines and somehow added NDC votes to the ballot boxes? Or had NPP early on realised the outcome of the voting, and hence spread suspicions of irregularities, hoping for a second chance?

NPP representatives boycotted the inauguration ceremony which took place as planned on the 7th of January 2013. Earlier, on December 28, the party declared they would file a petition with the Supreme Court, after having reviewed presidential votes from the 26,000 polling stations. NPP disputed more than 1.3 million votes. They claimed the elections were rigged through over-voting, and a malfunctioning biometric fingerprint system. The recently installed biometric machines that were to confirm the fingerprint of every voter broke down in 19 % of the polling stations (Pryce and Oidtman 2014; Brierley and Ofosu 2014). It took the Supreme Court eight months, until August 2013, to declare the NDC candidate and John Mahama as validly re-elected president.

Both television and radio broadcasted the court proceedings live. In the beginning of the case, the frustration and irritation were palpable. Although rumors and allegations aimed primarily at the politicians of the other side spread across town and the country was torn over who should be in power, most traders were upset over how this caused disunity and they were angry over the political elite’s incompetence to maintain stability. They were of course concerned about the allegations of rigged elections, but a general position was nevertheless that it should not lead to the political and economic standstill that the preparation and execution of the trial had led to. It was bad for business, and the politicians should have already solved the matter. The traders thus directed their accusations against the elite, against both parties, and against the political system as such, rather than against a perceived other side.

In May 2013, Saibu was disappointed with his business. He had not been selling any shoes for a whole week and had sold only one pair the week before. To Saibu, the obvious reason for this was the live broadcast of the court proceedings that was to air from Monday to Thursday every week, until it was all finished. Saibu was convinced his customers were
home watching TV, rather than coming to town. Maybe he was right. Nevertheless, this annoyed him and his trading friends on the street corner. Their view was that they had already voted, they had done their part. It was now up to the politicians to follow their votes.

The people in town were also following the broadcasts. I saw the Central Market chairman bending over the speaker of his wooden colored radio, and a bit further inside, Selina was turning the wheel frantically on her small green radio, but the reception was crackly. Perhaps the radio wave was lost in the narrow lanes of the market before reaching her store. Hussein had left his pile of trousers at the street with his small boy to follow the TV broadcast from the mobile phone shop close by. He had voted for NDC. But since he was frequently sent away from the streets because of the recently formed task force that had been given mandate to evict traders occupying streets, pavements, and open spaces in the city, he hoped the court case would give NPP the victory. This eviction process framed by the government as a “decongestion” had severely affected his business and he believed a change of government would make the authorities leave his pile of trousers alone. Seidu was listening via the hands-free utility of his mobile phone’s FM unit. I often borrowed one of his earphones. We sat tight listening together until there were customers.

While trying to evaluate, traders complained about the effect the court case had on their business, and what influence the expenses of a re-election would have on the economy. A general claim was that they should all just let it go, accept the loss, like the loser in a football game. In Ghana, politics is often metaphorically described through football.

Ghana has a reputation for organising free and fair elections, but the events and aftermath of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections demonstrates how the small-small politics developed in relation to the divisive democracy, and how it was grounded on disappointments and narratives of injustice. Elections are central features of any democratic citizen-making project, and the way they are held shape opinions about the political system and establishment. For Comaroff and Comaroff (2016: 31), democracy in the so-called Global South is today a fetish, “widely regarded as an enchanted force, one that, if only it could be fully domesticated, not hijacked by those who seek to empower and enrich themselves, might solve real problems in the world.” While elections are designed to let citizens peacefully express their political views through the ballot, democratisation has, as we have seen in the context of Tamale, also contributed to the deeply polarised environment and the conflict within the traditional chieftainship. The electoral process designed to peacefully manage and offset stratifications in the society, and to bring unity around how to make decisions, thus nourished factions and divisions. Incidents that in the larger picture of Ghanaian democracy would be small and insignificant, were magnified to characterise the entire democracy, breeding disappointment and distrust. From the perspective and voice of traders we see how there are simultaneously processes, especially in the marketspace, that work against this. The idea of democracy is thus challenged in a different way than by the politics of belonging, in that actors in opposition to divisions partly caused by democratization and party politics can form an alternative community based on cohesion, unity and solidarity.

Corruption, Greed, and the Mobility of Money

The polarised political climate of Ghana and Tamale has not only lead to divisions of people and geography, but the “winner-takes-all” form of politics has also led to a corrupt system of government contracts that forces contractors to align themselves with the political parties.
Large government contracts in construction projects, goods supply, or in the operation of public utilities are according to Osei-Tutu, et al. (2010: 247) often “targeted by corrupt public officials and politicians in partnership with unscrupulous business corporations or their agents”. Bierschenk argues that government contracts in Benin are a major cause for the increasing corruption affecting the country. This is due to the “feedback mechanism” (Bierschenk 2006: 549), in which parties need sponsorship from businesspeople, who in turn rely on government contracts. Similarly, in Ghana, government contracts are subjected to favoritism and financial irregularities, which may even risk the government’s chances of securing loan packages from the IMF (PRS Group 2015: 12).

By the end of the term and during the court case, several traders argued that the NDC government did not bother to pay their contractors. The common phrase “there is no money in the system” frames the general view of how corruption and greed caused the government to fail in letting money trickle down to the traders in the markets. Instead, the money entered the pockets of the politicians and officeholders. This was the fault of the government, they claimed; it was their responsibility to make the money move accordingly. For young Fuseini, a mattress and pillow trader in central Tamale, this was one reason why his business was going slow. He believed the corrupt system of government contracts hampered the flow of money.

You know, the contractors, those building the schools, the roads and everything. They sign contracts with the [national] government through the local government. And the state has been late in paying them. Not even their heads, the top ones, have received the money. So, they haven’t paid their workers and the contractors are the ones distributing the money in Ghana. […] I know many contractors, and they have been telling me. The only way they can get their money is through seeing someone at the local government, paying him some money for him to call the minister in Accra, and then pay him small so that the money will be distributed. […] You have to pay to get paid. In Africa here, and in Ghana especially, it is common.

The lack of “money in the system” was seen to be due to the government failing in two conflicting regards: spending too much and spending too little. During the spring of 2013, Linda claimed that there was “no money in the system” because the government had spent it all. “But if they have spent it all, would it not have reached the market?”, I asked. “It’s because they are holding the money, and not letting it out,” she then explained. Yakubu in turn expressed something similar, when I pressured him on why the market was not moving. There is no money in the system, didn’t you hear about the former MPs [Member of Parliament] getting two billion each [referring to the old currency, 200 000 in GH¢]? That’s the problem. The government and the ministers chop [spend] money too much. […] They should put money into the system. Now contractors are working for one or two years without receiving any money. They should pay them faster, so the market can move.

The spending of money did not generate movement. Instead, the money stayed within the community of government officials. As Stephen asserted:

The politicians only care about themselves. Take the MMDCE [Metropolitan, Municipal, District, Chief Executives] who have salaries of 7,200 Ghana cedi per month. Not even during my whole life I will be able to make that kind of money. During the campaigning, they can ask us to do anything; “Sleep there” they say [he points at the pavement to his right],...
and we sleep there, but then they don’t mind us until the next four years. It’s the same for all parties. Before the elections of 2000, which was the first election I was allowed to vote in, I thought it would be better with the NPP in power, but it turned out they were just as greedy.

The comment “there is no money in the system” was especially common to hear during the spring of 2013, the time of political liminality when everybody awaited the outcome of the petition. The trope was a way for traders to understand large macroeconomic processes, and their role within it. Through it, they realised their inability to produce incomes and growth themselves, having to rely on the flow of money generated primarily by government contracts. As traders made business on the margins, with small-small profits on every transaction, they saw the importance of money moving between individuals, and through institutions and companies. Hence, “no money in the system” was an accusation against the state and government for not taking the financial and moral responsibility to make money move. In the context of polarisation, these shared accusations against the government brought traders together. They could share a position of moral superiority by claiming that the government and the political elite of both sides were driven by immoral motives like greed and therefore failing to take the necessary steps to increase the flow of money.

**Small-Small Politics and Citizenship**

The shared view of the government and political parties as polarising, corrupt, greedy, and obstructive, is essential for the small-small politics. That said, there were those who tried to benefit as much as possible from the political parties, and the politicised situation in general. They joined a party and, by following its orders, they received benefits and resources. On the other end of the continuum, there were those who withdrew from any form of engagement with national or local politics, refused to join a political party or even vote. But such withdrawal was rarely motivated by a non-interest in the politics or development in Ghana; it was rather the ultimate critique of what they saw as a corrupt and unresponsive state. As such it was a political statement.

But most traders’ political engagement was somewhere in the middle. They voted but did not campaign for any party. They often engaged in political discussions but not in a polarising way. They blended a pride of being Ghanaian and of the Ghanaian progress with complaints and critique of the political establishment and could thus easily gain support and consensus with others, no matter their party preference. In contrast to a polarising and corrupt political elite, they emphasised dignity, honesty, community, and trust.

The political parties represented opportunities. But for traders, these opportunities came with the cost of having to represent that which caused the divisions and violence in town. A common gift by the parties were fuel coupons. But for more engaged activists, the parties also financed their Hajj journeys. Many actors’ only chance to travel to Mecca was through joining a party. For instance, Hajia Mariam and her son, were able to travel to Mecca thanks to their involvement in the NDC. Before the conflict turned violent in Tamale, Hajia used to be a strong NDC supporter. However, she did it silently, so it would not affect the business too much. When the violence in 2002 intensified between the Abudus and Andanis, Hajia withdrew from politics. When I tried to talk to Hajia about party politics she was very reluctant to discuss it. Maybe she was still silently working in support of the NDC, but my impression was that she no longer wanted to be involved in it.
Joining a party could thus be very important for climbing the social ladder; however, it could also backfire against the business if one did not take care. It could be difficult to combine with the moral economy of street and market trading, which required making and maintaining relations. Mohammed, a young shoe and slipper trader, argued that joining a party would make his friends disassociate themselves from him. The parties were simply too associated with violence and morally condemned behavior. Both Dagbambas and non-Dagbambas shared this view. Paul, a man of Asante ethnicity, was about 30 and sold mobile phones and computer accessories such as flash memories and headphones. While his two-year-old daughter was playing around on the street together with the neighboring trader’s children, he explained that here in the north there was too much “tribalism,” and that this was due the influence of the political parties.

That tribalism is big here, and in the rest of Africa, is because of our corrupt leaders, who only care about themselves. They are not like you the white who give food to those who have nothing. Our leaders keep everything themselves, no matter how rich they are.

At the same time, he did believe Ghana was slowly improving. The last elections were peaceful, and it was not like before, when the rich politicians armed their supporters and told them to fight.

Small-small, things improve. But both parties are equally bad. There is a song, ‘Our money, chop chop, fast fast something’ that describes how politicians absorb all the money for themselves. ‘You have to become a member before you chop,’ they sing.

Becoming a member of a party is the quickest way to become rich, Paul argued. “The money will come to you, and soon you have both a house and a car.” But joining a party means risking your life.

You’ll be the first to die. Everything is politicised and a while ago, someone died over here. All the politicians were involved, trying to free the accused. We on the street, we suffer. They use us for campaigning, but then not mind us until the next election.

The death that Paul refers to was a tragic event of political violence that took place shortly after the results of the 2008 elections were announced and that gave NDC the victory. A young butcher and NDC activist was killed outside the butcher house next to the Central Market. Four young Abudu-men were accused and caught with the “help” of some NDC youth groups who by force took one of them to the police on their motorcycles. There are different versions of the story. But the death of the butcher was interpreted by all in the light of the Abudu–Andani dispute. It took until 2013 for the men to be convicted. The long time in custody without trial was seen from both sides as yet another example of the injustice against them.

While the elections were a major part of the construction of the Ghanaian liberal democracy and its citizens, the politicised conflict and the inability of the government to solve the issue increased the demand for another kind of community. The marketspace formed such a community. There the conflict was not as present; it did not obstruct the everyday life and trade to the same extent. It encourages us think about small-scale trading in this way as an enactment of an alternative citizenship that can be described as a parallel form to what Holston has described as an “insurgent citizenship” (Holston 2008). In Tamale, this citizenship was based on the perception of a neglectful and corrupt state
that was nonresponsive to the needs of the traders. It was thus not so much grounded on resistance and insurgency, as Holston describes, but on the right to make a living. It manifested its appearance through the right to do trade, to support oneself and one's family in urban space. Often it rested on actors claiming a specific place designed for something else, a gutter, part of a walkway, or traffic island. I have elsewhere described (Jennische 2018) how the local and national governments through its ambiguous eviction processes, poorly implemented infrastructural developments and market renovations appear spatially unreliable and a risk to the traders' activities. This contrasts the reliability and permanence that characterise traders' own relation to urban space. The enactment of this citizenship connected the political disappointment directed against the government to the perceived moral righteousness of doing business.

Other actors involved in the marketspace besides small-scale traders also sanctioned and acknowledged this right to do business. Larger store owners blamed the government for not creating enough jobs and complained about the unfair treatment of street vendors. Owners of supermarkets, larger department stores, and petrol stations allowed for some traders to set up businesses outside their entrances, even though they might be selling the same thing. Customers understood the importance of loyalty in the market and rarely changed sellers even though prices were lower with someone else.

For Saibu, the Andani shoe seller who also was an adopted son of late Ya Na, politicians and public officers were the ones to blame for the conflict and polarisation. He shared a street corner, bench, and umbrella with the Abudu brothers Yakubu and Habib. They were close friends, helping each other unpacking goods, covering for each other. They talked, laughed, and prayed together. I asked Saibu one day if them being Abudu created a problem. "No, it's not like that," he answered. "They know who I am and who my father was, and I know who they are. There is no problem. We can even argue about it. But as they know my father, they won't speak about Ya Na. Instead we argue about politics." Through the moral economy of the marketspace, Saibu and his friends were able to produce a different way of living and being without being suffocated by identity politics.

Habib's political engagement illustrates the role of small-small politics in making a community. The purpose of the association Namba Yiŋa (Come Together as One), that he formed together with other young Dagbamba traders along the streets was to allow for conversations about business and life in general. They had about 50 members. Every member had to pay one cedi every meeting. For this, they could get financial help to pay for weddings, outdooring ceremonies for the newborns, or assistance for a ruined business. Habib had been the leader of the organisation for the last two years, but some did not appreciate him. His critics wanted to disallow members who could not afford the fee of one cedi per meeting from the association, while Habib thought they should be able to pay back later. They did not talk about politics within the association, but they encouraged everyone to go and vote, and from there to go directly home, without causing any disturbances in town. Namba Yiŋa was a response against the dividing mechanisms of the national politics and the Dagbon state, and a space where Abudus and Andanis could meet and form a community. While Habib was important in the production of this space, he simultaneously approached NPP to set up a deal with them, that if he would get the association to vote for NPP, they would "arrange things" in favor of Namba Yiŋa members. He could not define "things" concretely but referred to some fuzzy contracts that were to be drawn up if the
NPP came to power. While working toward cohesion, he still saw the opportunities arising from the political tensions and tried to make them work in his favor. But he was not able to convince Namba Yiŋa to take his path, and his attempt instead strengthened his critics who valued the nonpartisan aspect of the association.

Traders’ memories of the history of violence, the killing of Ya Na, the curfew and the tensions remained. They still made people cautious and inhibited their voting. This also affected the non-Dagbamba. Ibrahim, a Nigerien fabric trader who by naturalisation had become a Ghanaian citizen, explained before the elections that he was not going to vote. “In Tamale, it is too polarised. The town is divided, when they should be one.” If Ibrahim had lived in another city, like Kumasi or Accra, he would have voted. But in Tamale it was still too sensitive. Ibrahim’s unwillingness to vote was based on his critique against the government for not solving the dispute, and the fear that any voting would further intensify the divisions in Tamale. He also argued it was common that the political parties tried to buy votes. Although most people took the money and voted the way they wanted anyway, it rendered the elections pointless. Seidu also refused to vote in the elections of 2012. He said, “I don’t feel it in my heart to vote this time.” It was difficult for him to explain further, but he said he did not feel the NDC was performing well and he did not appreciate NPP enough either. Party advocates buying mobile phone credits from Seidu while attending the adjacent bar often urged him to join their party. Yet, he always tried to distance himself from them and explained he was not interested in taking part. It is important to see these actors’ reluctance to engage in party politics and voting not as a depoliticised position, but as a conscious non-participatory political act (Ahmad 2014), as a critical stance against corruption, political violence, and disunity. Ahmad argues that the Karachi residents, after the Pakistani elections in 2007, retreated indoors out of moral decency and out of indignation at the political violence taking place on the streets. For her, that withdrawal and denunciation was not due to disengagement but articulated “the possibility of conjuring and addressing an alternative, emergent public by recuperating the highly contingent righteousness of the ordinary” (p 411-412). The Tamale marketspace enabled a political position of non-participation. Here, it was possible for traders to formulate a political alternative of peace, righteousness, and unity, together with other traders and customers by taking a morally superior position against the capricious and provisional politics of the state.

