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Leiden
The Netherlands

Researching Africa: Explorations of everyday African encounters

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Citation
Bruijn, M. E. de, & Merolla, D. (2010). *Researching Africa: Explorations of everyday African encounters*. Leiden: African Studies Centre. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16254

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License:	Leiden University Non-exclusive license
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/16254

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Researching Africa

African Studies Centre
African Studies Collection, vol. 26

Researching Africa:

Explorations of everyday African encounters

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Cover design: Heike Slingerland
Cover photo: Jonna Both

Printed by Ipskamp Drukkers, Enschede

ISSN: 1876-018X
ISBN: 978-90-5448-096-9

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1

Introduction: Explorations of everyday African encounters: Research undertaken by students of the Research Masters in African Studies, Leiden University

Mirjam de Bruijn & Daniela Merolla

The Research Masters in African Studies at Leiden University, which is coordinated by the African Studies Centre and hosted by Leiden University's Faculty of Humanities, started in the academic year 2006-2007. African Studies, as it is formulated in this Masters programme, is a multidisciplinary field of study with its main focus being on the social sciences and humanities. The programme's multi- and interdisciplinarity is also reflected in the various institutes, universities and professors, from both the Netherlands and abroad, who participate in the teaching programme. In its first year of operation, the main participating institutes, in addition to the African Studies Centre and Leiden University, were the University of Wageningen, the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the VU University Amsterdam, the CERES Research School for Resource Studies for Development (Utrecht) and the University of Leuven. The Research Masters programme collaborates with many research institutes in Africa and offers a platform to unite African Studies in the Netherlands and beyond.

African studies

The study of Africa is as old as the first encounters between Africa and the West. These were in reality and in people's imaginations, the latter being exemplified by early maps that were often not based on actual travel experiences and realities

on the ground but on stories. More recent knowledge of Africa was laid down in texts, for instance in the written accounts of travellers and explorers but also by scholars of earlier times. Examples of African and African Arabic writers are Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun in the 13th and 14th centuries, and in the early 19th century there were the texts of European travellers and explorers such as Heinrich Barth, Samuel Baker, Andre Gide, René Caillé, Roberto Ivens and Mungo Park, to name but a few. At the beginning of the 20th century, the first colonial administrators produced linguistic, social and political knowledge about African societies and some of those French administrators are today recognized as being early ethnographers, for example, Louis Faidherbe and Jean-Louis Triaud. But it was only in the course of the 20th century that knowledge production about and in Africa became institutionalized in research institutes and universities. The names given to these institutes reveal that they were often the products of the colonial encounter. Examples are IFAN (Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire or African Institute of Basic research) in Dakar, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in the UK, and the Africa Museum Tervuren in Belgium. These early colonial institutes for social sciences were the start of the research traditions of the British, Belgians and French in Africa, and the Germans and Portuguese also left their footprints and created their own institutes.

Nations without colonial ties in Africa, like the Netherlands, have a different academic tradition regarding the continent. Although they had colonies in South America and Asia, Dutch involvement in Africa was not one of colonialism, and its trade relations with Africa go back hundreds of years. However Dutch institutes of learning incorporated the study of Africa only after World War II when colonial ties with Indonesia were loosened and a renewed interest in trade relations and commerce led to a craving for knowledge about the African continent. African Studies in the Netherlands became a reality with the creation of a professorship in the Anthropology of Africa Department at Leiden University at the end of the 1950s. Over the decades since, Africa has developed its own centres of African Studies in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya, among others. From being a colonial discipline, it has developed into a fully fledged field of studies with its own debates and combinations of disciplines, and with its own community of researchers (Zeleza 2006, 2007).

Although African Studies concentrates on the study of Africa, research is not confined to Africa alone as geographically African Studies also includes Diaspora Studies. And theoretically, the study of Africa reveals dynamics and processes that are instructive for various disciplines (see Bates *et al*. 1993). African societies are societies like many others and the study of Africa should be informative in allowing comparisons with other areas and seen as an important contribution to the development of new research fields within disciplines and

crossing related disciplines. It should be remembered that African Studies contains not only a range of disciplines but a wide variety of geographical areas, societal forms, economies and politics. Despite this diversity, Africanists feel united in a common endeavour: The study of Africa in all its diversity. The research of the Masters students in Leiden shows this diversity and commonality, which is sometimes so difficult to grasp, and they have become members of the Africanist community through the teaching programme and as a result of their research.

The Research Masters in African Studies

What do students learn in a Research Masters programme in African Studies? The main aim is for them to understand African societies within the context of a critical and reflexive approach, and the key tool for understanding is undertaking and experiencing research in practice. The research process can be divided into various phases, starting with the writing of a research proposal, which leads to the following phase, namely fieldwork. For some non-African students, this can be their first experience of Africa, while for African students it is their first experience of heading off on an academic mission. After their fieldwork, the students come back and process their research experiences into a thesis. Going along this route is a learning (and teaching) challenge in itself. Gaining good results is a test that for some students in Phase I may seem unattainable. Nevertheless, eight students in the first cohort of Research Masters in African Studies students reached the final phase successfully and their results are presented in this book. They started their Research Masters in the autumn of 2006, doing their fieldwork and the writing up of their results in the following (2007-2008) academic year, and defending their theses in December 2008.