**Conclusions**

The enskinment of the new Ya Na and the fact that both houses were involved in the reconciliation process preceding it, is a welcoming progress. This article simultaneously shows how, alongside the conflict, there has always been a peace process beyond that initiated by the political establishment and the eminent chiefs. This peace process manifests itself in the long-term economic and social relations that underpins the moral economy of small-scale urban trade.

Based on the moral economy, and the experiences of a polarised political climate, traders enacted a small-small politics by dismissing, condemning, and disregarding the state, while simultaneously being proud of the Ghanaian achievements. In Tamale, the successful Ghanaian democracy appeared divisive and conflict-creating. But traders united and showed solidarity to one another as a response to this effect of democracy. The distrust directed toward the political establishment contrasted with the confidence and trust that traders
often exhibited when entering into relationships within the marktespace. In addition, the distrust negatively affected the view of the entire formalisation project, which was thus perceived as unreliable and unpredictable. Sharing these sentiments, traders were able to form an alternative citizenship that combined the moral economy, the necessary right to trade, and the views of a polarising state and that allowed them to share space with a sense of peace and community.

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The Rise and Fall of a Political Party: Handling Political Failure in Municipal Elections in Burkina Faso

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ABSTRACT This article examines the socio-political transformations of Burkina Faso, following the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré from power in October 2014 and culminating with the municipal elections in May 2016. In particular, I develop a case-study on a political party (la Nouvelle Alliance du Faso, NAFA) that was founded in early 2015 around a presidential candidate who in mid-September the same year was deemed ineligible with reference to a newly adopted Electoral Law, and by the end of September was arrested and put in jail for having supported a failed coup d’état. Yet rather than considering this failed attempt to access power, I would like to analyse its local repercussions on municipal elections the following year. I describe the political failure from the perspective of NAFA regional and municipal political leaders, particularly by analyzing the actions of two local politicians. Beyond the specific case-study, the issue of political failure highlights how local political leaders are caught between their constituencies of voters and supporters, on the one hand, and the party’s headquarters and State administration, on the other. I look at the framing and timing of political failure and try to understand them as part of local leaders’ attempts to turn it into a socially and morally loaded virtue.

Keywords: political transition, failure, elections, party politics, Burkina Faso

Introduction

At the end of October 2014, a popular insurrection – at the time most often called a revolution – ended the 27 years of reign of Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso. Once again, the President wanted to modify paragraph 37 of the Constitution concerning the limitation of presidential terms so as to remain in power for yet another term. However, civil society organisations and opposition parties in alliance with citizens stopped another manipulation of powerholders. The October revolution à la sauce burkinabè pushed a regime change and a democratic breakthrough.

This article examines the socio-political transformations of Burkina Faso, following the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré from power in October 2014 and culminating with the municipal elections in May 2016.1 It builds on ongoing work seeking to combine a historically informed perspective on political developments with contemporary political and

1 I would like to express my deepest gratitude for ongoing conversations over the last two decades with the two main actors of the case-study: Assita Ouattara and Amadou Ouattara. Earlier versions of this article were presented at two international academic meetings. First, it was presented at the international workshop Transition politique et gouvernance communale au Sahel, Ouagadougou, 26-28 April 2017, jointly hosted by Ludovic Kibora, and me. My sincere gratitude to all workshop participants for their comments. Second, it was presented at a panel organised by Rosa de Jorio and Joseph Hellweg at the 61st Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, at Atlanta from 29 November-1 December 2018. I am grateful to the panel organisers as well as the discussant Maria Grosz-Ngaté for sharp comments and productive questions. Finally, I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for constructive comments and critical remarks.
cultural perspectives in the analysis of the Burkinabe political culture and, by extension, the specific democratic culture in Burkina Faso post-Compaoré (Hagberg et al. 2017, 2018). In particular, I develop a case-study of the political party Nouvelle Alliance du Faso (NAFA) that was founded in early 2015 around the presidential candidate Djibrill Bassolé, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the last government of Compaoré. Yet in September 2015, the Constitutional Council decided that the candidacy of Bassolé was ineligible, with reference to the Electoral Law that had been voted by the transition parliament on 7 April 2015. And by the end of September 2015, Bassolé was arrested and put in jail for having supported the failed coup d’état led by the ex-president’s Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP) on 16 September. Hence, Djibrill Bassolé, once the powerful Minister of Foreign Affairs for Blaise Compaoré and also General of the Gendarmerie, had a short-lived career as presidential candidate of the NAFA. This political failure at the very top of Burkinabe politics had repercussions for the new party, and its local leaders.

Yet rather than considering this failed attempt to access power, I would like to analyse the local repercussions that Bassolé’s fall had on municipal elections the following year. Drawing on long-term fieldwork in the municipalities of Bobo-Dioulasso, Péni and Sidéra dougou, I describe Bassolé’s political failure from the perspective of NAFA regional and municipal political leaders. I follow the campaigns of NAFA leaders positioning themselves vis-à-vis the country’s transformed socio-political landscape, particularly how local leaders handled the fact that the NAFA presented itself as a political alternative in early 2015 just to be a dead-end a few months later. The article is geared towards the question of how such a failure (amanya in Jula) was represented and discussed by key political actors in municipal elections of May 2016. Beyond the specific case-study, the issue of political failure highlights how local political leaders are caught between their constituencies of voters and supporters, on the one hand, and the party’s headquarters and State administration, on the other. I develop a methodological point on the importance of focusing on failure and miscalculation. Instead of exploring success and progress, I argue that we do need to take apparent failures seriously, as in this case. While any political actor would always try to transform a mishap into a trampoline for further attempts, we do need to reflect more on how and by what means failure is practically and discursively dealt with. I am interested in exploring how political failures function socially and politically in “the new Burkina Faso” where nothing should be as before (Hagberg et al. 2018). “Failure is a moral accusation – and specifically a devaluation – of something or someone. Failure occurs when the subject’s process of inscribing themselves in the world […] is interrupted or aborted” (Carroll et al. 2017: 10). And, yet, even though failure is a central feature of social life, it is often insufficiently analysed. One sociological definition suggests that failure is “a consequence of the necessary incompleteness of projects of governance” (Malpas and Wickham 1995: 39). Hence, failure has a lot to do with “the interrupted”, “the aborted”, and “the incomplete”, but is not necessarily the opposite to success. Instead, I would like to argue, failure is about framing and timing. In this article, I focus on political failure by paying attention to how local political actors handle and ascribe meaning to circumstances and events that occur far away from their constituency, and therefore far out of their control. More specifically, I look at the framing and timing of political failure and try to understand them as part of local leaders’ attempts to turn it into a socially and morally loaded virtue.

The article is organised as follows. First, I make some remarks regarding Burkina Faso’s recent years of socio-political transformations, followed by a brief description of the rise and
fall of the presidential candidate Djibrill Bassolé of the NAFA. Second, I describe the NAFA’s electoral campaign in the municipalities of Bobo-Dioulasso, Péné, and Sidéradougou, and comment the election results. Third, I discuss how the NAFA’s municipal and regional politicians handled, interpreted, and ascribed meaning to the political failure, by referring to cultural and moral values such as loyalty and trustworthiness.

From Revolution to Transition

In October 2014, years of social and political mobilisation culminated in a peaceful but forceful popular reaction against the government’s decision to send a Bill modifying paragraph 37 of the Burkinabe Constitution pertaining to the limitation of presidential terms. The proposed modification would allow President Blaise Compaoré to present himself once again to run for presidential elections. Yet a popular insurrection chased President Compaoré after 27 years in power (Bantenga 2016; Bonnecase 2016; Chouli 2015; Dégorce et Palé 2018; Frère and Englebert 2015; Hagberg et al. 2015, 2017, 2018; Oulon 2018a; Zeilig 2017). On Thursday 30 October, when the MPs were to vote the Bill, thousands and thousands of protesters moved towards the barricades set up by army units to protect the National Assembly, Burkina Faso’s parliament. Finally, protesters succeeded in entering the courtyard of the National Assembly, which was sacked and set on fire (Hagberg et al. 2015). In a desperate move to save the situation, President Compaoré quickly announced that the government and the National Assembly were dissolved. The same evening, he made a declaration in which he promised to step down from power the following year. But it was too late. On Friday 31 October, Compaoré finally signed his resignation after strong pressure from the street protests orchestrated by civil society organisations like the Balai Citoyen (Dégorce and Palé 2018). A mob standing outside the headquarters of the Chief of Defence Staff in central Ouagadougou demanded Compaoré’s unconditional resignation (Hagberg et al. 2015). Negotiations followed the resignation and a few hours later Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Yacouba Zida, a hitherto unknown public figure, assumed power with the support of some civil society leaders. On 1 November, Zida’s assumption of power was confirmed in a written statement signed by the military hierarchy of the Burkinabe armed forces. Zida was the second in command of the notorious Régiment de sécurité présidentielle (RSP), an “army within the army”, directly under the control of the President. With the support of other high ranking officers, Zida was the de facto head of state leading a military government for a few weeks before the transition of power to a civilian government.

In November 2014, a one-year transition was agreed upon and put in place after negotiations between civil society and opposition political parties with the military lurking in the shadows. Former Ambassador Michel Kafando was appointed transition President on 16 November. On 18 November he was sworn in, took office and received the powers from Lieutenant Colonel Zida. Yet once in office, Kafando appointed Zida as his Prime
Minister. This decision was seen as proof of the continuing strong involvement of RSP in the civil transition. But Zida maintained the revolutionary language that he had adopted as *de facto* head of state, referring to his leadership being guided by “the will of the Burkinabé people”. In a public meeting on 13 December 2014, Zida marked a distance to the RSP and the former regime by declaring that the Burkinabé people want justice: “I can assure you that justice will be made for our comrade Norbert Zongo. Justice will be made for all those who fell under the murderous bullets of Blaise Compaoré. We’ll work on it” (quoted in Hagberg et al. 2018:62). A third key actor of the transition was the Speaker of the transition parliament (*Conseil national de la transition*, CNT), journalist Chérif Sy. The CNT was essential for power sharing and law making during the one-year transition. Many laws were passed by the CNT. Hence, the transition regime (President, government, and the CNT) initiated a series of actions and rules so as to make sure that in Burkina Faso, “nothing will be as before” (Hagberg et al. 2018). The days, weeks and months that followed the popular insurrection came to be a particularly productive period of political practice and democratic change. It was also a period of repositioning and remaking of political careers. A very interesting case is that of Djibrill Bassolé, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the last government of Compaoré, and General of the Gendarmerie. Bassolé emerged as a presidential candidate of the NAFA able to challenge the paved road to presidency of MPP’s Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (Hagberg et al. 2018).

For a long time, Djibrill Bassolé was a key figure in the Compaoré political system and an active member of the ruling party *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (CDP). Between January 1999 and January 2000, he was Deputy Minister of Security and in charge of the political repression of protesters in the aftermath of the assassination of the journalist Norbert Zongo in December 1998 (Frère 2010; Hagberg 2002; Loada 1999; Ouédraogo 1999). In November 2000, he was appointed Minister of Security, a position he held until 2007 when he became Minister of Foreign Affairs. In August 2008, Bassolé was appointed Chief Mediator between the Sudanese government and the Darfur rebels. He left the Burkinabe government, but returned as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011 after the many protests that had shaken Compaoré’s power (Chouli 2012). He was deeply involved in the different mediation assignments that Compaoré undertook, particularly in Mali in 2012-2013. He was a loyal servant of Compaoré and remained Minister of Foreign Affairs until the fall of Compaoré in October 2014.

On the morning of 30 October 2014 when the National Assembly was sacked and set on fire, the MPs of the CDP/presidential majority sought to escape by jumping the wall of the courtyard of the parliament. Most MPs were evacuated to the adjacent courtyard where Djibrill Bassolé lived. Hence, his house became a temporary refuge for the fleeing MPs before they were evacuated by the Gendarmerie. One of the key actors discussed in the case-study, Assita Ouattara, at the time an MP of the CDP, at the time an MP of the CDP, jumped the wall of the National Assembly and ran to Bassolé’s courtyard. From there, she was evacuated first to the Gendarmerie’s headquarters in the Ouagadougou neighborhood of Paspanga from where a helicopter flew her and other MPs to Ziniaré, Compaoré’s hometown some 40 km north of the capital.

Bassolé played an important role when Compaoré was ousted from power. In the Burkinabe biweekly *L’Événement*, the usually well-informed journalists Germain Bitiou Nama and Newton Ahmed Barry argued that four high-ranked military officers reacted rapidly on 30-31 October 2014 in order not to lose power: Lieutenant Colonel Yacouba
Isaac Zida, General Honoré Nabéré Traoré, General Djibrill Bassolé, and General Gilbert Diendéré. According to the sources of the journalists, once the popular insurrection had attacked the National Assembly these military officers orchestrated the recuperation of the insurrection by one faction of the army (the RSP) to make sure that power was not lost (Nama et Barry 2014). As in any regime-breakdown former powerholders actively sought to save what could be saved and to maintain as much as influence as possible. And this was what these men sought to achieve.

After the fall of Compaoré, Bassolé remained in Ouagadougou in contrast to many other former ministers. Bassolé continued to play a role in the shadows of the revolutionary fever at the time. In early 2015, it became clear that Bassolé emerged as the presidential candidate of a new party, the Nouvelle Alliance du Faso (NAFA). In meetings and assemblies, he was presented as a leader seeking to mobilize Muslim voters (Hagberg et al. 2018). Given that in 2013, Bassolé had already been mediator of the Organisation de la Conférence Islamique (OCI), he sought to play on this image of a pious Muslim to convince Muslim voters representing some 70% of the Burkinabe population. At the time, things looked bright for him, and he seemed to be a major candidate in the presidential elections. The Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès (MPP) – a party founded already in January 2014 by prominent CDP leaders – and its presidential candidate Roch March Christian Kaboré admittedly saw Bassolé as a serious challenger to the presidency.

Yet Bassolé’s career definitely changed direction with the voting of the Electoral Law on 7 April 2015, stipulating that those having worked for the modification of paragraph 37 of the Constitution pertaining to the limitation of presidential terms would not be eligible (cf. Hagberg et al. 2018). The background to the Electoral Law was that the transition regime faced a complicated dilemma. On the one hand, in principle any candidate should always be able to run for elections in a democratic system. On the other hand, there was a legitimate fear that former powerholders would return to power after the transition had ended. The Law states: "all persons having supported an anti-constitutional change that violates the principle of democratic turnover, notably the limitation of the number of presidential mandates having led to an insurrection or any other uprising". Discussions about the Electoral Law intensified in the months after its adoption. The court of ECOWAS5 declared that all candidates should be allowed to compete in the Burkinabe elections. As late as in August 2015, it seemed that Bassolé’s candidacy would finally be accepted, because his name appeared on the list of presidential candidates of the Constitutional Council (Burkina24, 29/8/2015), but in a decision on 10 September 2015, the council barred him from running. His name did not appear on the final list (Lefaso.net, 10/9/2015). Less than a week after the verdict of the Constitutional Council the coup d’état led by General Gilbert Diendéré reshuffled the political landscape. The events that followed finally turned out to be the definite fall of Bassolé (Hagberg 2015; Saidou 2018).

On 16 September 2015, the coup was led by the RSP, an elite corps with 1,300 heavily equipped and well-trained soldiers (Banégas 2015; Hagberg 2015). RSP soldiers interrupted the government council and took the President and the government hostage. After unsuccessful mediation attempts, the coup d’état was declared on the morning of 17 September. It was quickly condemned by most Burkinabe civil society organisations,

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5 The Economic Organisation of West African States.
trade unions, and political parties, as well as by the international community. The coupists declared that they had removed the president from office and dissolved the government and the CNT (Omega.bf 17/9/2015). Curfew was declared in the whole country. Across the country, however, people mobilised in popular resistance and civil obedience. RSP soldiers patrolled and shot live rounds in neighborhoods, where residents had built barricades, while popular resistance and civil disobedience gained momentum in the whole country. On 21 September when the regular army sided with the Burkinabe people, it became clear that the coup would fail. On 22 September, the RSP and the regular army signed an armistice, including the disarming and retreat of the RSP. President Kafando was reinstalled and the government came back in office. The coup had failed and General Diendéré said he “regretted the coup” and did not “talk about it” any longer (Lefaso.net 25/9/2015). Two days later the government adopted three decrees: the first ended the functions of the General Commander of the RSP, the second ended the functions of the Minister of Security, and the third dissolved the RSP (Hagberg 2015). On 26 September, the government decided to freeze the assets of certain personalities, including Diendéré, and political parties (CDP, NAFA, etc.). On 29 September, Djibrill Bassolé was arrested on accusations of having supported the coupists with the help of Guillaume Soro, at the time the President of the National Assembly of Côte d’Ivoire. A long telephone communication was one of the key elements proving this. Bassolé was kept in the army prison, the Maison d’Arrêt et de Correction de l’Armée (MACA), with due respect to his grade as General. In 2019, the trial of the coupists finally took place and was mediatized live. The Court condemned Diendéré and Bassolé to 20 consecutive 10 year terms in prison. While Diendéré was judged as the prime instigator of the coup leading to 14 deaths and 270 wounded, Bassolé was judged as accomplice and condemned for treason (Jeune Afrique 11/9/2019).

To sum up, in October 2014 Bassolé was the very strong Minister of Foreign Affairs under Compaoré. With the latter’s fall Bassolé was one of those who managed to navigate maintaining influence and control, not the least thanks to his grade of being General of the Gendarmerie. In early 2015, he emerged as a full-fledged presidential candidate with enthusiastic support from the new party NAFA. Yet the Electoral Law of 7 April changed the game, and the Constitutional Council’s rejection of Bassolé’s candidacy on 10 September was the culmination of five months of political uncertainty. The implication of Bassolé in the failed coup led to imprisonment and later judgement, which in turn meant that his political career was definitely over.

In this kind of dramatic socio-political context, important questions include how local politicians navigate, and ways in which they seek to make do as political representatives of a party whose presidential candidate is accused of instigating a coup d’état and whose political future is all but uncertain. In what framing and timing do they explain political failure? In the remainder of this article, I first discuss some general features of the municipal elections in May 2016 and then focus on two local NAFA leaders during the electoral campaign: Assita Ouattara in Bobo-Dioulasso and Amadou Ouattara in SidéraDougou.

**Municipal Elections in May 2016**

Municipal elections took place on 22 May 2016. The electoral campaign officially opened for two weeks ahead of the Election Day and ended on 20 May. The voting was carried out in a peaceful manner, and many referred to the lack of financial resources to properly conduct the campaign (Hagberg et al. 2018).
A few features need to be described in the new political landscape that emerged after the one-year transition (Hagberg et al. 2018). First, the growing tendency for ethnic tension in party politics. On the one hand, there was a continuous allusion to Moose politics in the midst of democratic elections; hence, it was as if the power of the Moose (naam in Mooré) was the normal in Burkinabe politics. On the other hand, other ethnic groups seemed to take action to make sure that their own “sons” and “brothers” – and much more rarely “sisters” – were in the forefront. For instance, one CDP candidate who was second on the electoral list in his neighborhood felt that he had been badly positioned because he was Moaaga. He held that his fellow party comrades wanted to avoid making him candidate for central mayor, and felt challenged both from other parties and from within his own party. In Bobo-Dioulasso, there was a general feeling that the Moose were dominating Burkinabe politics, and that would explain why Moose candidacies were not to be on top positions in the city (cf. Hagberg 2007; Sanou 2010).

Second, there was the tendency of ambiguity of the so-called “renewal of the political class”. On the one hand, the new ruling party, the MPP, had clearly set out to a strategy to allow a new generation of politicians to occupy important political positions. Fewer of the old generation were on the electoral lists. On the other hand, the old political actors were still lingering around. Most spectacularly, the former mayor Alfred Sanou (1995-2001), and MP of the CDP, was leading the fight against his former challenger Célestin Koussoubé, the CDP-mayor 2001-2006, now campaign director of the MPP. In February 2001, the fight between the two had led to bloodshed and ethnic tension, even hatred. In 2016, the old rivals once again dominated the political scene: Sanou was elected on the CDP-list, but he decided to leave his seat to the person that replaced him; Koussoubé was elected MPP-councilor but was later elected the president of regional council of Hauts-Bassins (Bobo-Dioulasso region), a very important and prestigious position of decentralised governance. Another example is the role played by Assita Ouattara in the NAFA’s campaign. She was not a candidate but was still one of the most outspoken political actors in Bobo-Dioulasso, especially when it came to women’s mobilisation. A few years ago, Célestin Koussoubé, Alfred Sanou and Assita Ouattara had been party comrades in the CDP supporting Blaise Compaoré. But in 2016, they rallied for three different parties: the MPP, the CDP, and the NAFA. The splitting of former party comrades incited a strong moralistic discourse, where political morality was advocated in public discourse. The MPP was referred to as “the bad seeds of the CDP”, and CDP activists talked about that “the true people” had remained in the party whereas the opportunists and “fraud people” had left for the MPP.

Third, there were many attempts to build alliances against the MPP. The UPC, the NAFA and the CDP all aimed to counteract the MPP dominance. “All but MPP” was almost
a slogan put forward in public. In Péné municipality, 25 km southwards of Bobo-Dioulasso, the alliance building worked well, as the UPC and the NAFA councilors outnumbered those of the MPP when electing the new mayor. The NAFA got 19 councilors, the MPP 21, and the UPC 8 councilors. The new mayor was former CDP-mayor Abdoulaye Ouattara, now representing the NAFA.11 For most people the NAFA victory in Péné municipality was the result of Assita Ouattara’s political action. She had campaigned intensely, despite the fact that she was not a candidate herself. I heard intellectuals from Péné complaining, that “Assita has divided the population” as she did not limit her action to Bobo-Dioulasso but got heavily involved in the politics of Péné.

Fourth, a tendency was that all parties avoided big political meetings and favored a neighbourhood campaign. The justification was that people did not want to host mass meetings any longer. A big political meeting would cost money, and money was not available in these elections. Even for the ruling party since 2015, the MPP, the financial resources were lacking, and little money came from Ouagadougou. Accusations of fraud and vote buying were ventured, but less money seemed to circulate compared to the 2012 elections when the CDP was still at its height. Still, many local leaders denounced the MPP’s money distribution.

**NAFA – Value, Interest, Benefit**

During the municipal campaign in May 2016, local leaders of NAFA often made a point that their party – in contrast to other political parties – had a name that people could understand. In Jula, the word *nafa* means “value”, “interest” or “benefit”. In Sidéradougou municipality, a campaign facilitator of the NAFA stated in a meeting: “we do not know what the other parties stand for: sedepe [CDP], empepe [MPP], erdea [RDA], etc. But for the NAFA, that is clear”. By this he wanted to signal that a vote for the NAFA was a vote for “our values, interests, benefits”. In the following, I explore how two regional and municipal NAFA leaders (Assita Ouattara and Amadou Ouattara) maneuvered through a tumultuous political landscape, and I show that political failure is to a large extent a question of framing and timing.

**Assita: Political Transhumance in Practice**

The first case is that of Assita Ouattara, a longstanding political actor in Bobo-Dioulasso and in Péné, the Houet Province. She was the 1st Deputy Mayor of Bobo-Dioulasso in 2007-2012, and the MP for the CDP in 2012-2014. She is a well-known mobiliser of women and was involved in a political battle over women leadership in Bobo-Dioulasso in 2009-2010 (Hagberg 2013; Hagberg and Koné 2019). After the fall of Compaoré when she was evacuated from the National Assembly, Assita returned to Bobo-Dioulasso. Her home had been devastated by insurgent youth, but her house had not been set on fire. Luckily, her family had been able to evacuate before the mob arrived at the house. The fact that her house was not burnt was “a good sign”, she maintained, when we met in December 2014. She said that a destroyed house should be seen as “a collateral damage”, that is, a damage that one has to accept when active in politics. But she also admitted that this was very tough and that she

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11 Abdoulaye Ouattara had been elected the CDP-mayor following the elections in December 2012 until November 2014 when the municipal councils in Burkina Faso were dissolved by the military transition. And now the same mayor came back, but under the banner of the NAFA this time.
had suffered financially as well as morally. She was thinking about how to position herself in the new political landscape. Should she abandon the CDP, the party of Compaoré? Her political future seemed uncertain, to say the least.

Then, in early 2015, Assita publicly declared that she supported Bassolé’s candidacy as part of the NAFA. Assita led meetings and published lots of images and statements on Facebook the coming weeks. She quickly emerged as a key leader of the NAFA. The party was financially supported by Djibrill Bassolé.

In April 2015, however, when the transition parliament CNT voted the new Electoral Law, preventing former powerholders like ministers and MPs to run for the next elections, NAFA supporters were very upset. In particular, Assita published a comment on her Facebook page declaring that Bassolé would be presidential candidate in any case: “Djibrill Bassolé sera candidat pian” (Lefaso.net, 9/4/2015). Expressing herself like this indicated that she was convinced that Bassolé would be eligible for presidency. The reaction from the transition regime was immediate. Assita was arrested and put in the notorious prison Bolomakoté in Bobo-Dioulasso for “illegal political activities” (Lefaso.net, 15/4/2015) and for being a “threat to the security of the State” (Lefaso.net, 25/4/2015). She was imprisoned for a month, and her supporters published appeals on Facebook like this one:

La prisonnière politique du gouvernement de la transition. Elle s’appelle Sita OUATTARA. Elle est secrétaire nationale adjointe de la NAFA. Motif d’incarcération : ATTEINTE À LA SÛRETÉ DE L’ÉTAT. FREE SITA OUATT.

After one month, she was released on 7 May. Upon her release, people mobilised to greet her and show support (Lefaso.net 7/5/2015). Assita later told me that she was deeply moved by this popular support. However, one of Assita’s closest party comrades – an old woman who has been in politics since the 1970s – more soberly pointed out that Assita’s sojourn in prison “will train her politically”, as to indicate that a politician must suffer to become a big leader.

During the coup d’état in September 2015, Assita’s name was cited on a list of the planned government of the coupists. Accordingly, she would become Minister of Women’s Promotion in a document circulated on social media. While the veracity of this list is highly dubious – and Assita herself claimed it was a lie – the rumor could be seen as a sign of political allegiance. The NAFA was one of the political parties that supported the coupists in a declaration made public a few days after the coup (FasoZine, 20/9/2015). And it was well-known that Assita was an outspoken supporter of Djibrill Bassolé, whose involvement in the coup was later revealed. However, the allegation of Assita supporting the coup was never substantiated.

In the 2015 legislative elections, Assita did not present herself as a candidate. The main reason was, she told me, that she feared being declared ineligible, and thereby destroying the chances of other NAFA candidates. She nevertheless mobilised for the NAFA candidates. She explained this strategy by underlining that it was very important for her to demonstrate loyalty to Bassolé, even though she was not a candidate. She regularly paid visits to him in prison. For her, it was central to make sure that the party “survived” despite its leader being imprisoned. Hence, Assita saw the greater long-term importance of the party, more than her short-term perspective of being elected there and then.

Assita did not run for elections in the municipal elections in May 2016 either. Still, she supported NAFA candidates, including the future mayor of Péni, Abdoulaye Ouattara. She mobilised voters in Péni municipality, and emerged as a counter-power to the traditional
The NAFA did well in Péni municipality, where Abdoulaye Ouattara became mayor after a coalition between the UPC and the NAFA that succeeded in blocking the MPP’s road to get the position as mayor. The subsequent election of the mayor was violent, and it had to be aborted, but it eventually confirmed NAFA’s victory (Burkina24, 22/6/2016). However, in Bobo-Dioulasso, the municipal elections went bad for the NAFA, where the party only got one single councilor.

Once the municipal elections were over, Assita significantly reduced her involvement in political life, and concentrated more on her job as a dentist. But when I met her in December 2016 she confessed that she saw opportunities in the new party coalition of the Coalition pour la Démocratie et la Réconciliation Nationale (CODER) composed of former parties in power at the time of Blaise Compaoré: ADF/RDA, CDP, AUTRE Burkina/PSR, Les Républicains, NAFA, RSR, UNDD and Le Faso Autrement (Lefaso.net, 16/10/2016). In the years to come, Assita pursued a leadership position in the NAFA but encountered growing difficulties with another leader who tried to marginalise her from any politically significant position in the party. She felt that this complicated the pursuit of her political career. In November 2018, Assita finally left the NAFA and went (back) to the CDP, Compaoré’s former ruling party. At the time of finalising this article (March 2020), she is preparing her political comeback in the legislative elections in 2020.

Amadou: To be a Candidate in Town

The second case is that of Amadou Ouattara, a political leader in Sidéradougou municipality in the Comoé Province. Amadou became involved in politics in 2002 and ran as a candidate for the first time in the municipal elections of 2006. He was the secretary general of the Rassemblement pour le Développement du Burkina (RDB), a party led by Célestin Compaoré, the cousin of President Compaoré. The RDB was a party of the presidential majority at national level and to a large extent a party set up to showcase that Burkina Faso’s had political diversity. In local politics, such a party could nevertheless gather the political opposition. In the Comoé Province, the RDB was a local alternative – or opposition party – to the mega-party CDP. In the provincial capital of Banfora, the RDB held the position as mayor from 2006-2012, and again from 2012-2014.

In Sidéradougou municipality, the RDB was an opposition party. In 2006, Amadou’s RDB lost the elections to the CDP, but many alleged that this was due to fraud. One of his main adversaries later admitted the fraud: “frankly, young brother, we stole the elections”. In the municipal elections of 2012, the RDB once again scored well, but not sufficiently enough to get the majority of councilors for the position of mayor. At the time, Amadou emerged as the eternal opposition politician in Sidéradougou politics.

After the popular insurrection in 2014, however, the RDB fell into pieces. When Compaoré was ousted from power, his cousin Célestin Compaoré dropped the party altogether. Yet in the Comoé Province, the party had a stronghold independently of national stakes. In December 2014, I attended a strategic meeting at which the RDB leaders discussed where to go after Compaoré’s fall. Salif Barro, the RDB leader in Banfora, insisted:

12 The late Golotigi Badiori Ouattara who was Assita’s uncle, at least tacitly supported the MPP. As a matter of fact, party politics in the Péni municipality became very much a community issue, as people of the main ethnic group in the municipality (the Tiefo) have for long time been strife with internal disputes and rivalries (Hagberg 2004).
"We need to stand united, because otherwise we will not succeed. We should change party [membership] as a group, not individually."

In early 2015, the RDB leaders of the Comoé Province decided to join the NAFA. Locally however, the same political cleavage prevailed despite the fact that many former CDP followers now had joined the MPP, and that many RDB activists had joined the NAFA. In May 2015, I joined a sensitisation campaign launched by the NAFA to clarify to people that the RDB had metamorphosed into the NAFA and that people should support the NAFA. This was the time when Djibrill Bassolé was as a serious challenger to Roch Marc Christian Kaboré of the MPP. According to many NAFA informants, those staying with the CDP were “the noble” and “the upright”, compared to the opportunistic politicians who had joined the MPP. Therefore, the CDP and the NAFA soon initiated discussions of building an alliance.

Yet after the coup d’état and the imprisonment of Bassolé in September 2015, the activists sought to mobilise as much as they could. The MP of the ex-RDB Salif Barro, now a candidate for the NAFA in the 2015 legislative elections, sponsored most actions. Despite these efforts, he lost his parliamentary seat in the elections, which in turn meant that the NAFA in the Comoé Province was weak when the municipal elections arrived.

In Sidéradougou municipality, Amadou Ouattara funded the 2016 municipal campaign himself. The campaign staff was composed of a group of five people, driving on motorbikes to distant villages. In each village, the message was similar:

*We cannot bring money to you. We do not come with the speech of politicians. Instead, we just want you to vote for us because you know who Amadou is. He is not someone who lives in the city, but he lives here. He respects people and he seeks to bring development to Sidéradougou.*

It was a campaign based on “trustworthiness” and “honesty”, but with no substantial amounts of money to be distributed. In contrast, the MPP campaign was characterized by the distribution of money (pace: vote buying), very much in the same way as it was practiced at the time of Compaoré (Kibora 2019).

The NAFA did relatively well in the elections in Sidéradougou municipality, when considering the lack of resources to campaign, but Amadou himself was not elected. As was the case in 2006 and in 2012 he took a pride in being a candidate in the “town” of Sidéradougou rather than in his home village Tanga. “I always run in town where I live, while the leaders of other parties present themselves in small rural villages”. In the 2016 elections, Amadou lost his seat in the municipal council, and thereby some of his influence in local politics. Worse, he soon began experiencing financial difficulties, because he had neglected his work as an independent veterinary surgeon while doing politics. Still, for Amadou, it was a pride to be a candidate in town, facing heavy political artillery from the ruling MPP. He said this showed that he was feared, and thus respected.

To sum up, the cases of Assita and Amadou are examples of how politics are practiced locally in times of tumultuous national politics. The decisions of the two to join the NAFA could, in hindsight, be seen as a political failure. Both were hit financially by the changing times, and neither was elected. For the individual politician, there is an ambivalence in not being elected. On the one hand, this gives the politician a decent exit from politics; s/he has lost his/her political seat and can now concentrate on other things. On the other hand, this
gives the opportunity to prepare for a political comeback, because next elections are just a few years away.

Discussion: Political Failure and Democratic Culture

In the remainder of this article, I would like to reflect upon how local political leaders react and adjust to dramatic political changes at the national level, and how they re-appropriate and fill politics with meaning locally, when socio-political transformations leave them with uncertainty. Although I do not want to dismiss the importance of the resources and the political networks that mega-parties mobilise to win elections – for instance, the sums spent by the MPP campaign in 2015 and 2016 elections, and by the CDP until 2014 – it is also very clear that local leaders seek to do what they can, to practice politics efficiently in local arenas.