These students all succeeded in overcoming the challenges they encountered while doing research. This exercise was not only a learning process but also allowed them to attain a level that contributes to other people's knowledge of Africa. The inventiveness and originality of the topics they chose and the quality of their work mean that they can be included in the interdisciplinarity and thematic directions of the field of African Studies. The diverse encounters they had with Africa during their research period offered an extra dimension to the discussions that were central in the courses they followed before they started their research when the main objective was to develop an understanding of African societies and the processes and dynamics at play. Insights are however created in a context of African Studies that is as much a scientific field as a field in which we deal with choices and selections. The field of African Studies is particularly influenced by choices and processes that are defined in politics, more specifically within development policies, with the epistemological foundations of

research in African Studies being marked by the intersection of research and hegemonic discourse and practice. Where in the past the concerns of the colonial powers were central, today the politics of development, security and poverty alleviation have an essential place in the debate. The study of Africa should, however, go beyond these concerns and delve into themes that relate to general continent-wide discussions in the social sciences and humanities. Orientations in the study of Africa are defined in relation to images that we create about and of Africa and Africans. These images and Africanist knowledge are not isolated in scientific discourse but stimulate as well as react to a wider context. Perceptions and ideas present in the researchers' wider environment contribute to constructing knowledge, including visual forms such as paintings, photos, documentaries and films, and a large range of narratives like news, travelogues and 'fiction' (Mudimbe 1988). Such a wider context becomes especially relevant if we consider that African artistic reflection and reactions to external exploration and knowledge have interacted with political discourse and practice. The works of African artists have challenged fellow artists as well as policy makers and researchers. Works by Birago Diop, Ousmane Sembène and Tshibumba, for example, demonstrate how scientific images denied historical changes and misrepresented Africa's present as well as its past. Such a criticism again interacted with and stimulated the enormous number of studies on the continent's historical past. Even today, the different fields of knowledge production in and of Africa are interconnected in reflections on technological, scientific and political developments within Africa and on long-term exchanges and transnational processes.

While preparing their research proposals and doing fieldwork, the African Studies Research Masters students learn to recognize the conglomeration of images of Africa and the major intellectual processes that are at stake. They become able to analyze orientations towards and against the radicalization of the differences and the aesthetization of Africa in apparently diverse discourses, such as scientific essays, institutional reports, newspaper articles, films and creative writing. This also involves attaining a critical stance of one's own work in the writing phase. We can indeed only contribute to a good understanding of Africa in relation to African issues, of Africa in relation to general debates and of Africa in relation to ourselves if we critically analyze these dynamics.

The 'we' referred to in this section are the members of the Africanist scientific community, of which the Research Masters students have become a part. It is important to make the results of their research available to this community and this is the reasoning behind the decision to publish this volume.

The chapters

The studies included in this volume vary in place, methodological approach and theme. What then makes them essentially products of African Studies? First of all, they share an empirical grounding, being based on fieldwork in African archives, daily situations and interviews and, in addition, they are strong in contextualizing and situating the studies both in place and theoretical debate. The fields of study in this volume include conflict, democracy, migration, urban and rural studies, language, communication and youth, but all are linked to the diverse thematic fields that are currently in vogue in African Studies.

As stated above, an important debate in African Studies is about the practice of policy, one that is certainly present in some of the contributions in this anthology. Josh Maiyo's study relates to the issue of how political parties function in Eastern Africa, which is explicitly related to the problematic that goes with introducing and building democracy in Africa. This particular study received a lot of attention and support from the Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), which is based in the Netherlands. It did not stop with the provision of information but made a critical analysis of the functioning of political parties in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. The political-science approach was linked to profound ethnographic work within the parties themselves. Another example of a study that is closely related to a policy-relevant theme is that carried out by Hilde Kroes on Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) in northern Uganda. This study analyzes the various visions and ideas vis-à-vis these IDPs and the possibility of peace in the region, concluding that the international community's expectations are based on incorrect assumptions leading to policies that do not necessarily deliver the intended results. In particular, those policies aimed at returning the IDPs do not seem to relate to the reality on the ground. The critical approach that both these studies took is demonstrated in the other studies as well. Their common approach, in the sense that they have tried to analyze social realities in their political and social consequences while being strongly embedded in the empirical, has resulted in a clear vision of the processes at play, while including an analysis of political relations, the processes of in- and exclusion, and relations to future developments. They also provide good descriptions of the social, political and economic realities encountered. Reflexivity on the reality of fieldwork itself and on the way analyzes are made should always be part of a critical approach.