In the municipal campaign of 2016, the CDP had a strong message about the party representatives being the “true activists”, in contrast to those of the MPP who were named as “the bad seeds”. Many stated that “the CDP is noble”, and that “the CDP activists do not burn houses but show integrity”. In a similar vein, the NAFA campaigns were also about morality and nobility. “The NAFA is the party of Islam, of seriousness”, I heard at many campaign meetings, “but it is not a party of jihadism”. Both the CDP and the NAFA also made a point of political opposition. They did not fear to belong to the political opposition. “One shouldn’t be ashamed of belonging to the opposition”, a NAFA leader stated at a meeting I attended. Hence, people should not fear to be in opposition (baanbaga in Jula, approximately “the refuser”), because the country needs critique, and counter-power. This moral discourse combined with a sentiment of accepting being in opposition is interesting to observe among those who were previously rallying for the then ruling party CDP at the time of Compaoré. The discourse also gives us insights into the fabric of party politics in a semi-authoritarian regime that I have elsewhere called “démocratie à double façade” (Hagberg 2010; Hilgers and Mazzocchetti 2010).

NAFA leaders were campaigning as a trustworthy alternative. They may well have been in the CDP before – this particularly pertains to Assita Ouattara – but the NAFA leaders argued that they had been benefitting much less than those of the MPP (largely composed of former CDP comrades) who had been “eating” so much during the reign of Compaoré. A particular anger targeted the powerful President of the National Assembly, the late Salifou Diallo, the once loyal right-hand of Compaoré who fell from grace in 2008 and later returned as one of the founding fathers of MPP in January 2014.13

By looking at the May 2016 municipal campaign in Bobo-Dioulasso, Péri and Sidéradougou, the article has demonstrated that some political actors really experienced political failure as a consequence of the country’s political transition. This may well be considered unjust and unpleasant for those affected, but the failure gives us an opportunity to better understand the workings and prospects of democratic culture. Those previously in power now lived the sour experience of being in opposition, the ones who refuse (baanbaga).

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13 Salifou Diallo was a central political figure of Blaise Compaoré’s power machinery since the late 1980s. For twenty years, he occupied a number of the most significant political positions. He was a heavyweight in Burkina politics, and a political animal in a division of his own. In December 2015, he became the president of the National Assembly, and the interim president of the MPP. On 19 August 2017, Diallo was found dead in his hotel room in Paris while on an official mission.
They had to accept that they were not in power any longer, and they had to prepare themselves for the next elections. In this way, a political failure could well clear the ground for future success.

The question of political failure has been an undercurrent throughout the article. Methodologically, I would like to argue that it is important to study failure – in this case, a political failure as experienced and dealt with by local politicians – as a counter-discourse to the pervasive production of success stories and ingenious political entrepreneurship. As stated in a recent volume on the material culture of failure, failure and success are not binary opposites, but exist on different scales and frames. The interesting aspect is thus to explore how failure works socially (Carroll et al. 2017: 7), and I would add, politically. Failure also exists in different temporalities. Past failure may well prepare the grounds for future success. Thus, the framing and the timing are central ingredients of how people deal with failure.

In this article, I have demonstrated the extent to which two local leaders handled the fall and subsequent imprisoning of Djibrill Bassolé, at the same time while these leaders were campaigning for the NAFA in the elections. While the party survived and did surprisingly well in some municipalities, the price to pay was high for local leaders. Socially, these leaders were back talked and even seen as losers in the local arena. Politically, their adversaries did what they could to make them fail, because they could not count on any support from significant powerholders or big men.

The two cases give different insights into how failure may function socially and politically. Assita turned the political failure into a success when the mayor of neighboring Péri municipality succeeded in becoming mayor despite fierce resistance from the MPP. She conspicuously avoided being a candidate and thus reduced potential exposure for herself. Amadou failed to be elected and spent large amounts of his own money in the municipal campaign. Since then he has been trying to withdraw from politics and focus on his work as a veterinary surgeon. Yet his key problem remains: how to exit from politics in a way that it is not perceived as treason (by his followers) or as failure (by his adversaries). The sentiment of treason (janfa in Jula) is a central feature of how politics in perceived in local arenas, and to call someone a failure (amanya in Jula) is a politically and culturally loaded statement.

To conclude, I would like to argue that political failure must be explored socially and culturally to make sense and that failure is fundamentally relational. Local political leaders invest discursively and practically in trying to transform the apparent political failure into a new beginning. If political failure is difficult to explain away – “you did not get many votes and were not elected” – local leaders resort to moral and social ways of transforming such a failure to a virtue. This is the fundamental reason why anthropological research could productively explore political failure socially and culturally.

References


BRICOLAGE
About the Moralities of the Commons in the East African Cattle Economy

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ABSTRACT  Hardin’s article The Tragedy of Commons has had strong influence on environmentalist discourse. In it, the case of pastoral decision-making is used as an illustrative parable to throw light on wider issues. However, it also became a dominant filter for how policy issues relating to pastoralism in East Africa were regarded in the 1970s and 1980s. In this article, the author summarizes some of the criticisms that have been, or can be, raised against the factual basis of Hardin’s assumptions. The latter represent misconceptions both about ecological processes related to grazing and about pastoral decision-making. She looks at the implicit and explicit moralizing aspects of the article and asks how such elements may promote the market for particular policy choices.

Keywords: Pastoralism, Commons, Morality, Overgrazing, New ecology, Colonial denigration, Policy

Introduction

This article reflects upon the impact of the idea of the Tragedy of the Commons. The concept gained prominence during the last few decades of the twentieth century, meant to govern international and national policies for interventions directed at the East African pastoral societies, where individual short-sightedness was believed to undermine collective interests. The relevance of Hardin’s argument for the understanding of the situation of traditional livestock rearing communities was at an early stage discarded by ecologists and anthropologists. On the article I summarise the limitations of the concept in this context. This article discusses the concept at length which, despite its shortcomings, survived as a governing thought model, at least until the end of the 1990s.

Hardin and Morality

Fifty years have passed since 1968, when microbiologist/ecologist Garrett Hardin published his famous text on “The Tragedy of Commons”. His intention was to shed light on how certain types of human problems lack technical solutions. Instead, they demand a change in human values and moral ideas. The basic message of Hardin’s text was that it is unjust to give birth to more progeny when the Earth’s resources are scarce. The text appears to emerge from his wrath on the wording of the ‘Human Rights Declaration’ that gives families an irrevocable right to make choices about their own children in terms of the number of children they can give birth to. Hardin raises a number of controversial proposals for ethics, such as the sharing of inheritance rights according to genetic merits. He has in other contexts advocated such things as euthanasia, forced sterilisation etc. Is this ethical? The example illustrates the linguistic difficulty when writing about morals and ethics as social phenomena:
calling something for ethical or moral seems to signal appreciation. In this article, I highlight the evaluating aspects of a particular type of discourse without prescriptively labelling it as right or wrong. I reflect on the paradoxical influence Hardin received over the fates of East African pastoral people, despite massive, multidimensional criticism from ecologists and social scientists. The criticism mainly concerned the applicability of the model to the pastoral case, long seen as the archetype of the same. The model itself is an explicit statement about how people act and implicitly over their morality, so abstract that it is difficult either to prove or contest.

‘Moral’ has been described as being founded on two psychological functions: on the one hand, a pre-discursive, emotionally charged preparedness for rapid action/interpretation based on the individual’s past experience and knowledge, on the other hand, a unique human readiness for self-reflection (Haidt 2012). In contrast, the concept of ‘ethics’ refers to purely intellectual handling of questions of right and wrong. Hardin’s article is an attempt at ethical reflection on the limited resources of the Earth, initiated by a moral reaction.

Many ‘agents’ in today’s society consist of complex networks of individuals. Written policy documents are among the most important tools for collectives to appear as coherent, ethically conscious actors. Such policy documents often contain typical linguistic patterns capable of mediating a moralising content. One of these is that they are often built around fashionable “buzzwords”. These are expressions which have, for various reasons, been charged with emotion and moral value but also with timeliness. Often they are concepts that cannot be precisely defined, but are the subject of moral and ideological struggle. Various opponents, instead of questioning the concept as such, try to mobilise the expression in favor of their own position and ideology, thereby making it all the more ambiguous (Gallie 1956; Dahl 2008). Both on an individual and institutional level, such concepts can be desirable identification marks that help to make a policy look promising for the potential readership as well as for the author. The Tragedy of Commons was not a positive value concept like other slogans such as “empowerment”, “sustainable development” or “resilience”, but it could easily convey that the person who used it was a both a morally engaged, updated and a scientifically-informed actor.

As a contribution to the new interest in how policies are disseminated, McKenzie (2017) has recently published an article on the possible use of so-called Affect theory to understand how policy models are spread and absorbed. McKenzie does not address the issue of moralism as an important emotion-related aspect of policy-spreadering, but this appears to be a theme that would merit elaboration. The term ‘affect’ refers to, in this context, the structures of emotions that are shared in a social context, either at the macro level in the style of the general feeling of crisis or hope in a society, or at the micro level such as in the ambience of a certain meeting room. McKenzie focuses primarily on emotional charge in nonverbal communication during human encounters. However, to do so involves major methodological difficulties in capturing rapidly transient affective processes in the flow of events in real-time or reconstructing them post-hoc. What becomes crucial and interesting in the long run is seen more clearly only afterwards. Emotional charges are often not verbalised. However, in written policy documents, it is often possible to identify implicit or pronounced moral references which have an emotional base.

Many policy researchers (e.g. Roe 1994, Czarniawska 1997), inspired by literary studies (Barthes, Todorov and others) and the sociology of language (e.g. Labov), described how policy documents can be interpreted in terms of narrative, i.e. they contain more or less
explicit narratives with a characteristic sequence of structures, consisting of “initial summary (abstract), background orientation, event, evaluation, resolution and punchline” (Adelswärd 1996:31 ff, cit. Labov 1972). The valuation, which is central to the narrative, distinguishes the narrative from a mere report and is often indicated by its perceived or intended score (’moral’, see Czarniavska 1997:25). A typical narrative is propelled by the intentions of the actors in a certain context and the consequences the action causes. The actions of the protagonists are made comprehensible by either their own character and inner essence, the events preceding the act or by the limitations of the situation. The everyday narrative is probably the most common form of how morality is conveyed. It is considered a basal human ability to interpret and remember information in this way.

In Hardin’s article, his pedagogical parable around shepherds and their strategies has this form and function and was the part of the article most broadly cited and dispersed. The parable was borrowed from William Forster Lloyd (1833) and lacked specific reference to any particular region in the world. Hardin’s parable of the shepherds does not cover more than half a page out of nine, but intends to shed light on the surrounding moral reasoning in the text, concerned with the importance of seeing the Earth’s resources as limited and adapting the human reproduction rate accordingly. However, the model can also be seen as an indirect consolidation of another moral point: the good nature of private property. This is not elaborated in any direct way by Hardin but may be seen as implied, given that he expects it to be shared by the reader: only private property rights can lead to the care and safeguarding of resources and to their improvement by investment. Only the owner of the land overlooks what happens to it and knows that s/he can enjoy the result. If we see this in relation to a larger complex of moralisation, Hardin’s article becomes a confirmatory exception to the idea of the invisible hand of the economy, which turns economic self-interest into something good for all citizens. In economics, this metaphoric model works in turn as a counter-argument against a common view of money as morally corrupting. The Hardin model states that private property is the condition for individual self-interest to not be destructive.

When you look at the footprint of Hardin’s text in subsequent literature, you can get the impression that he has offered an authoritative, empirically based statement about how communities based on pastoralism function. When he is quoted, he is often referred to as a ‘biologist’. The fact that Hardin’s article was published in the journal Science gives further credibility to the model. The journal focusses on original research, but it also includes debate articles discussing the role of science in society. The review process and competition to get published is fierce. Together with its rival Nature, Science is one of the most meritorious scientific journals in the world. The trust that there is a scientific basis for what is published in the journal is strong.

Hardin’s article did not aim to contribute precisely to the understanding of East African herdspeople, but it had a tremendous impact on the widely disseminated image of pastoral strategies, and for interpreting other types of economic activities that use resources with free access. The Tragedy of the Commons represents an abstract model that can be used in relation to all resources used with free access for individual operators, resources, which are thus according to the model, threatened. In their quest to maximise their profit, all individuals are thought to use the common resources without restraint and consideration for others. The consequence will eventually be the collapse of the collective resource. The concept is perceived as basic in environmental science education and is used in many varied
contexts, from the population increase that Hardin focused on, to the greenhouse effect and the garbage whirls in the oceans. I do not take any stand to the usability of the model in other contexts in this article, or to its further spread, but focus on the East African context. This is where the concept had its first major impact, then within the debate on overgrazing.

The savannah landscapes that we connect with images of East African wildlife are ancient cultural landscapes, where livestock-rearing people with herds of cows, sheep and goats or camels and goats lived together with zebras, elephants, antelopes and lions for centuries. Households move according to the convenient access to water in different places, but the herds are made to move continuously. The rain in many places is irregular and unpredictable from year to year, which means that the ecologically best way to use the ground is one that guarantees cattle to be constantly redistributed over very large areas. Even at the time of my fieldwork in the 1970s, it was clear that many seasonally important areas had been lost – particularly watered, often tsetse-infected biotopes, which could only be used when there was drought and crisis, but which were in such situations crucial to security and continuity. Large-scale irrigation farms, private ranches, nature reserves, refugee camps, etc. are examples of competing, albeit deserving, land uses that have reduced the resource base for pastoralists in northern Kenya. In the last few years, additional factors have been included which have changed the conditions for pastoralism. The Nairobi-Addis Ababa Highway creates new grounds for the value of land: cuts off here, fixates there. Democratic reforms make control of electoral constituencies critical to the availability of all the resources that political positions and contact networks bring. This homogenises the constituencies ethnically. In the opposite direction, large investments are made in group-owned wildlife areas, where membership is defined by local presence rather than by ethnicity. The process undermines in part the traditional forms of soil conservation and soil control. However, the reduction of grazing land surface and obstacles to mobility have never aroused as much attention as the issue of overgrazing.

My experiences in East Africa lie now a while back in time. During the 1970s and 1980s, I worked with several stock-rearing communities in Kenya and Sudan trying to understand how their subsistence system worked. My main method was participatory observation and interviews. I was with Borana in Kenya for a year and six months with Beja (Bedawiet) in Sudan. I also collected a number of documents from researchers and aid organisations, which I have studied in great detail during the last year for a project on how moral arguments are used, for better or worse, in the environmental contexts. I am interested in how ‘environmental arguments’ are used to legitimise privatisation or nationalisation of resources.

Hardin’s interpretation of the shepherds’ strategies was still fresh during my fieldwork. I saw it as a problem as difficult for the pastoralists as the drought. It was for them an unknown and invisible ruling force, that influenced governmental planning and action directed towards their livelihood. The basic idea in Hardin’s text is that individual herdsmen act rationally in relation to how many animals they allow themselves to ‘get’. They estimate the profits they can obtain by fattening and selling an animal against the cost they incur in the form of overgrazing. Since they share this cost with others, the cost becomes negligible for the individual who can count on enjoying the profit himself. The result is that the herds grow unreasonably and that the pasture is driven towards over-exploitation. The moralising translation of this more economic-technical description is that the cattle owners
are presented as selfishly short-term oriented rather than long-term, forward-looking and loyal stewards of the environmental resource.

To trace in detail, through the flora of institutional reports and policy documents, the process that led to Hardin's text being seen as important for understanding the cattle economies of East Africa, cannot be done here, but would be an interesting task for history of science. The metaphoric story of the selfish shepherd mainly spread separated from the article's context of saving the Earth's resources at a higher level and from the question of human population growth. Ideas similar to the Tragedy of the Commons had however antecedents in earlier colonial literature (Report 1955). A foundation was established with widespread but exaggerated notions of rapid herd growth and that the pastoralists maximised their herds far beyond household needs in search of prestige (Dahl and Hjort 1976). During the severe droughts of the 1970s, the debate on the subject was dominated by the vision of a threatening front of desert spreading south from the Sahara, an image that was later revised. Authorities were keen to protect wildlife and tourism from possible pastoral competition, but also to ensure that there was sufficient meat available for the urban markets.

During the 1970s, it was not yet common to relate the African drought to general climatic processes such as the currents in the South Atlantic. The blame was often put on local mismanagement. Hardin's interpretation model dominated the policy documents produced by local authorities and international aid organisations to deal with the problems of the cattle rearers in East Africa or the severe drought in the Sahel (Picardi and Seifert 1976). Gradually, more and more researchers began to question the relevance of the model for the East African cattle rearers. In human ecological literature, this critical gaze had broken through in the middle of the 1990s. The criticism left Hardin's basic model intact, and questioned only the regional applicability. As indicated above, the model is even today still used in its general form in other resource-use contexts. For pastoral economies, its perspective has also spread and is now applied in relation to the pastoralists in Tibet (Allan 2000) and China (Zhang 2015:57f).

In order for the reader to understand how Hardin's parable looks from the perspective of East African pastoralists, I shall try to describe the fundamental ways in which it has been criticised but also other aspects that highlight the lack of relevance of the model. It is a powerful narrative that seems to have two main ingredients: individualism and overgrazing. When you dissect it, it comprises a multitude of dimensions of misunderstanding.