The two socio-linguistic studies in this volume offer insight into the combination of the study of language and social analysis. Pierre Aycard's analysis of youth culture in South Africa, its integration in the lives of youths and its implicit notions of democracy and hope for the future are telling. This study was mainly based on participation and interviews in the townships but it has also resulted in

Picture 1.1 Hilde Kroes taking a *boda boda* in Gulu Town, Uganda
[© Hilde Kroes]

the film *Speak as You Want to Speak: Just Be Free!* in which Pierre Aycard's interviewees offer linguistic materials and interpretations of their linguistic practices. It even manages to avoid the pitfall of many documentaries that speak 'about' Africans while Africans themselves remain voiceless. The analysis of the use of Swahili as a language of difference in Burundi, as proposed by Lianne Belt, goes beyond a simple analysis of the language and its use and tries to situate the development of language in the historical construction of ethnic controversies in the town of Bujumbura.

Migration and mobility have become prominent topics in African Studies in the past few decades. The research on IDPs in northern Uganda is an example of a study that enters into this realm, alongside Conflict Studies. The dynamic migration patterns of girls who move to N'djamena, Chad's capital city, are described by Jonna Both and offer another example, showing how migration patterns are embedded in the cultural context of the societies to which the migrants belong. The study however also illustrates how these patterns are situated in a political and regional context, in this case the very specific context that was created by Chad's long civil war, which has led to an economy and society of uncertainty that makes the migrant girls not only move but also negotiate differences in a profitable way.

The everyday lives of Africans – be they adults, girls, youth or children – are at the heart of the majority of the chapters. The students looked for situations in which life had become problematic and where there were 'problems'. We should however take care not to study only situations in the context of crisis or an extreme problematic setting. A study of women and how they organize themselves in small groups to deal with a lack of money, which was undertaken by Esther Kuhn, is a good example of a very ordinary situation in an African village, but in the ordinary lies specificity at the same time. The ROSCA saving schemes described are important for villages in Mali, and probably in some cases even crucial to the survival of women in this part of Africa. The use of mobile phones in a small urban centre in Anglophone Cameroon, as described by Barbara Gwanmesia, is another example of ordinary everyday experiences and the study's conclusion that phone use should be understood in the context of the needs and wishes of the local people who have these phones seems obvious. The context of these needs and the way they are defined, however, mean that in the context of Buea and the normal economy of uncertainty, the phone has taken on its own role and its own different types of usage by those involved in the study. People are shaping and modelling the technology of communication to suit their needs as they are modelled and defined in the specific cultural, social and economic contexts in which they lead their everyday lives.

All the studies refer to the uncertainties with which Africans, but also African institutions (although they may be part of the very uncertainties themselves), have to deal. These uncertainties are political, economic and/or social, shaping the daily context and thus the daily lives of institutes, political parties, migrants, inhabitants and men, women and youth in various countries and rural and urban spaces in Africa. The studies in this volume have taken different theoretical orientations regarding these uncertainties but they are all grounded in practice. For instance, the study of political parties is related to this problematic in terms of internal organizational problems, and the analysis considers the informal and formal workings of politics. And while the analysis of ROSCAs invites one to enter into a debate on economic- and social anthropology, the IDP problematic in Uganda in a discourse analysis with the migrant girls' situation is best understood as a form of navigation in various worlds. The socio-linguistic studies attempt to understand situations through a combination of linguistic analysis and social-historical theories, and the analysis of phone use is related to an economic analysis of the situation, linking the daily practices of phone use to the economic changes in the area.

These variations in approach have not resulted in big differences in the methodologies used. All the studies have embraced the ethnographic empirical approach, though with various interpretations. The ethnographic approach as it is

applied in the study of political parties in three different countries is certainly not the same as the ethnographic approach used in the study of migrant girls in town but what they have in common is that the reality is seen through the eyes of the people participating in this reality. Various methodological tools are used: Small surveys, observation, interviews, discourse and narrative analysis and, probably most importantly, an extended stay in the students' respective places of research.

Being in the field for a long period of time should never be an aim in itself but it is necessary if one is to grasp the practice and reality and to understand and interpret the processes and dynamics to be studied. This was perhaps the most challenging phase in these research projects, partly because it determined the ultimate outcome, i.e. the thesis.

Picture 1.2 Lidewyde Berckmoes discussing developments in the field in an NGO vehicle
[© Lidewyde Berckmoes]

The chapter by Lidewyde Berckmoes is devoted in its entirety to the process of gathering data in a field where insecurity reigns. In this specific case, the insecurity was physical, unlike the Cameroonian case where it was economic and was being experienced by the informants. The field locations chosen were ex-

periencing different forms of insecurity, but in six of the eight studies physical insecurity played a role: the threat of rebel attacks in the northern Ugandan case, military and police violence on the streets of N'djamena, the hostility and rebel presence in Burundi, urban violence in South Africa, and confrontations with political upheaval in Kenya. These situations impacted on the researchers' feelings of security as well and certainly influenced their findings. For instance, the researcher analyzing political parties in Kenya after the 2007 riots found a totally different environment from the one that had been expected. In the study of migration to the city, risks were taken when going onto the streets at night and it was not possible to do so as extensively as would have been ideal when employing an ethnographic research method. One can imagine that doing research in the IDP camps was not without risk. But as mentioned in the article on youth in Burundi, these situations also contain extensive information in themselves. The unsaid and the places avoided are telling and should be used as data. The feelings of despair they can evoke in the researcher may be similar to those felt by informants. The limits on the choices for fields of study are indeed limits, but analysis of the 'why' of these limits may be helpful in understanding specific research questions. The methodological reflections in Lidewyde Berckmoes's article are relevant for all the researches whose work is described in this volume and they open up a debate on methodology that belongs as much to the field of African Studies as do the exciting themes and approaches the researchers describe. And what is shown above all is that endurance and creativity are important elements in the research process.