**Common or Land with Free Access?**

The main criticism has been that Hardin in his original text missed the difference between the country to which absolutely free access reigns (“open access”) and ‘community pastures’ (“commons”), which are controlled by a certain community, as pointed out by many commentators (e.g. Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975: 15; Swallow 1990: 3-4; Galaty 1993; Cousins 1993: 2-3; Bromley 1991). Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom (1990) is best known for this distinction. She emphasised how jointly owned property could be cared for by a local community. According to her, the aspects that separate the categories are if they have clear and safe membership criteria, common rules for the use of resources and social sanctions against norm breakers. For Ostrom, absolute privatisation or government intervention were not necessary measures if the commons filled the criteria, had clear limits and allowed the owners to exclude those who did not comply with the set rules. However,
resources with free access lacked authorities to protect the rights of the users and had no active exclusion of external people. In Ostrom’s work, the possible exclusion of people with competing demands appears to be a morally desirable posture. The potentially negative moral charge that the idea of exclusion can have, depends, of course, on what alternatives are offered for the excluded, but the question is seldom raised about what the excluded pastoralists would devote themselves to in order to survive.

Ostrom’s models have been criticised for being mainly applicable on demarcated commons governed by small communities. They do not respond to the land use in East African cattle-rearing communities. The traditional land use of East African pastoralists was no free access where other people were not needed to be taken into account. Nor was it based on formalised property rights. Principles for obtaining access to grazing lands varied: in northern Kenya, most claims were maintained by actual use (usufruct rights) but also through constant negotiation between different ethnic groups, and ultimately, through the marking of positions of strength. The cognitive model that marked the distribution of land did not build on the idea of surfaces delimited by distinct boundaries, but by central resources being associated with a certain ethnic group. Gilles and Jamtgaard (1981: 137) thus pointed out that the pasture access of the Borana people was regulated by the possibility that critical resources such as dry seasonal grazing or water points could be under family or group control (see also Kituyi and Kipuri 1991). From the central resources, more strictly controlled, the influence declined towards a periphery where the claims were ambiguous, contentious or negotiable. A flaw in the Tragedy of the Commons model as it has normally been applied, is the assumption that we are only talking about formalised property rights and that users of the common without such rules are totally incapable to defend the resource or negotiate it. For researchers with personal commitment to the pastoralists, it was still at the beginning of the 1990s strategically necessary to sharply delineate the image of herding practice from the idea that pastoralists were characterised by free grazing access. Galaty, for example, powerfully emphasised the ability of a functioning Maasai group to define their own borders, and to remove outsiders against whom one “invariably resisted” (1993: 2).

From an ecological point of view, it is often advantageous to have negotiable or non-specific boundaries. The spread of cattle can then be flexible and adapted to changing rains. Ostrom’s work held firm on the importance of clear property principles, and thus became no defense of ecological flexibility.

In today’s society, the competing land uses are many and are based on fixed legal rights. A new problem arises for the pastoralists to defend their interests if they themselves do not have such rights. The lack of formal rights then means that their loss is not recognised as a loss or as a morally relevant consequence of intervention. The one who makes such a loss becomes invisible. In Kenya, extensive work has been done to rebuild the land ownership system so that the earlier nominal state pastures are instead controlled by ‘local community foundations’. This, however, cannot solve the problems of maximising the mobility of grazing animals: the ideal of security in people’s rights stands against what is favorable ecologically, a difficult paradox.

**The Rationality of Cattle-Rearing and Moral Superstructure**

However, there are many other grounds on which the applicability of the model of the tragedy could be criticised in relation to the cattle keeping people in eastern and southern Africa. One of them is the idea of the narrowly individualistic oriented cattle owner. It
is central in that representation of cattle herders, whereby the more rationality-oriented interpretation of their strategies is transmuted into moral devaluation. Its core message is 'the cattle owners think only of themselves: they do not take into account their co-pastoralists, or other humans who have an interest in the savannas of East Africa and its wildlife. They should get off cattle in the name of solidarity so that the grass is spared!'

However, the ‘individually-owned herds’ among the shepherds of East Africa used to consist only partly of a man’s own cattle. To this came animals managed for relatives, who retained rights over them, and a complex collection of animals held in exchange with ‘cattle friends’. The social arrangements for this vary between different ethnicities, but in some ethnic groups like the Borana there are patrilineal groups, where members maintain an insurance responsibility for each other. A head of family who has lost his animals without his own fault could traditionally request animals for a new nuclear herd. A herd was never just one individual’s business.

Among East African pastoralists ‘the decision to acquire an animal’ does not look like what Hardin suggests. The continuous addition of new heifer calves is a prerequisite both for milk production for the family’s own consumption and the future continuity of the herd and the family. This is the focus of the traditional East African herdowner. He has a moral mission in addition to the care of the individual animal. The herdowner must make sure that not only his own livestock but also the sons’ part of the herd have conditions for future regrowth, based on heifers, that the herdowner controls without being limited by the claim of any other family member. The survival of she-calves is a great concern. In contrast to what Hardin describes, the herdowner does not ask “Should I get another animal or not?” He fights, with the help of the women of the family, in order for heifers to survive. Women have practical responsibility both for the care of calves and for the handling and distribution of milk.

The decisions most similar to that of Hardin’s concern are based only on the bull calves, a side product from the dairy economy. When the bull calves become weaned and can graze independently of their mothers, the owner has a choice to slaughter, sell in the meat market or to keep them. Retaining has costs in the form of inputs for watering and herding. For sale, the cattle owner is subject to the market, to competition with other forms of production and often to veterinary restrictions. The gelded meat animals normally form a smaller part of the herd.

A core problem for those living on cow milk is that both the milk and the regrowth of the herd require access to a herd consisting mainly of adult dairy cows. Unfortunately, not every other calf is born a heifer. The unfortunate will get a long series of bull calves, a fate that will threaten future access to food and cattle capital. An even flow of females of different ages is the most important resource. The devoted care of this capital is the main moral characteristic of the herdowner, in the face of threats of drought, disease, the temptation to sell the cows and in face of the ravages of fortune with the sex ratio of the newborn calves. It is an ability that is culturally perceived as equal to virility and the moral base of being a good man. This is why I refer to the herdowner with the pronoun ‘he’ in this text.

External observers often show a lack of understanding of how many animals and which composition of flock is required for a milk diet (Dahl and Hjort 1976). A larger number of animals allow for a refined herding organisation, more varied grazing, and risk minimising diversification of the herd composition. One of the explanations given to the alleged interest in maximising the number of animals in the herd has been the need for insurance against
risks (Eckholm 1975: 143; Glantz 1975: 4). Risk reduction, however, is not a question of number in itself, but ‘many animals’ should be seen as a short form for ‘a well composed flock’. Pastoralists do not want to lose critical links in the reproductive flow or the daily supply of food. The continuity of access to healthy females is a critical resource that must be ensured by regeneration, reproduction and maintenance, a never simple project. However, the community judgement of the man’s care of his capital is also linked to the joint guarantee of a basic resource by the patrilinear kinship group. The care of the cattle capital, that in Hardin’s model appears as a short-term individualistic pursuit, was in terms of pastoral morality a long-term, lineage-related foresight. These moral ideals do not shine through when you look at them with the Hardin filter, but for example explain resistance to the sale of females.

Hardin himself lacked direct experience of the life and decision-making situations of pastoral people but based his thinking about the herdsman’s options on stylised, imagined decision-making situations. The model has shortcomings in the interpretation of both pastoral access to land in East Africa and of the purposes of traditional cattle economies. The fact that it had such an impact created an inertia in achieving effective understanding of local herdowner perspectives on the conditions of production.

**Cattle, Overgrazing and Ecological Destruction?**

In relation to East African pastoralism, Hardin’s simplistic model failed in terms of the logic of production and the underlying values. Since it was formulated, views on ecological balance, pasture land degradation and overgrazing have changed.

The wear on a particular ground surface has, among other things, to do with cattle mobility. Safety and labour aspects make it easier to keep a larger and more diversified herd (which can support more shepherds). It is not easy to save standing grass, because there are many other creatures apart from livestock which nibble on the grass (wild grazing animals, termites and microorganisms). Regardless of grazing, the quality decreases when the grass dries out. The ecological surface is affected by how you distribute grazing and fertilisation across the ground. The trampling by the livestock pushes the manure into the ground and loosens the soil. Both the treading of animals and their grazing have recently been partially revalued. Some foundations (see Northern Rangelands Trust 2017) that manage dry areas in northern Kenya are now encouraging their members of associated herding co-ops to themselves experimentally use herding methods, which were in the 1980s seen as destructive. An example is ‘close herding in tight groups’ (Talbot 1971: 3; Schlee 1981: 36), aiming to produce better re-fertilisation.

What was previously seen as devastating pasture deterioration consisted of a shift from perennial grass to annual varieties, reduced coverage of grass, expansion of bare surfaces, degradation of soil and growth of woody plants. Overgrazed patches were considered open to the ravages of the sun and wind, creating erosion and possibly influencing the rainfall negatively (Hare et al. 1977: 33). All of this was considered irreversible, and generalisable processes generating reduced production capacity, ultimately caused by overgrazing. Since the late 1980s, researchers instead saw the savanna environment as relatively resilient (Behnke 1993: 1-2). Homewood and Rodgers (1987: 119) noted such traits as “a higher reproductive rate of savanna plants under stress conditions; increased growth rates of vegetation at low biomass; spatial heterogeneity which encourages herbivore migration and provides habitat refuges and recolonization sources; underground reserves; dormancy mechanisms and the
‘predator switching’ flexibility of the herbivore community exploiting the multispecies plant biomass. Attempts to protect savanna against disturbance or to reduce heterogeneity may damage this resilience.” With the new vision, overgrazing was a minor problem compared to how previous experts saw it. The ecologists found instead that rain in general led to rapid regrowth: there was no question of irreversible destruction.

The reassessment of the savannah landscape was related to the so-called new ecology, with its rejection of the idea of natural balances. Over time, there was a changed view of the productivity of traditional cattle farming, which was previously seen as both destructive and ineffective. Questions on productivity often have a moral twist, linked to an older idea that one shall not allow resources to go to waste because of underutilisation. The rhetorical effect differs drastically if you measure productivity in terms of deposited money, area, individual animals or number of people meaningfully employed and with legitimate requirements of supply. Measured in terms of productivity per animal, Moris wrote (1988: 1-2), “productivity was low but per hectare at least as good as for available options for resource utilisation”. He then leaned towards new methods to measure the produced biomass per hectare.

Over time, rangeland researchers also became more aware that ecological sustainability and ecological downturn must always be assessed in relation to what local production methods look like (Homewood and Rodgers 1987: 120; Warren and Agnew 1988: 18). A change in vegetation does not need to be a deterioration from an ecological point of view if it does not change the basic conditions for plant and animal life. However, it can still be devastating to human housekeeping.

Even before the new ecology broke through, scientists questioned that the savannah was threatened by their human inhabitants and their cattle. Jacobs (1975: 410-411) quoted extensive ecological research that showed that intensive grazing created the low grass landscape that favored wild grazing animals. The cattle grazed down the thorn shrubs and opened new surfaces for the wildlife (cf. Adams 1996: 1). The same argument has been put forward on the old practice of burning overly woody shrubbery. Insecure pastures and under-use entail the invasion of less nutritious vegetation, which also attracts tsetse (Dahl 1979, Schlee 1981: 54, Kjekshus 1977). Warren and Agnew (1988: 6) further quoted evidence that pasture was more productive in hard-grazed regimes.

Abel (1993: 1-3) argued that in areas with varying rains, the amount of rainfall was more important for grazing quality than the density of grazing cattle. O’Connor (1985) proposed that the natural environment that pastoralists use is relatively robust. In the dry season when the grazing pressure is large, the plants’ living parts hide behind the thorns and in the seeds, but in the rainy season when vegetation grows at its best, there is more than the cattle need. Behnke (1993) underlined how meaningless absolute land control over a single limited area would be in these areas where rain falls in unpredictable places. A certain fuzziness in ownership and access is only to ecological advantage (Behnke 1993: 1-2).

The basic ideas of Hardin and his followers about the ecological processes were not correct. Productivity does not always go up with lower cattle density: hard grazing is not always destructive.

**Hardin’s Policy Legacy**

Hardin’s description implied a package of measures with two main parts. The first meant that land should not be under ‘communal sharing’ or ‘free access’. The second concerned the necessity of compulsory or voluntary cattle reduction, a constant theme in older
administrative documents related to the East African pastoralists. It is not known to me if any cases of forceful herd reduction were actually carried out in post-colonial times but it was always on the agenda (see e.g. Brown 1971; Eckholm 1975: 143). Perhaps the ethical doubts and political risks were too obvious. The alternative in northern Kenya was that the herding households ought to sell off cattle, but the infrastructure for this was poor. Often, quarantine restrictions were an obstacle.

Warren and Agnew (1988: 7-8) were among the first to ask what reproduced these beliefs, which seemed to rest on such a poor basis. Their response was that the beliefs had become ‘institutional facts’, a concept the authors borrowed from the analysis Thompson et al. (1986) made of how factually unresolved ideas about soil deterioration spread in Nepal because they served the interests of the authorities. Warren and Agnew argued that the notion of the Tragedy of the Commons contributed to attracting economic resources and maintaining the flow of international aid. It also diverted interest from other sensitive issues, such as the most important issue for the livestock owners, that of the shrinking areas of rangeland, free and open for mobile cattle. External observers often emphasise the absolute number of animals rather than the limits of their movement or the possible intensity of movement.

Lane and Morehead (1993: 4) described the story of The Tragedy of Commons as “the most influential theory one finds among policy-makers in Africa today”. They noted that the theory was used to justify land reform that generally meant the privatisation of land, the registration of land rights and programs for centrally planned land use. They declared straight to the point (p.9) that the idea of the Tragedy of the Commons provided extensive legitimacy to the nationalisation of pastoral resources. Similarly, Galaty (1993: 3) pointed out that in spite of being dubious, the arguments in Kenya and Tanzania nevertheless backed up political demands for privatisation or collectivisation (depending on the political system). A recap showed that in those countries, Hardin-inspired interpretations had led to individual or group-ranchbased rights to land or at least justified them theoretically.

The other side of the coin was exclusion from pastures for the less-favored, and reduced total mobility with negative ecological effects. The causality in legitimising representations is often composed. Was the impact of formalised rights the result of a deliberate strategy or just a logical but unplanned consequence of many events? Whatever the answer, our attention is directed to how important it is to reflect on the context of interest when moral issues are implied. The use of Hardin’s model was propelled by an overwhelming intersubjectivity rather than by some form of empirical test or by being based on careful study of how the livestock tenders reasoned.

Hardin’s first formulation depicts pastoral strategies as rational responses to a specific decision-making situation. Yet he, as well as his followers, fit them into a moralising framework. In this moral assessment, the wished-for possible restraint in how many animals were kept was the only thing that counted as a morally meritorious cooperation – the commentators did not know about other types of collaboration between the cattle owners or found them irrelevant. The possible solidarity felt by individual herd owners was in the model hijacked by others, exploiting it to expand their own herds.

Tobisson and Rudqvist (1992: 6) summarise the moralising position: “to note is that when social groups that inhabit marginal dry areas are placed on the agenda, it is mainly because they themselves are identified as the problem and the main cause of environmental degradation. They are regarded as careless people who deliberately deplete natural resources
for short-term gain, whose traditional ideals and stubbornness affect the efforts of authorities and donors to improve the state of the environment”. Devaluing the livelihoods of self-sufficient groups is a long tradition, which in no way confines itself to how to treat East African pastoralists. In retrospect, you see how colonial and post-colonial environment policies for cultivation, forestry and fishing in many parts of the world have been linked to the moral denigration of the inhabitants of the areas in question. To blame those affected by accidents is a well-rooted tradition (see e.g. Sen 1995: 218). The rhetoric that surrounded the idea of the Tragedy of the Commons fitted into the general pattern identified by post-colonial research in the spirit of Fanon and Said. Western habits, thought models and science were normatively defined as superior to those found in the former colonies, and the subjected population portrayed in derogatory terms. Moralising the colonised people’s management of natural resources and the underestimation of local ecological knowledge offered a justification at local level not only of general subordination but also of concrete interventions in the subject’s manner of subsistence. Such discourses were furthered by both external actors and local new elites in the post-colonial situation.

Swidden forest farmers and pastoralists were seen in the 1980s as lazy, wasteful and destructive, but at the same time driven by their own greed. Fairhead and Leach wrote, for example, in a noted book (1998) about how contemporary and colonial forest management institutions legitimised their existence by incorrectly describing the West African forest as being in a state of acute crisis. They thereby justified the control of fires and trees, ‘protecting’ forest areas from a local population described as “unsatisfactory resource managers, whose activities destroyed the forest and required repressive regulation” (Fairhead and Leach 1998: 170). Interventions introduced from above have led, at various points in the world, to the collapse of self-sufficiency and that small producers have lost land resources to their own or colonial state, which pursued ‘rational’, usually specialised, commercial production. In the long run, such nationalisation has sometimes led to privatisation of once collective resources (see e.g. Lane and Morehead 1993: 16 for group ranches), sometimes to be used more as a collateral than for production of human sustenance.

The impact of the Hardin-followers’ scientifically ill-founded model illustrates that moral assessments of power-weak groups are not necessarily based on facts, but live their own lives. One can ask if there is something in moralising thinking that makes it relatively resistant to fact-based arguments and makes morale trump empirical description. One of the few who have discussed the difficulty of rhetorically disproving Hardin’s formulation is Emery Roe. His thesis is that communication on issues “where extreme uncertainty reigns” (Roe 1994:14) must be based on an equally hard-hitting narrative as the thesis you need to counteract. For him, ‘narrative’ means a causal chain with beginning, middle and end. To argue like I have done here, using a point-by-point approach, is useless, according to him. When there is reasonable doubt over what is right, decision- and policy makers may find that the already given narrative gives strength to their decision (Roe 1994: 2). Roe emphasises the structure of the argument and does not make any point that moral elements simplify the spread of narratives. However, other theoreticians dealing with narrativity and cognition mention them as key elements (Brown 1971; Czarniawska 1997; Lakoff 1996: 169; Williams 2006)

The intention behind Hardin’s example was to strengthen the surrounding argument of the article on Earth’s population issues. In an otherwise strongly moralising text, the parable is written in a neutral language, although it refers to highly morally charged phenomena.
Private ownership is one of the cornerstones of our culture, and desertification is a powerful symbol of acute environmental degradation. Anyone who is not satisfied with the reference to Hardin but reads the article, may wonder whether there is not a feedback in the opposite direction also; from the moralising and crisis oriented surrounding text to the superficially more neutral parable story. Psychologists working on issues of morality and emotion have noted that emotions tend to strengthen the experience of presence and immediate relevance: they act as a kind of reality certificate (see Prinz 2006: 38; Frijda 1988: 352). Other parts of the article are also less well-structured than the shepherd example, which through its narrative form is catchy and easy to remember.

About Morality and the Necessity of Time to Seek Knowledge

To moralise is not something that is behind us in time: Every era has its values that pave the way for policy fashions. To legitimise the land grabbing of colonial powers and post-colonial regimes by blackening earlier forms of land-use morally is just one of several examples of how morality has influenced policy. In similar ways, national and international development organisations have often legitimised their interventions. Positive moral stereotyping also has a role and the filter that moralisation offers can apply to romantisation as well as denigration. Voluntary organisations and NGOs are looking for grassroots contacts to legitimise and market themselves in terms of authentic popular knowledge and anchoring. Others are looking for role models or alternatives to mobilise in a culture-critical battle.

In the twenty-first century, there is a strong emphasis on ‘community’ solutions for different resource allocation systems, rooted in the neoliberal dream of the natural community that is supposed to exist if one quenches the state’s tendency to interfere through regulation. The anti-state stance of neoliberalism coupled with the popular orientation of non-profit organisations in the 1990s produced a nominally decentralised development model that proponents hoped would transfer the control over cultivation and forestry, fishing, hunting and pastoralism to local communities. Today, such interventions are often described as a question of ‘win-win’ for both the local population and the environment. However, it is not uncommon for the locals to continue to lose resources, be it forestry or wildlife reserves, and difficult to find successful projects where locals explicitly feel like winners. ‘Community’ and ‘co-management’ by various ‘stakeholders’ have also been criticised as normative concepts that veil differences in status and opportunities (Bromley and Cernea 1989: 52; Agrawal 1997). They provide a static view of populations in supposed harmony with nature (Fairhead and Leach 1998: 179) and with each other, even when hundred years of external interventions have already created gaps between local individualists and entrepreneurs on the one hand and the fundamentalist and collectivists on the other.

Today, environmental policies are often linked to the rhetoric of recognition, where respect for local knowledge has a great place. There is a conception of the importance of self-esteem and of own agency for the individual’s self-responsibility. Structural obstacles and problems are therefore given little importance and it can be seen as immoral to see the people as victims of circumstances. This, too, can be deeply problematic if the recognition is not based on seeing the whole situation of people or the internal differences in interests that exist in their society. There is a risk with standardized interpretation models, whether they are based on biased stereotypes or sweeping generalisations about how human rationality and morality work. There is a methodological problem here: the knowledge of both ecosystems
and production forms require close and careful scrutiny, difficult to achieve for large scale organisations involved in development and environmental work or in new commercial activities. Fairhead and Leach (1998: 35) mention, in this context, the administrative need for simple interpretation models: “... where data is poor, time is short, national agendas are overruled and local consultation impossible”. In his time, Harding’s story filled that demand well, and could be carried forth by the ruling moralities of the time, but his dedication did not protect the model against having destructive consequences both for pastoralists and their environment.

Today, acute environment-and climate issues and a sense of urgency exacerbate the problem of lack of local details and insights, both at the technical and moral level. The societal conversation about crisis and time scarcity dominate and can distort both moral engagement and knowledge and affect the market for different policy options dressed in ethical draping.

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Harmonization and Ethnographic Critique in the Context of Innovation Politics

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on the intrinsic potential of ethnographic critique challenged in the context of innovation political projects equipped with the harmonizing Triple Helix model. An ethnographic approach has been used to generate the initial problem of harmonization, which is discussed in relation to Henry Etzkowitz’ textual assumptions on harmonization in the Triple Helix model, followed by two ethnographic cases concerned with the practices of harmonization. Harmonization is described as making consistent different provinces of meaning or worlds, unrestricting them from conflicting structures of relevance. Therefore, the concluding remarks attempt to broaden the scope of critical ethnographic strategies with the help of a Weberian differentiation between a political and a social scientific world.

Keywords: Harmonization, Ethnography, Critique, Innovation Politics, Triple Helix

Introduction

Social anthropology is used to terrains shifting under its feet. Things observed from afar suddenly become near, and the knowledge economy is an example. Consider the place of anthropology as a discipline in a world where creativity becomes an adjunct of productivity, interdisciplinary collaboration becomes a paradigm for innovation, and everyone is valued for their expertise. How to lead a critical life emerges as a new kind of problem. (Strathern 2006)

In 2015, I had participated in a seminar in which a significant number of organisational representatives had gathered in order to establish two world-leading research facilities – ESS\(^1\) and MAX IV\(^2\) – as “Growth Engines” in the Öresund region (the Southern part of Sweden and the Copenhagen area). The Danish and the Swedish representatives were about to work on an interregional application with a focus on research, development, and innovation. The main idea of the application was to establish a future collaborative interregional project that went beyond national as well as organizational borders. Such work, however, demanded a project leader entrusted with the task of visualizing and thematically focusing on the diverse interests of the various representatives to make the project fruitful. As the project leader, Emil had successfully been able to simplify the heterogeneity with the help of four integrated “bubbles”: Industry-Academy, Research-Education, Border Barriers-Service-Information, and Marketing. While pointing to the power-point slide with the colored bubbles, Emil said,

\(^1\) The European Spallation Source (ESS) is set to become a multidisciplinary research center based on the world’s most powerful neutron source. It is planned to be finished in 2019. [Link]

\(^2\) The MAX IV laboratory will support three areas of research: accelerator physics, research based on the use of synchrotron radiation, and nuclear physics using energetic electrons. Construction started in 2010, and the opening ceremony was scheduled for 2016. [Link]
Where are we today? It has been an extensive process, and many of you have been involved from the beginning. Today we have come to a point where it is possible to view a common thread running through the different projects. Previously, we were just different parts, but now we have constructed a whole. However, we need to give an account of the broader societal benefits. Creating wholeness is essential. How are we to knit the results from the various parts? The interregional project cannot live its own life without any societal connections. Everything must harmonize with each other.

Thereafter, the four interdisciplinary representatives of the “bubbles,” one by one, gave an account of how to contribute to the regional, and societal development. After we had finished listening to the representatives, Emil said, “I think we can find a great interregional added value. All the parts now hang together and point towards the same thing – exchange. By integrating the four bubbles, we can create an innovative win-win-situation.” Emil posed a question to the strategic project leader: “Marja, how are we to think when writing this interregional application?” Marja responded,

> It seems evident that this collaborative, interregional project could apply from EU’s innovation strategy – Horizon2020. Most of us here are interested in innovation. So, there is an obvious connection to the two research facilities: ESS and MAX IV. These two research facilities can produce smart social and economic growth within several sectors.

As an ethnographer, I wonder how we can comprehend these public expressions in terms of a political project or model.

In a rhetorical ethnographic approach, the vignette above is “thick” (Geertz 1973) with meaning as it gives a social expression of the trendsetting Triple Helix-model used as an underlying ideal and practical foundation for contemporary innovation politics. The aim of innovation projects could be comprehended as increasing the economic and social growth in the existing welfare society by striving towards one common integrated future (cf. Strathern 2004). Policymakers and policy-linked researchers (government employees) working on “innovation” usually depart from the Triple Helix-model (Etzkowitz 2004, 2005; Shinn 2002), since it provides them with idealistic and practical principles on how to construct productive relations for imagining an uncertain future. In contrast to the notion of a centralized model in which the state controls the academic and industrial worlds, and the laissez-faire model in which the academia, the state, and the industry collaborate to a certain extent across explicit boundaries, the Triple Helix-model undertakes hybrid and collaborative relations between university, industry and the state (this has been further elaborated upon in this article). In this context, I would like to suggest that we are dealing with a phenomenon that logically could be comprehended in terms of harmonization (see Nader 1990, 1997). Not least because of the phenomenon in question (Triple Helix) could be understood as attempts of making different worlds (expressed above as “bubbles”) consistent in the sense that they become unrestricted from conflicting structures of relevance that give meaning to specific related “objects” (see Schutz 1999). The processes of harmonization, thus, poses a challenge for a Weberian distinction between politics and social science/ethnography (Weber 1977).

Marilyn Strathern (2000: 286–7, 2004, 2006; see also Godin 2015, 2017) has underlined that anthropologists ought to become critically alert about the new emerging relationships, between innovation politics and ethnographic projects since there are several indications of increased harmonizing monologues on behalf of more critical dialogues. At
the backdrop of this ethnographic and critical reflection on a new emerging harmonizing phenomenon, it seems reasonable to ask the following questions: What do the harmonization processes look like in an ideal textual world? What do the harmonization processes look like in a practical everyday life world? The two questions are addressed through textual and empirical relations in order to paint a dynamic image of the harmonizing processes in the Öresund region. With the help of this textual and empirical case, the purpose of this article is to extend the disciplinary conversation on ethnography with critical strategies (Marcus and Fischer 1999; Strathern 1987).

The article proceeds in four steps. First, I have provided a brief historical background and development of the classic ethnographic project with critique. Second, I have given an account of my ethnographic approach in order to demonstrate how it generated an awareness of the relationship between harmonization and ethnographic critique. Third, I have presented the result and discussion, which is divided into two parts: the Triple Helix in its textual and practical expression. I have then moved on to the concluding remarks in which I have discussed the two questions before extending the disciplinary conversations concerning critical ethnographic strategies.

**Background**

In this step, I have made an attempt to outline a brief historical background of the ethnographic project, against the processes of harmonization, to clarify the problem at hand. As I present a brief exposé concerned with the classical ethnographic project, and its development during the mid-1980s, the principal point is of a pedagogical matter about highlighting the intrinsic potential critique in the qualitative method.

When reading Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* ([1922] 2002), it becomes understandable that he continuously struggled with the practically and conceptually interrelated work, between the modern capitalistic world and the non-modern world of the Trobriand Islanders. As Malinowski was setting out to describe the extensive and sophisticated trading system of the Kula, he claimed that the goal of ethnographic fieldwork is based on three avenues: 1) a clear outline and documentation of the culture and its structure; 2) taking fieldnotes on action and behaviors that articulate the cultural experiences; and 3) documenting the natives’ point of view by (in)formal interviews. It follows that he came to discuss the problem with preconceived ideas about the meaning of “Ownership” (Malinowski 2002: 89). Malinowski underlined that the meaning of the word ownership changes depending on its relation to a specific social context. In western capitalistic societies, ownership closely relates to economic and legal institutions, which might not be the case in all societies around the world. To own an object in a western society, constituted by a capitalistic logic, indicates that people have the legal right to sell it for personal profit (cf. Barnett & Silverman 1979: 40-81). Use of the western word “own” in the description of a collective native society is, according to Malinowski, an example of how the ethnographer unconsciously relies on preconceived ideas in the ethnographic project. To sincerely understand the meaning of ownership, in a different society than our own, he stated that the ethnographer ought to deal with his or her preconceived ideas in the interpretation of other customs, traditions or rites.

From the perspective of Alfred Schutz (1999), Malinowski’s discussion engages with understanding preconceived ideas, as researchers dealing with two different provinces of
meaning, also known as worlds. Schutz rightfully emphasized the intersubjective fact that human beings live in multiple provinces of meaning. In the everyday lifeworld, there are infinite provinces of meaning – such as art, economy, politics, and science – with their own logical, temporal, bodily, and social dimensions. It means that people making a Kierkegaardian “leap” between different provinces need to consider its “belonging structure of relevance” which gives meaning to closely related material and conceptual “objects.” All provinces of meaning are, according to Schutz, to be treated and assumed as systemic contexts of objects with specific reciprocal relationships to each other. When people “leap” between different provinces, it follows that, initially, encounter different conflicting meanings and objects – usually known to ethnographers as culture shock. This kind of shocking encounter, thus, generates various methodological problems, such as the case of Malinowski’s discussion on preconceived ideas. In other words, in the classical ethnographic project, here explained with the help of Schutz, there are no harmonizing relationships between various provinces of meaning. As Malinowski considers the meaning of ownership among the Trobriand Islanders, there is an intrinsic contrast between an individualistic modern Western capitalistic (economic) world and a non-modern (gift giving) province of meaning constituted by the collective. As a reader of Malinowski’s world-famous book, it becomes evident that the existence of the two Schutzian provinces or worlds creates an opening for potential ethnographic critique.

As is well known to most anthropologists, Marcel Mauss succeeded in intensifying Malinowski’s intrinsic potential critique when launching his groundbreaking theory of gift giving (see Friberg 2012). Today we are aware of the socio-political fact that Mauss carried on with the intellectual tradition, analytically concerned with social transformations during the nineteenth century: the rise of individualism, the decline of religious solidarity, the disappearance of traditional authorities and the growth of the market as a medium for human relationships. In this intellectual context, The Gift ([1925] 1972) could be measured as a search for the origin of the social contract. By taking a departure from an enormous amount of ethnographic material (foremost the material of Boas and Malinowski), Mauss was able to criticize the contemporary theories of self-interest and the idea of pure economic relations. Mauss’ critique expressed itself through a proper form of gift giving theory, situated somewhere between communism and individualism, as an honorable approach for the reader to follow in his or her everyday life (1972: 88).

Along with the “representation crises” in the mid-1980s (Clifford and Marcus 2010 [1986]; Geertz, 1988), which seriously questioned the asymmetric relationship between the modern capitalistic world and the non-modern peripheral provinces in anthropological writings, ethnographers struggled to develop the Malinowskian ethnographic project (Marcus 1998). Consequently, the ethnographic horizon became increasingly directed towards the institutional domains of the West, which gave meaning to the expression of doing “anthropology at home” (Jackson 1987). As a result of this, the rationality among many anthropologists became that of ethnography as a new and potential ground for societal and cultural critique. In Anthropology as Cultural Critique ([1986] 1999), George Marcus and Michael Fischer claimed that ethnographers could no longer operate under the ideal that they were discovering new provinces or worlds, since they were stepping into ready-made representations. Along with this argument, the authors claimed that a “primary framing task of any ethnography is to juxtapose these preexisting representations, attempting to
understand their diverse conditions of production, and to incorporate the resulting analysis fully into the strategies which define any contemporary fieldwork project.” (Marcus and Fischer 1999: xx) They suggested that the basic critical strategy was that of defamiliarization, which means attempts to disrupt common sense, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar settings to make the reader conscious of different worlds (Marcus and Fischer 1999: 137).

I want to propose that the ethnographic practice of defamiliarization is surprisingly much the same as the literary approach of Wendy Brown who claims that critique is about taking an object (with power to organize and govern us) “for a different project than that to which it is currently tethered” (2005: 16) However, the notion of defamiliarization, according to Marcus and Fischer, is to be agreed as critical reflection, that is, contemplation on the Others’ as well as the ethnographers taken-for-granted “objects” in the everyday lifeworld. The message of this form of criticism is that the natural order of material and conceptual objects is to be considered as culturally constructed. Similarly, Strathern (1987) discussed critical strategies to utilize when doing ethnography “home.” It followed that she initially avoided a binary division between “home and away.” For Strathern, conducting ethnography was not about a spatial, social, or national belonging; instead, it was a strategic decision about the organization of knowledge. Being at “home” means that the ethnographer is organizing the knowledge aligned with the informants’ way of organizing knowledge. In both the case of Marcus and Fisher and Strathern, it seems they attempted to construct specific ethnographic strategies in purpose to make a distinction between what we could comprehend as a Schutzian academic ethnographic province and the Others’ worlds, with the primary purpose to evoke critical thought.