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2

Facilitating return: Notions of conflict and peace in ending internal displacement in Northern Uganda

Hilde Kroes

In current conflict theories it is suggested to see 'war' as socially constructed phenomena and that the level of violence in an area is not an effective indicator of the extent of a conflict. This paper challenges the conventional definitions of 'war' and 'peace' that influence humanitarian and government interventions in northern Uganda. Since peace talks started in 2006 between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government, hundreds of thousand internally displaced persons (IDP) have been pushed out of the IDP camps 'as the war is over'. However, IDPs do not act upon notions on war and peace, but decision making is based on the level of security they experience. In their views, northern Uganda is still a violent, uncertain and volatile place. This article argues that humanitarian and governmental policies do not sufficiently correspond to the life world of IDPs. Forcing the return process upon IDPs is not the solution to the displacement in the region. Instead, this approach promoted by the government and some humanitarian agencies, seriously undermines the displaced people's rights and their authorities to make their own choices.

Introduction

I have grown up in the camp. I fear abductions due to what happened in the past. If I go back to my village, the LRA[1] *will roam while we are not protected. Nobody is sure whether this will end peacefully. The LRA might still be in our villages.*[2]

---

1 The Lord's Resistance Army.

2 Focus group discussion at Anaka Camp, male aged 22, 19 December 2007.

Since peace talks between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda started in 2006 the displaced people in Gulu and Amuru districts in northern Uganda have been waiting for a conclusion to one of Africa's most notorious conflicts. Over the last twenty years, 1.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes in northern Uganda for internal displacement camps. As the LRA is no longer terrorizing the region now that negotiations have started, the Ugandan government has claimed the war to be over and the region safe enough for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their villages. However, the IDPs in Gulu and Amuru districts did not leave the camps in 2007. This article highlights some of the dynamics that were explored in a research project[3] that investigated why these IDPs were not returning home despite the relatively peaceful environment. It addresses the notions that the government, humanitarian agencies and IDPs have about conflict, peace and security.

Different ideas about when a war is over and the development of a region result in interventions that do not necessarily correspond to the worlds of those most in need. In some cases, IDPs' rights are even violated. This article challenges the perceptions of the Ugandan government and the humanitarian community who speak of a 'transition phase' now that peace talks are being held after twenty years of conflict and humanitarian crisis. If northern Uganda's situation were examined with the view that war is 'socially constructed' (Richards 2005), it would be clearer why people in northern Uganda are not moving. Humanitarian interventions could then be better adapted to the realities of those who have been displaced.

Theories

Conflict and peace

The transition from 'conventional wars' to what are often referred to as the 'new wars' have been analyzed by many. Conventional wars are interstate wars that cross borders, for example the First and Second World Wars as well as the Gulf Wars. After the end of the Cold War, the so-called new wars came into the global arena. New wars involved new forms of violence, like the use of machetes, the burning down of houses and property, and mutilations. This kind of war has always been around but received only limited attention before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The new wars were 'apparently provoked by poverty, population pressure or the bizarre hatreds of international terrorists' (Richards 2005: 2). These wars tend to be inter-zonal and often within national borders.

[3] H. Kroes (2008), 'The journey home, multi-discursive perceptions on the movement patterns of internally displaced persons, Northern Uganda', MPhil Thesis, Leiden: African Studies Centre & Leiden University.

In the 1990s, the global community faced new trends in international politics; growing political instability, increasing numbers of migrants and wars as well as higher numbers of refugees and IDPs (Duffield 1994: 2-3). Conflicts in Africa are generally seen as obstructing and damaging economic revival but, according to Richards (2005: 3), there is a danger in approaching wars as tumultuous and seeing them as 'bad'. War is then taken out of context: War is 'foregrounded' as a 'thing in itself' and not – as we shall argue – as one social project among many competing social projects.

Perceiving war as a negative discourse overlooks the factors that can reduce violence: Social organization, culture and politics (Richards 2005: 3) Wars are sociological phenomena that systematically include planning, organization, training and the involvement of specific groups in society (Ibid.: 4). This means that wars are not mindless actions of rebels or others, although their actions may seem random and lacking in organization (Ibid.).