In sum, while reading the classic Malinowskian ethnographic project, it is possible to detect a distinction between two central Schutzian worlds, which implies an intrinsic potential critique. As was illustrated above with the help of Mauss, this potential critique could be intensified in a various situation if necessary. As noted, however, the “natural” distinction between the worlds seems to have become challenged with the emergence of the representation crisis in the anthropological discipline. Consequently, some creative anthropologists began to experiment with various critical strategies, which is grasped as a way to re-establishing the notion of different Schutzian worlds here – a return to a potential critical approach. With this as a backdrop in mind, the point is that the intrinsic potential critique in the ethnographic project – constituted by dualism that strives towards the multiplicity of the horizons of the lifeworld – again, becomes challenged in the context of innovation political projects with Triple Helix as a trendsetting policy model. As noted in the introduction, the main reason for this form of contemporary challenge is due to the political fact that the intentionality of innovation politics is that of a single integrated future world (Strathern 2004).

A Note on the Ethnographic Approach

In opposition to philosophical inquiry based on pre-constructed concepts (armchair anthropology), distinctive for the ethnographic project here is the empathic attention towards the Others’ expressions (textually and practically). The relational form of listening to the Others’ expressions, such as the case of the introductory vignette, creates a continuous flow of reflective questions as the ethnographer struggles to make sense of the phenomenon in the field. Hence, most of the ethnographic questions appear and force themselves on
the ethnographer during fieldwork, when he or she gets (re)involved in new as well as old relations (Agar 1986; Friberg 2018). Here, the ethnographer will always find him- or herself in the middle of historical and contemporary relations that should be described – from experienced relations to textual ones in the form of a monographs or scientific articles. Strathern (2005: vii) calls attention to this form of ethnographic knowledge production as using interpersonal relationships to uncover and create conceptual relationships, which is a reasonable way to describe my own ethnographic approach.

Ethnographic material was collected through participatory observations, interviews, and documents within a life science network in the Öresund region between 2014 and 2015. As a fairly stable node in this network, my ethnographic base was in a Swedish life science research foundation (more about this later) that arranged specific meetings aimed at discussing and creating collaborative projects over the boundaries between universities, the Danish and the Swedish state, and industries – they assumed the Triple Helix policy model. From this node in the life science network, I became aware of the existence of the interregional project presented above. Consequently, I followed the last two collaborative seminars to a postponed successfully funded interregional project, which gave me the opportunity to see how the Triple Helix operated in interpersonal relationships. When conducting participant observation and doing interviews, I got a sense of how the Triple Helix model influences other organizational structures, and challenges critical strategies (see Friberg 2017, 2018). Accordingly, I drew conceptual inspiration from Nader (1990, 1997) because many of the ethnographic situations could be understood and explained as variations of the same theme (Lévi-Strauss 2016: 76–82) – the phenomenon of harmonization. As demonstrated by Nader, many of today’s Western political models actively influence and persuade individuals and groups – as an imagined natural virtue of civilizing progress. According to Nader, the controlling processes have shifted from social or coercive complications to become cultural or persuasive matters. In this new unipolar world order, differences and antagonism are considered “uncivilized,” while the notion of harmony is seen as a western civilization process.

With the backdrop of these interpersonal and conceptual relations, I became concerned with the expression of innovation political harmonization processes and their relationship to the ethnographic project with potential critique.

Results and Discussion

This step is divided into two main parts. The first part demonstrates the textual model of harmonization with a close reading of the Triple Helix policy model. The second part illustrates the practices of harmonization with two ethnographic cases. This division allows for the demonstration of harmonization processes – both textually and empirically – as an analytical precondition for understanding their influence in everyday lifeworld.

I. A Textual Model of Harmonization

The contemporary popularity of the model has led to the construction of the official Triple Helix Association, with Professor Henry Etzkowitz as its current president. The Triple Helix Association now has its own website, journal, workshops, and conferences. Consequently, there is a global network of researchers and policymakers with interest in organizational collaboration between universities, industry, and government in various contexts.
According to the Triple Helix Association, just as the three worlds retain their own specific identities, they are also supposed to assume “the role of the other.” This form of interaction based mainly on technical and economic development is the foundation of innovation. Etzkowitz writes,

Moving beyond product development, innovation in innovation then occurs through “taking the role of the other,” encouraging hybridization among the institutional spheres, creating new organizational formats, such as the venture capital firm, from elements of the various institutional spheres. (2004: 69)

It follows that the actors involved will attempt to capitalize on new knowledge in order to develop and strengthen regions (Etzkowitz 2005: 19–24). Etzkowitz argues that the model itself is a “rational way” to gather common resources and reduce competition between various worlds (Etzkowitz 2005: 72). The three worlds – universities, businesses, and the state – are seen as relatively equal partners in innovative strategic development. As such, Etzkowitz considers the model to be “endless,” as it continuously generates new harmonizing options as to what a region, company, university, and state can do.

**Etzkowitz’s Connection to the Regional Context**

I have mainly focussed on the content of Etzkowitz’s Swedish book *Trippelhelix – den nya innovationsmodellen Högskola, näringsliv och myndigheter i samverkan* (The Triple Helix: University-Industry-Government Innovation in Action, 2005) on account of the book’s close socio-political and organizational relation to the regional context around which I conducted my original fieldwork.

Etzkowitz’s book was commissioned by the Centre for Business and Policy Studies (Studieförbundet Näringsliv och Samhälle), an organization that presents itself as a politically independent Swedish think tank. According to their homepage, this organization – consisting of leading decision makers in Sweden – is concerned with making an impact on decision makers in business and public administration through activities such as research, seminars, and publications of various kinds.3 As I interviewed several Swedish policymakers in the Öresund region, many of them referred to Etzkowitz’s book, which in itself indicates its impact. Even though the Swedish policymakers did not always agree with Etzkowitz’s line of argument, the overall influence of his ideas became apparent to me when the policymakers informed me about certain procedures. They referred to activities such as “creating regional collaborative clusters,” which is a direct adoption of Etzkowitz’s argument. Moreover, the policymakers explained that they had established a specific innovation unit in their own public organizational setting, which is another obvious reference to Etzkowitz work.4 The innovation unit, for example, had the specific function to encourage and to create new innovations and thus promote regional economic and social growth, which is one of Etzkowitz’s main points. The policymakers’ arguments and practices, as we will see, are thus consistent with Etzkowitz’s textual intentions, and any congruency between them is not a surprise for anyone who has made a close reading of the book. Already in the Preface, the reader has learnt that there has been a longstanding relationship between Etzkowitz and the Swedish innovation system, which is mainly represented by an organization called

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3 See [http://www.sns.se/artikel/om-sns](http://www.sns.se/artikel/om-sns)

4 See [https://www.skane.se/organisation-politik/Naringsliv-och-arbetsmarknad/](https://www.skane.se/organisation-politik/Naringsliv-och-arbetsmarknad/)
VINNOVA. It is worth noting that the former director-general of VINNOVA, who at the beginning of my fieldwork was the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University, was closely related to Etzkowitz. This close relationship, between the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University and Etzkowitz, seems to have played a significant regional role in promoting and organizing the establishment of ESS and MAX IV using the Triple Helix model (Carlén and Wulff 2014). During my fieldwork, the Vice-Chancellor publicly claimed that the harmonization of the state, the universities (mainly represented by ESS and MAX IV), and the industrial world would lead to new innovation and, thus, regional economic and social development.

The University

According to Etzkowitz (2005: 172), the main pillar of the Triple Helix model is the university because of its centrality in a knowledge-based society/economy. However, it is not the traditional Humboldtian university (i.e., a world separated from the state and the market) that he has in mind. In this context, Etzkowitz advocates the “Entrepreneurial University” as the main engine of technological, economic, and social development. It follows that the core mission of this kind of university is the capitalization of knowledge, establishing the university as an independent economic actor (Etzkowitz 2005: 37). As the main engine of the Triple Helix, the entrepreneurial university is to be controlled neither by the state nor by industry. Etzkowitz’s ideal university determines its own strategic directions, regulated more or less by the critique of students and some university teachers (2005: 56). In essence, universities will act as venture capitalists. On a meta level, Etzkowitz argues that venture capital is an “innovation of innovation” – that is, a new creation with new organizational mechanisms designed to promote technological, economic, and social innovation. Unlike holding companies, which may seek to retain ownership, the venture capital model has a strategy of withdrawing from the investment by means of sale within a reasonable time (Etzkowitz 2005: 97–99). In summary, the entrepreneurial university can be characterized in terms of five partly contradictory norms that should be balanced to achieve optimal results:

1. Capitalization: Knowledge must be obtained and transferred to be of practical use. The capitalization of knowledge is the foundation of economic and social development.
2. Interdependency: Instead of being an ivory tower, the entrepreneurial university interacts with the state and business.
3. Independent: The entrepreneurial university is not dependent on other institutions.
4. Hybrid formation: To solve some of the contradictions of interdependency and independency, the entrepreneurial university needs to create new hybrid organizations.
5. Reflection: The internal organization of the entrepreneurial university must be continuously transformed as its relationships with state and business change. Corresponding organizational changes should occur within the state and companies. (Etzkowitz 2005: 43–44)

3 According to their homepage, “VINNOVA – Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems – is Sweden’s innovation agency. Our mission is to promote sustainable growth by improving the conditions for innovations, as well as funding needs-driven research.” http://www.vinnova.se/en/About-VINNOVA/
4 See Etzkowitz’s (2005: 11–12) personal gratitude to the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University (Per Eriksson).
In a fully developed entrepreneurial university, research is designed through the collaboration of scientists and external actors, with the overall goal being to create useful and applied knowledge.

The State

In Etzkowitz’s Triple Helix model, the state is to be understood as “the innovative state.” This means that the state should attempt to recreate the sources of productivity in science and technology – not as the sole actor but through new forms of collaboration. Summarized below are the 10 principal rules of an innovative state:

1. Expand control of violence within the territory, from the public to the private sector, to promote stability and security.
2. Introduce government guarantees for private capital to increase risk-taking in relation to new investments.
3. Change the tax system to protect the nation and promote welfare.
4. Offer tax relief for research and development.
5. Introduce rules that structure economic life.
6. Introduce new hybrid institutions to promote innovation.
7. Make use of legislation to create specific rights, such as patents.
8. Ensure that universities control the intellectual property rights created by public funding.
9. Supply resources for basic research in order to foster innovation.
10. Supply venture capital in order to create a linear model of innovation.

(Etzkowitz 2005: 60–61)

Etzkowitz states that many contemporary European societies (e.g., Great Britain, France, and Sweden) are constituted by a post-corporate collaboration between the state, the business world, and the entrepreneurial university. “Post” signifies the replacement of unions with universities in collaboration with the state (Etzkowitz 2005: 72). The innovative state therefore seeks new partners when striving to develop its regions. The consequences are half-public spaces – hybrids of the private and the public. According to Etzkowitz, this is what knowledge-based economic development – innovation systems – is all about.

Business

In the Triple Helix model, business comprises “Relationship businesses” constituted by organizational and technical innovations. In contrast to a contract business based on transactions across explicit boundaries, a relationship business emerges in a network that transcends institutional boundaries; it is part of cooperation processes that include other units, such as research groups within entrepreneurial universities (Etzkowitz 2005: 77). Etzkowitz writes that new businesses usually emerge in response to various strategies for developing a region. Heterogeneous partners meet to solve a regional problem and get to know each other, creating long-lasting alliances and reciprocal trust; according to Etzkowitz, this kind of cross-fertilization is the key to innovation. However, knowledge-based companies are usually successful because of specific people with “double lives” who have learned from the “other side,” for example, a physicist who has learned about marketing research products from an economist. The ideal person in the Triple Helix model is one with degrees or
qualifications in two or more particular subjects, which allows him or her to function as a translator – a creator of bridges – between disparate worlds (Etzkowitz 2005: 81, 85).

Innovation and Regional Development

Etzkowitz believes that the Triple Helix model is superior to previous political innovation models that were based on the interests of particular worlds. Referring to VINNOVA’s role in research and innovation for sustainable growth, Etzkowitz (2005: 72) claims that the core issue in Swedish innovation politics is to reduce centrifugal forces – that is, to increase collaboration on a local, regional level. When research is applied, it is useful and comprises innovation, it also becomes a political question for the local and regional economy. In contrast to identifying regions as geographical, cultural, and industrial areas, Etzkowitz argues that we need to understand them as innovation units – Triple Helix regions. The development of such regions cannot be seen as linear because it has various points of departure and involves multiple actors. The process of regional change is neither purely market-oriented nor purely politically driven because of its heterogeneous objects and subjects. The ideal Triple Helix is observed as the hybridization of semi-autonomous actors with process perspectives, a multifunctional approach outside institution-bound thinking. The ultimate goal is a self-generating process of enterprising unconnected to a specific university or regional initiative. According to Etzkowitz, a Triple Helix region based on several heterogeneous sources of knowledge can reproduce itself. He further writes that the roles of the three worlds within the regional organization process can be replaced if necessary. For example, if political decision-makers are lacking, a company can encourage a branch of trade to collaborate with the universities. This is a way to ensure that Triple Helix regions continue to generate economic growth (Etzkowitz 2005: 110–112).

With these textual claims in mind, the following step enables us to understand how the harmonizing Triple Helix model is practiced in regional social life.

II. Practices of Harmonization

This part demonstrates the practices of harmonization by using two ethnographic cases as examples. The first case is an attempt to illustrate how, when, and why policymakers from Region Skåne (The County Council of Scania County in Sweden) use the Triple Helix model. The second case shows how the Triple Helix is used as a harmonizing organizational model for regional life science in general.

Case 1: How, When, and Why Harmonize?

When I asked how the regional policymakers were applying the Triple Helix model, some said that it is usually put into practice to establish a basis for organizing people to meet formally. They told me that the model is used primarily as a deliberate strategy to dissolve boundaries and shorten the distances between established institutions, organizations, worlds, and professionally active people. In a conversation with a policymaker, I was told,

We begin by buying the first lunch so that different people start talking to each other about collaboration, and this will hopefully lead to a point when people need to decide whether or not they want to be part of the collaboration. We do, however, reserve the right to put our foot down when needed … and it is damned hard for many involved to accept that!
This statement should be understood in the context of the policymakers’ desire to bring people together to “create added value” in the form of new job opportunities and new innovative products in the market. Another policymaker said that this is “a way of modelling the social world – in a nice way.” Despite this nice opportunity for modelling social realities, it is clear that not everyone considers crossing boundaries and dissolving distances as being in their interest. As the quotation illustrates, the policymakers sometimes need to “put [their] foot down.” This prerogative depends on the fact that they perceive themselves as being entitled to remind people to take responsibility for collaborative regional development. The Triple Helix model – with the presupposition that collaboration is inherently good and competition bad for regional development – seems to aim to harmonize divergent interests. As noted by Strathern (2006: 192), such innovative, collaborative social situations might well be conceived as forms of micromanagement. I was told that the management of harmonizing differences emerges from policymakers portraying themselves as having “a regional overview.”

It is not that the policymakers uncritically apply the Triple Helix model. During my fieldwork, it became obvious that although the policymakers see the model as “a good tool to think with,” the model is treated as far from being complete. It has built-in limitations, which are occasionally discussed among policymakers. This means that the three strands of the helix – academia, business, and the state – are actually seen as excluding other partners. Some policymakers have therefore begun to experiment with involving one or several other strands, such as “customers,” “citizens,” and “NGOs”: These extended social models are referred to in terms of Penta Helix or Quad Helix. However, in accordance with Etzkowitz, I never heard any discussions about involving unions (as a form of modern representative democracy) as an additional fourth helix.

After several months in the field, I wondered when and under what social circumstances do the policymakers treat the Triple Helix model as a useful organizing resource. It soon became clear that the model appears especially useful when working with organizations which and individuals who have long historical backgrounds of self-determination in professional working life; therefore, it should be well suited for academics of both public organizations and entrepreneurs from the private sector. It is assumed that academics are usually very difficult to harmonize; in this regional field, most academics are described as acting like “cats,” implying that this group is difficult to manage and are perceived as individual mavericks. In an interview with another policymaker, I asked whether he had experienced any problems with academics, and he stated that this was “a really difficult group.” He told me a story about a specific meeting that was intended to encourage material scientists to collaborate with representatives of the state and entrepreneurs from the business world. The policymaker in question remembers it as an unpleasant encounter, as the scientists responded to his invitation by asking, “Who are you to define Material Science?” He explained that the material scientists essentially questioned his position as a representative of the state. They were upset because they imagined that he was trying to define and control what “the research community should consider relevant collaborative inquiry.” He said that he used the Triple Helix model to illustrate how collaboration could bring in “extra economic funding for further research and education.” When it came to the last group, the entrepreneurs, it seemed that many policymakers were fairly patient when dealing with them. This kind of patience, I was told, depends mostly on the economic fact that “the
entrepreneurs are not funded by the state," unlike most academics. However, according to the policymaker, the most difficult task with this group was to convince the entrepreneurs of "the added value in the long run." This was because "most of the entrepreneurs have a short-term economic business perspective … they find it difficult to see what's in it for them." It follows that some policymakers apply the Triple Helix model to make it clear to the entrepreneurs why they should consider the latest academic research. The point here is to enlighten the entrepreneurs about how collaboration will make them more competitive in the markets. Many policymakers argue that maintaining or improving one's position in today's markets is only possible if entrepreneurs collaborate with representatives of the state and academia (including both research and education).

The main reason for harmonizing social realities seems to depend on the policymakers' firm belief that hybridizing various worlds and people will create innovations that advance regional, social, and economic development. Such harmonization, I argue, is the practice whereby most regional policymakers appear to find hope in the new knowledge economy (Strathern 2006). It should also be emphasized that such harmonization – as it symbolically explains and represents three heterogeneous objects (i.e., universities, business, and the state) and subjects (i.e., researchers, entrepreneurs, and policymakers) – enables policymakers to control and manage various heterogeneous groups at a distance. I was told by a policymaker that this is not a question of party politics:

If you think about most representatives today – whether Social Democrats or from the Moderate Party – nobody is against Triple Helix or innovations. I cannot think of anybody who would disagree with the model … it would perhaps only be an extremist party that would raise such a critical question.

He was not alone in stating that most politicians favor the Triple Helix model, and it could be argued that the practice of harmonization instills a kind of hope in contemporary Swedes.

To summarize, the Triple Helix as a harmony model is used by policymakers as a micro managerial tool by bringing together historically autonomous actors – as a harmonizing apparatus to persuade people to collaborate in line with their own interests. This is done on the basis of instilling hope for future regional development.

Case 2: Harmonizing Life Science

After illustrating how, when, and why many regional policymakers apply the Triple Helix to harmonize various social realities, this case has a more concrete research orientation. I have focused on the Triple Helix as a harmonizing organizational model for regional life science in general.

When I first contacted one of the main Swedish regional initiators of a life science collaborative network in southern Sweden, I asked if it would be possible to interview their organizational strategists. As the foundation (called Life Health in this example) is partly sponsored by the county council of Region Skåne in Southern Sweden, the organizational strategists were very open-minded and informed me that it would be possible. Although they were extremely busy participating in other activities, after several weeks I made an appointment to conduct my first interview. I went for the interview well prepared, but the strategist said, “Sorry, but I am not sure you will need that,” pointing to my digital tape recorder and interview questionnaire. I was a bit surprised, as she told me that she had prepared “some slides for me” and that I could ask questions “after the brief lecture.” I
was lectured about the foundation’s history and its close relationship to the organizational structure of the foundation. Beginning with the historical emergence of Life Health as a foundation, she explained the political preconditions. “Something had to be done on the regional level,” she explained, because one of the region’s largest life science companies had decided to move its operations to another region. As a result of this relocation, “approximately 900 well-educated life scientists suddenly found themselves unemployed,” which prompted reactions from both private and public investors. Eventually, Region Skåne in collaboration with Lund University began to think of a collaborative forum for regional life science based on the commercial fact that life-science knowledge can easily be patented and transformed into exclusive products in the market(s). The strategist continued the story by explaining that a well-known entrepreneur was contacted who later “donated ten million Euros to establish the present foundation.” The entrepreneur, policymakers, and representatives from the university established a regional forum for research and innovation concerned specifically with life science. The strategist clarified that the collaborative relationship between the university, Region Skåne (the state), and the entrepreneur should be seen as a kind of Triple Helix, which is the explicit organizational structure of the foundation. “This is,” she argued, “a hybridization of the private and the public spheres.”

Later, when discussing the harmonization of regional life science communities with a policymaker (engaged with the regional work of Life Health), I was told,

_Policymaker:_ It is within these kinds of hybridized organizations that universities become more like companies, concurrently as the companies become more “academized.” When they drift together, this creates possibilities for new collaborative projects. One can walk in, out, and over to academia. This is an innovative way to work together. It might have been the life scientists who first started collaboration between universities and companies … The Triple Helix boundaries are very fluid, and I am positive that this will increase in the future.

_TF:_ So … there are no longer any explicit boundaries, as in the case of modern society?

_Policymaker:_ No, it is about new frames. The old industrial society – with its manufacturing industry – was part of a different period. As I said, companies today are becoming more research-oriented, and the universities are becoming more entrepreneurial. It is natural that people are crossing boundaries. And the personal relationships are becoming tighter and tighter.

_TF:_ What role do you think today’s companies have in regional development?

_Policymaker:_ It is all about collaborations between companies and universities. Companies like to be close to universities, research, and development. They usually drift together in the long run.

_TF:_ So … what do you think will happen to the critical practices as universities collaborate with companies? Is it possible to critique the Triple Helix, for example?

_Policymaker:_ Well … those universities that depend on government funding will have no problems criticizing policymakers and the state … even though they get their money from the state. But sure, if the universities are completely in the grip of the companies there may be some problems. It might be easier for a life science-oriented rather than a humanities-oriented university to work with companies. If a university brands itself as red [i.e., leftist], it will have difficulties attracting money from the business world. Well, I mean it is a free choice … but, sure, there are certain complex problems.
This dialogue concerning the Triple Helix and life science illustrates how regional companies and universities seem to merge into a common identity, while the traditional modern boundaries between the worlds are becoming more fluid. The Triple Helix model is seen not only as having regionally productive functions but also as potentially causing fewer critical strategies.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this article, I have argued that the intrinsic potential critique in the ethnographic project is challenged in the context of innovation political projects equipped with the harmonizing Triple Helix model. To make this argument, I started with a brief disciplinary discussion to make the point that the classic ethnographic project is (re)constituted by the dualism between different worlds, which generates an intrinsic potential critique. From there, I scrutinized the harmonization processes of Triple Helix – in its textual as well as its practical expression. In this analytical context, the harmonization processes appeared in an overlapping manner in which the subjects (the concerned people) are supposed to take “the role of the other,” while the objects (the concerned institutional worlds) are to be hybridized with each other. It follows that the entrepreneurial university acts as a venture capitalistic motor, while the innovative state simultaneously attempts to hybridize the private and the public, while the related business operates in networks beyond institutional boundaries. If this works out, the Triple Helix model will ideally make it possible for the emergence of a self-generating process of enterprising – an endless, harmonizing transformation process towards one everyday lifeworld. This seems to be essential for the formation of a knowledge economy, which has a focus on regional development constituted by commercialized knowledge. Consequently, as presented in the two ethnographic cases, the Triple Helix model provides policymakers with textual-practical-possibilities of challenging critical strategies. In this sense, it seems relevant to remind ethnographers that the academic ethnographic project is organically situated in the emerging entrepreneurial university (cf. Strathern 2000, 2004, 2006).

The relationship between the disclosed harmonization processes, in the context of innovation politics, and the ethnographic project is generative to think through for contemporary ethnographers, primarily as it extends the conversation concerned with critical ethnographic strategies (Marcus and Fischer 1999; Strathern 1987). The primary critical strategy I have in mind is not about defamiliarization, nor concerned with the organization of knowledge, but instead with the (re)establishment of a Schutzian (1999) ethnographic province of meaning or world. Such a critical strategy would imply a structure of relevance constituted by the modern Weberian differentiation between politics and social science (Weber 1977: 25, 41). While the province of innovation politics gives meaning to “knowledge” as a means to achieve something else (the political pursuit of power or influence on checks and balances), the province of ethnography would signify “knowledge” for the sake of knowledge (social scientific analysis of political processes, such as harmonization).

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References


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In April 2019, Professor Emily Martin was awarded SSAG’s Vega Medal in Gold for her contributions to Anthropology. The Vega Symposium was organized as part of the celebration, to which the medalist invited three distinguished guests to speak on the theme Witnessing Anthropological Journeys, and the Returns. The theme was suggested by Medalist Professor Emily Martin and she opened the symposium on the lead theme. Then followed Professor Leith Mullings who talked on “Who Owns History: The New York City African Burial Ground, the Movement for Black Lives and Confederate Monuments”. The Symposium continued with Associate Professor Jane Anderson’s presentation “Responsibility and Care in/through Returns: Law, Property and Decolonization of Knowledge”. The Symposium concluded with Professor Don Kulick’s talk “The Burden of Giving: Everyday Reciprocity during Anthropological Fieldwork”.

Some 100 people attended the 2019 Vega Symposium, and listened to the four inspiring presentations. The Symposium was recorded and is accessible through https://ssag.se/film-fran-vegadagen-2019/

The Speakers

For decades, Professor Emily Martin has had a profound influence on anthropology and is still publishing major works fascinating and challenging new generations of young anthropologists. Emily Martin started out as a China scholar. In the early 1970s, she conducted a year of fieldwork in a Taiwanese village and, as Emily M. Ahearn, wrote a book about capricious ancestors and verbally abused children titled The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village (1973). This book is regarded as a classic by anthropologists working in China. However, her most influential book that announced her arrival as a major thinker, is about medicine and American culture, titled The Woman in the Body: a Cultural Analysis of Reproduction (1987). Having been translated into many languages, this book does something that Professor Martin has continued to do ever since; which is to read science with an eye for the cultural values that it reproduces and reinforces, even as it disavows and denies that it is a cultural product at all. She developed an approach combining feminist analyses with an ethnography of science and medicine that was highly innovative and original. Moreover, it founded a productive and constructive way to contrast the views of medical science with those of real people from diverse social and economic backgrounds; based on this approach, Emily Martin’s production of classic works has continued unabated and influenced feminist.
and gender studies in a broader context outside the discipline of anthropology also. Her next book *Flexible Bodies: the Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (1994) continued her characteristically biting analysis of the power of the metaphor in modern medicine, this time focused on how medical and popular understandings of the immune system changed during the course of the last 50 years. Another book, this time with the thought provoking title *Bipolar Expeditions: Mania and Depression in American Culture* (2007) examines the fascination that American culture has with mania; a fascination rewarding manic behavior, simultaneously punishing people living with bipolar disorder, and in many ways denying them the status of being fully human.

Professor Emily Martin has so far published six books, more than a 100 articles and was the founding editor of the journal *Anthropology Now*. After holding a number of positions in leading American universities such as Princeton, John Hopkins, and Yale, Professor Martin is professor in Anthropology at New York University since 2001.1

Leith Mulings is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center, The City University of New York. Signifying Professor Mulings’ work is a sincere engagement with society, issues of inequality and the role of social movements in social change. This interest is mirrored in her extensive publication list that includes titles such as “Movement, Migration and Displacement: What Can Anthropologists Contribute to the Public Discourse?”, “New Social Movements in the African Diaspora: Challenging Global Apartheid”, and “Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An Anthology of African American Social and Political Thought from Slavery to the Present”, to mention just a few.

Professor Mulings has a long-standing engagement in bridging academia with society and advocacy organizations through projects such as Harlem Birth Right Project and New York State Scholar-Practitioner Project. In all her work Professor Mullings emphasizes the importance of engaging the subjects in her research to become actors in the transformation of their own environment.

Jane Anderson is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies, New York University. Professor Anderson’s Ph.D. was in Law from the Law School at University of New South Wales in Australia. She combines anthropological perspectives with law in her research, providing a productive way to focus on the philosophical and practical problems for intellectual property law and the protection of Indigenous and traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. Her research has been published in a number of studies such as: “Negotiating Who Owns Penobscot Culture”, “Labeling Knowledge: The Semiotics of Immaterial Cultural Property and the Production of new Indigenous Publics” and “Intellectual Property and Indigenous Knowledge”. The titles display Professor Anderson’s sincere involvement in projects related to how Indigenous perspectives about the management of ethnographic collections are defined and incorporated into contemporary practice. Her projects aim to legitimize locally based decision-making and Indigenous governance frameworks for determining ownership, access, and culturally appropriate conditions for sharing historical and contemporary collections of cultural heritage. Professor Anderson has also secured a number of prestigious grants and fellowships such as “National Endowment

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1 This part is a slight adaptation from the official motivation for awarding Professor Emily Martin the SSAG Medal in Gold.
for the Humanities”, “Institute of Museum and Library Services”, and “New York University Research Challenge Fund”.

Don Kulick is Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology and the Research Director of the “Engaging Vulnerability” project, which is an interdisciplinary long-term research program at Uppsala University financed by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet). The program’s goal is to re-focus the understanding of vulnerability as something more than a lamentable condition from which subjects should be defended, rescued or liberated. Instead, the program documents and theorizes vulnerability as a productive position, condition, or state that does something.

Professor Kulick’s extensive and broad interests that span topics such as language, sexuality, and marginalised positions are unified by a thorough interest in approaching vulnerability as a human condition. He is known for ground breaking titles such as “Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes” and “ Loneliness and its Opposite: Sex, Disability, and the Ethics of Engagement”, to mention a few titles from his extensive publication list. His recent publications move between a long standing interest in languages, as in “A Death in the Rainforest: How a Language and a Way of Life came to an end in Papua New Guinea” to more recent engagements such as human-animal communication in “When Animals Talk Back”. The publications testify about Professor Kulick’s extensive fieldwork record from Papua New Guinea, Brazil, and Scandinavia.

The theme and the talks

In his seminal book published in 1977, Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco, Paul Rabinow stated that the aim of the book was “the comprehension of the self by the detour of the comprehension of the other”, building on the idea of fieldwork as a journey yielding its rewards when returning home. Since then, this image of anthropological journeys and returns has shifted. “The field” has become much closer and as much as anthropologists return from fieldwork, they also return to the field, which has increasingly become a return to something familiar rather than something “other” out there. However, “returns” also have additional meanings apart from the spatial; implying what we, society, and people involved in our research may gain from the enterprise, intellectually as well as in material terms. The 2019 Vega Symposium raised crucial questions on what these reciprocal relationships between anthropologists and their interlocutors tell us about the kind of knowledge that is produced and how it can be applied. Anthropologists have returned books and articles, analytic grammars and dictionaries, and material support, honoring, struggling with, and sometimes certainly violating, complex cross-cultural differences in ethical codes about reciprocity. Questions about returns are now also being raised about the proper fate of ethnographic treasures that are housed in American or European museums and libraries. Should such collections of cultural heritage be returned to their communities of origin? In the 2019 Vega Symposium, participants made presentations on these themes of material as well as social and academic returns, as discussed previously.

In her introductory lecture Professor Martin, with references to Marcel Mauss’ seminal theories of the gift, started her lecture with a broad and thought-provoking expose of the history of explorers’ journeys, focusing on the exchange of objects and how these exchanges took part in the construction of benevolent as well as coercive social relations. The lecture
took its theoretical point of departure in Mauss’ rejection of an absolute division between the idea of the gift as free, and the legal contract as an act of coercion. Instead, gifts as well as legally binding contracts in varying degrees, include aspects of coercion as well as freedom. By this detour of Mauss, Professor Martin introduced several of the lead themes in the following presentations – law, ethics, norms, power, and the notions of freedom and coercion.

Taking her ethnographic point of departure in two cases – the New York African Burial Ground and the conflicts around confederate monuments in the USA – Professor Mulling connected to the theme by placing it in a frame of culture and history. She focused on power relations and how dominant groups have the power to represent the history, not just of themselves, but also of subalterns and how that serves as a forceful tool of domination. Historical monuments play a part in this by being the means to perform history and signifying who has the power to choose how to represent history. Professor Mulling drilled further into these themes by raising questions such as how engaged, or activist anthropology, may or may not help to build ethnographic knowledge in relation to conflicts around the representation of history.

Professor Anderson’s presentation followed a similar theme of culture and history but took a slightly different track. She followed the story of a song, actually one of the first ethnographic recordings ever made. By tracking the history of this song Professor Anderson raised the question of ownership. When culture and cultural performances such as singing, are recorded the ownership of the song starts to be contested. Being recorded makes it available for distribution to new audiences, for storage in museums and archives and to be sold as a commodity. In her evocative speech, which also included examples of recorded songs, Professor Anderson took the audience on a global journey through time and space by a combination of the means of songs and modern technology.

The 2019 Vega Symposium ended by Professor Kulick inviting, at least the anthropological audience, into situations of gift giving and fieldwork that are utterly familiar to them but at the same time seldom talked about or discussed. Many, if not all, fieldworks include aspects of exchange, gift giving, handouts, and straight out payments. Most anthropologists take part in this, but few make it a public concern or intellectual query. The material gifts – reciprocated either in the form of material or social gifts – are usually clouded in ambiguity, ethical uneasiness, and even shame. Professor Kulick aimed to rip the blanket off this elephant in the anthropological parlour. And he did so too. In an animated talk, Professor Kulick gave a detailed description of his long-term fieldwork in a small village on Papua New Guinea, and how that embroiled him in a web of exchange; an exchange without which the fieldwork would have been inconceivable as it constituted material as well as social survival for the anthropologist while at the same time benefitting people in the village. Professor Kulick ended his speech by screening detailed charts of the gifts he gave and received during a week’s fieldwork.