It is claimed that war belongs to society (Richards 2005; Hilhorst 2007; Lambach 2007). According to Richards, wars can only be explained in different causes as part of a social process. There is 'no single explanation of war' (Richards 2005: 12). He focuses not on what causes wars but on how war and peace are 'constructed' (Ibid.: 13), arguing that there are many unconventional ways of looking at 'war' and 'peace'. Economic factors have often been attributed to the start of a war,[4] as has ethnicity. Richards (2005: 8) refers to this new trend as 'new barbarism' and he promotes an 'ethnographic perspective' of war focusing on 'patterns of violence already embedded within society' (Ibid.: 11). These perspectives include:

> (…) pre-war peace is often more delicate and finely balanced than appreciated; and that the seeds of war are to be seen shooting up in peace; that the shift towards intense armed conflict is a process with many twists and turns (and significant pauses, relevant as opportunities for peace makers); that conflict is sustained by an emergent sociology and economy of war; that turning back towards peace, even beyond a peace agreement, is a rocky path with many pitfalls; that the hidden or silent violence behind conflict has to be addressed if peace is to be sustained (justice matters); that sometimes peace breaks out even without formal peace making efforts; that war and violence echo in collective and individual memory for generations and that the institutional fabric to keep armed conflict within bounds over the longer term emerges from below as well as from above. (Richards 2005: 13-14)

It is necessary to focus on the details of personal and societal lives. Every detail, like displacement, abductions and divided families are part of an armed conflict. And every detail matters when analyzing war and peace. To conclude, Richards prefers to speak of a 'continuum' instead of making sharp distinctions

[4] Richards (2005: 9-10) refers to Berdal & Keen (1997), Berdal & Malone (2000), Le Billon (2000; 2001) and, notably, Collier (2000).

between war and peace. This shift in thinking encompasses the irregular eruptions of violence in a period of perceived peace as well as cases where peace is even more violent than war (Richards 2005: 5). War does not ultimately result in peace, and peace does not always mean the end of war. 'War' does not always mean war in terms of violence and 'peace' is not always without violence. It is sometimes better to talk of 'No war no peace' as in the title of Richards' (2005) book.

Linking relief to development

In this phase of news, wars and complex emergencies, the UN and the international aid apparatus are being challenged by new dynamics based on political instability, insecurity, an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, conflict and population movement and displacement (Duffield 1994: 3). New wars demand new types of humanitarian aid and humanitarian aid should be linked to development.

New dynamics require new kinds of interventions. Emergency relief no longer means the provision of food packages in times of hunger or tents for shelter. Donors now want more sustainable ways of addressing people's needs even when they are hungry and have no shelter (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell 1994: 1). Organizations have noted a gap between relief and development operations, with the theory being to link relief and development to ensure sustainability and cost effectiveness. 'Better "development" can reduce the need for emergency relief; better "relief" can contribute to development and better "rehabilitation" can ease the transition between the two' (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell 1994: 1).

It was thought that effective development could contribute to conflict prevention (Macrae *et al*. 1997: 223). Development tackles poverty and poverty, as was the general line of thinking, enhances the risk of war.

A new paradigm in the aid industry was born, a paradigm dominated by terms like 'relief', 'reconstruction', 'rehabilitation' and 'recovery'. As Duffield (2002) observed, the focus on sustainability has resulted in interventions and strategies based on 'self-sufficiency' and 'development'. The distribution of food to the starving was no longer seen as an ethical or long-lasting solution. Relief has been used to take 'anti-impoverishment measures'[5] (Duffield 2002: 89). He calls this 'liberal self-management'; to design programmes for people to ensure their own economic and social well-being. In cases where circumstances are more difficult (gender, discrimination, etc), NGOs can offer a helping hand (Ibid.).

[5] An example would be that people no longer 'just' receive food during relief operations. The World Food Programme has expanded its programme to include a more developmental focus. In their Food for Education programme for example, schools prepare breakfast and lunch for pupils to prevent them from dropping out of schools. Another example would be attracting labourers by paying them in food.

Picture 2.1 Koro Camp, October 2007
[© Josh Maiyo]

The academic debate of linking relief to development is strongly connected to the debate concerning the definition of conflict/emergency and peace. As Hilhorst (2007: 2) explains, ‘emergency’ and ‘reconstruction’ are socially constructed labels linked to different political debates. She argues, in line with Richards, that the distinction between emergency and post-emergency is not clear (Ibid.: 3) and that peace agreements often illustrate peace and motion reconstruction. Instead she suggests that a crisis occurs over a longer period of time: There will be a long `no war no peace´ phase. When war is officially over, violence and predatory behaviour may still occur (Hilhorst 2007: 3; Lambach 2007: 10).

If peace suggests ‘reconstruction’ in the aid discourse, notions of peace should be critically examined. In the developmental discourse, emergencies are seen ‘as

temporary interruptions to the process of linear development' (Duffield 1994: 5). He argues that these complex emergencies and their challenges affect social networks and systems as they are embedded in historical and societal dynamics (Ibid.: 4):

> So-called complex emergencies are essentially political in nature: They are protracted political crises resulting from sectarian or predatory indigenous responses to socioeconomic stress and marginalisation.

In the context of Sudan in the 1990s, Macrae *et al*. see two major questions to consider when shifting to developmental aid in a complex emergency situation. The first is whether the emergency is over and the second is the space for development aid (Macrae *et al*. 1997: 229). Establishing when an emergency is over is not easy. The different interests of stakeholders claim different explanations about how to define a situation. Often it is the local government that declares an emergency to be over. Interests should then be critically examined before declaring an emergency to have definitively ended. 'The space for development aid' is related to this. The shift to development depends on an invitation by local authorities to start with development interventions. A space for development can be created, even if an emergency is not yet over or the time is not yet ripe. Macrae *et al*. (1997: 231) also suggest that the shift to development can be a wrong signal in the relationship between donors and governments. Government can then claim that the situation is normalizing and that the population is no longer in danger or need. Duffield (1994) and Macrae *et al*. (1997) argue that complex emergencies are always political, which means that every national, international and local actor is involved in politics in emergencies.

Linear thinking

Terms like 'development', 'relief' and 'rehabilitation' deny the wider political context in which aid agencies determine their instruments and channels (Macrae *et al*. 1997: 224). In Sudan it was determined that different organizations did not have a common understanding of the definitions of these popular terms and none of them provided a decent policy framework. Those involved in the aid discourse however think linearly and that one situation follows another (see Figure 2.1). Every stage demands a different aid response from humanitarian aid to development. The linkage between the two extremes is defined by terminology. But how one can respond to the different stages in practice is not clearly defined. If war is thought to result in transition, peace conflicts with the academic debate on the social processes of violence. The following chart represents the thinking in the humanitarian world.

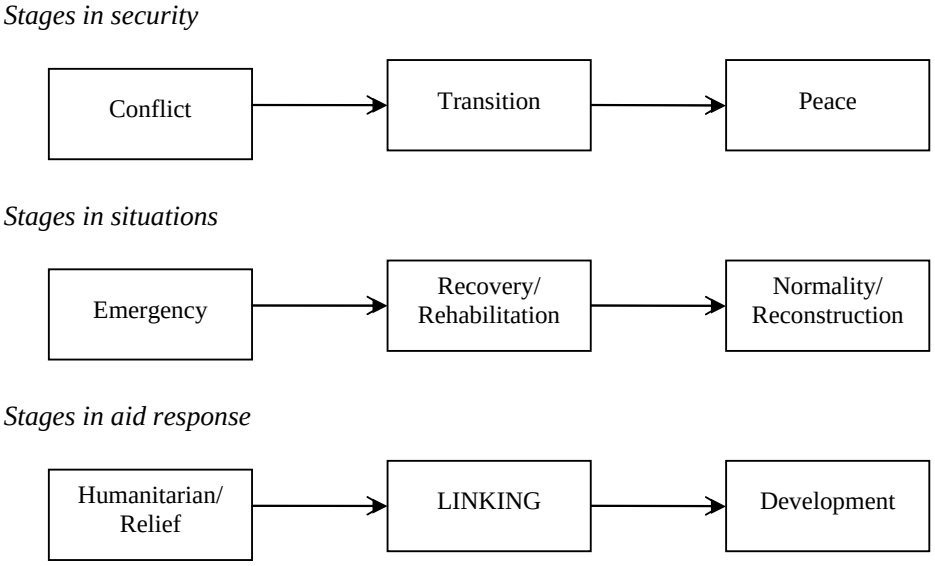

Figure 2.1 Linear thinking of the humanitarian world in security situations and aid responses

Macrae *et al*. (1997: 225), Richards (2005) and others are sceptical about these linear approaches. Hilhorst (2007: 12) summarizes it as follows:

> Let us not forget that the transition from relief to development is an optimistic slogan that does not apply to most people in emergency situations. [citing Christoplos 1998] Their normality is not one of development but of bare survival, with few services to fall back on. Their return to normality is not a transition from relief to development but a transition from relief to muddling through. Safeguarding the meagre livelihood, safety net and service options of these people should be a major driving force of humanitarian aid.

To conclude, humanitarian aid and the development discourse offer a linear thinking in terms of how to explain security situations and responses. It is thought that conflict means an emergency, one that demands a humanitarian response. Conflict is then followed by peace, which means a phase moving towards normality and reconstruction. Development programmes support this phase. However, there is no consensus on what to do between conflict and peace and how to respond. The humanitarian and development community invented a new model, the 'linking relief to development' approach. However, as academics have argued, the linear approaches to conflict, situation and responses will not help to understand local dynamics and the genuine needs of people. All the terms in Figure 1 have been invented in the aid organizations' paradigm. What might be better would be to approach peace and conflict as part of society and nuanced

processes as Richards (2005) and Hilhorst (2007) propose, also in the case of northern Uganda.

The Ugandan context

Conflict and displacement

It is hard for people to speak of one Uganda (RLP 2004: 10). Linguistically, culturally, economically and ecologically, southern Uganda is very different from northern Uganda, and the north/south divide was emphasized even during British colonial rule (Doom & Vlassenroot 1999; RLP 2004; Gingyera-Pinycwa 1992). The Baganda in the south were rewarded for collaborating with the British with roads, infrastructure, hospitals and a university during colonial rule. Northerners were considered disorganized and tribal (RLP 2004: 10) and in this less-developed part of the country the British were able to find many people prepared to join the British army. Northerners were more occupied with fighting someone else's war instead of investing economically in their own region (Doom & Vlassenroot 1999).

Democracy became rooted in Africa when the indigenous people had to deal with the colonial powers (Omara-Otunnu 1992: 445). In the north, ethnic groups were struggling within themselves and with others but generally joined efforts to oppose the southern dominance created during colonialism. There was a wide-spread belief that a northerner as president of Uganda could make up for these imbalances (Glentworth & Hancock 1973: 240).

However, the two presidents from the north did not bring about national unity and stability. On the contrary: The gap between the north and the south widened and the situation deteriorated dramatically. Murder, imprisonment and exile marked Uganda's history between 1962 and 1986 (Mugaju 2000: 8): Obote was a brutal dictator and Idi Amin's regime represented eight years of oppression, killings and human rights abuse. His motto was: 'I can fight therefore I must rule' (Omara-Otunnu 1992: 445). When the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) captured Kampala in 1979, Idi Amin fled the country. After the elections in 1980, Obote started his second term as president although guerrillas accused him of sabotaging the elections. One of these rebel groups was the New Resistance Army (NRA) headed by Yoweri Museveni. Obote was overthrown by his own commanders in a coup in 1985 and Tito Okello assumed the presidency for a short period until he was overruled by Yoweri Museveni, who was not happy that Okello had assumed power while it was the NRA that had contributed to Obote's departure. Museveni and his National Resistance Army feared southern influence and revenge.

NRA troops destroyed villages in the northern part of Uganda and civilians were incarcerated in concentration camps soon after they had captured the north

(Omara-Otunnu 1992: 454). Both the NRA and the rebel groups committed murder, looted properties and burnt down houses. Museveni even admitted that his troops set fire to food stores in northern Uganda, his explanation being that everything should be done to weaken the rebels (Ibid.: 455). As a result, many people from the north fled to Sudan or formed rebel movements in the north (Doom & Vlassenroot 1999: 14). An opposition party emerged in northern Uganda under the name of the Uganda People's Democratic Movement (UPDM). Alice Lakwena, a young Acholi woman founded a movement known as the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (Omara-Otunnu 1992: 455) which posed a serious threat to the NRA but it could not overcome the NRA's superiority (Omara-Otunnu 1992: 457). Museveni took this opportunity to claim that northerners were backward and wild but, in the meantime, Lakwena's followers formed a new rebel group under the notorious Joseph Kony: The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The year the NRM took power and the LRA was formed marks the beginning of northern Uganda's conflict, but numerous factors and incidents could have triggered the violence that followed. Or as Dolan (2005: 67) puts it:

> (…) what defines a particular period of violence as a war in its own right rather than simply one more in a succession of phases of violence? The so-called LRA war, after all, follows on from the violence of the Obote and Amin periods, violence during the establishment of colonial rule, and the depredations of the ivory and slave trade in the nineteenth century, to mention only the most obvious.

During the conflict between the LRA and the government army, thousands of people were forcibly displaced by the NRA, which was infamously known for the looting and killing of the Acholi's cattle. The LRA committed horrific atrocities: The cutting off of noses, lips and ears for example. In 1993 the first attempt at peace negotiations were initiated but a year later the talks failed, triggering a tremendous increase in violence (Dolan 2005: 75-76). The level of insecurity made people feel that they were no longer safe in their homes and thousands of young children 'commuted' between their villages and what they perceived as safer areas like the streets of Gulu town, hospitals, NGOs and churches where they spent the night. Fearing abduction from their villages, they sometimes walked several kilometres every evening and then returned in the morning. Others left their villages for the so-called 'protected villages' declared by Museveni's government. Most of them were *already* trading centres or small towns: The majority however were controlled by the government army, now called the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF).

People were ordered to leave their villages and go to the closest trading centres or newly established camps but this displacement of the local population was only a temporary solution. The displaced were not allowed to leave the camps as they could be mistaken for rebels and would be shot. The conflict

started to attract more international diplomatic attention and the Ugandan government was urged to take initiatives to end the conflict. It kept emphasizing that the conflict with 'bandits' demanded a military solution but when the LRA finally seemed to become tired of fighting, international efforts were made to get both the LRA and Museveni around the table for peace talks in 1998. However, the UPDF continued to fight the rebels in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Under international pressure, the Ugandan government signed a peace agreement with Sudan in 1999. Furious about the lack of LRA involvement, Joseph Kony and his soldiers returned en masse to the northern part of Uganda. The conflict continued and the Acholi who had sought to return to their own homes found themselves back in congested camps (Dolan 2005: 76-85). By the end of 2004, 80% to 90% of the Acholi people were living in displacement and the UN World Food Programme was distributing food to about 1.5 million people in northern Uganda (Ibid.: 89-92).

The violence continued in the following years. In 2004, the LRA attacked Barlonyo camp in Lira district, killing over 330 people. This was followed by a big demonstration in which 10,000 people urged the government to offer better protection for the IDP camps (HRW 2004). In early 2005 another attempt was made to organize peace talks but these again failed. The LRA extended their attacks to include Sudanese civilians and aid workers in northern Uganda, forcing relief organizations to temporarily leave the region. The ICC issued arrest warrants for five LRA leaders, including Joseph Kony and his second-in-command Vincent Otti. Civic and religious leaders expressed their concern that the warrants would obstruct possible future attempts at peace talks (HRW 2005). In July 2006 and financed by bilateral and multilateral donors, the regional government of Southern Sudan initiated peace talks between the LRA and the Ugandan government. A ceasefire was signed and the agenda was agreed. Under pressure from critics, the government of Uganda proposed withdrawing ICC warrants for the LRA leaders but this was not possible because the ICC was in charge and the Ugandan government was no longer in a position to influence the ICC process.[6] These peace talks raised expectations among those who had been displaced (HRW 2006) and, at the time of writing, peace talks between the LRA and Museveni's government are still taking place with only Kony's signature still remaining.

[6] Many scholars and professionals have written about the justice and reconciliation process in northern Uganda and the tensions between justice (ICC warrants) and peace (withdrawing the warrants to encourage Kony to sign the deal).

The national policy for internally displaced persons and the PRDP

Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, said the situation in northern Uganda was 'one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world' (*The Lancet* 2003: 1818). The displacement of 90% of the northern population resulted in congested camps where disease, death and extreme levels of poverty were prevalent and people were living in appalling circumstances. To address the rights of the internally displaced, the government of Uganda was encouraged to prepare a policy to ensure their rights. The National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons was thus drawn up in 2001 and resembles the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The policy describes the rights of the internally displaced and focuses on their return and resettlement and the assistance that should be offered by various institutions in this process. The policy states that:

> *Reintegration* is the re-entry of formerly internally displaced people back into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of their original community;
> *Returnee* refers to any Internally Displaced Person who returns to his or her home or place of habitual residence;
> *Resettled persons* are Internally Displaced Persons who resettle voluntarily in another part of the country of habitual residence
> *Integration* is the process by which formerly displaced persons get absorbed into the social, economic, cultural and political fabric of a new community, or the community where they first found temporary settlement. (OPM 2004: xi)

Although the policy does not describe how displaced people should be guided in these three processes, their rights are emphasized in the chapter on 'General Provisions'. Two are of major importance: 'freedom of movement' and 'freedom of choice'. The first is described as follows:

> Free movement ensures that the internally displaced can take part in various subsistence activities and should, therefore, not be curtailed. (OPM 2004: 21)

Strategies to ensure this right include the provision of security and a person's free choice as to where to reside (Ibid.). Related to freedom of movement is the freedom of choice:

> In order for IDPs to be able to make the decision to return with full knowledge of the facts and freedom of choice, the Government shall use appropriate means to provide Internally Displaced Persons with objective and accurate information relevant to their return and reintegration to their homes or areas of habitual residence, or resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. (OPM 2004: 23)

Since the peace talks started, the government, UNHCR and various NGOs have been actively working towards a northern Uganda without displacement, camps or the need for aid. Northern Uganda should develop because it is 'the major impediment to increasing GDP growth in Uganda' (PRDP 2007: vi). The Uganda government initiated a huge policy plan to recover and develop the north

called the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP). It is a framework for all the operations in the north for a period of three years at a cost of US$ 606,519,297. The policy has four objectives: (i) the consolidation of state authority; (ii) the rebuilding and empowering of communities; (iii) the revitalization of the economy; and (iv) peace building and reconciliation. Gulu district has been told to replace the IDP policy and adopt the PRDP as their focus even though northern Uganda is still in the displacement phase. However it is promoted that displacement now belongs to the past.

Humanitarian and government discourse

Perceptions of conflict and peace

On 10 November 2006 the UPDF and the northern district leaders declared on the radio that people could 'voluntarily return'.[7] As a district government official said: 'The government assured that Kony will never cause displacement anymore'.[8] In their view, people should leave the dirty and crowded camps for their own villages where the government could protect them. The Ugandan government is aware of all the critique they have received by forcing people into camps where life became worse for so many. Home is now considered to be the best place for them. No one would challenge them on that but the questions remains: Now, at this time? According to the same government official, this is a good time to return. As his colleagues confirm, the government has been very positive about the outcome of the peace talks. The level of insecurity has decreased dramatically and the region has been declared safe and ready for returnees. Government officials at the district and central level claim to have the 'Kony issue' under control and at the Office of the Prime Minister in Kampala, it was even said that the conflict 'was a temporary problem'.[9]

Calling the conflict a temporary problem is one way of looking at a conflict that has lasted for decades. It indicates the indifference of the central government towards this conflict and a lack of sympathy for its victims. The government does not speak about the threat of the LRA as a group but focuses on one man: Joseph Kony. Government officials claim Kony is no longer a threat to northern Uganda, that the region is safe enough for IDPs to return and that peace talks will certainly succeed. Others have adopted the view that there is no longer a war going on. Especially in the media, phrases like 'When the war is over (…)' have resolutely turned into 'Now the war is over (…)' (*AllAfrica* 2008; *Daily Monitor* 2008).

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[7] Interview with a district government official, Gulu town, 21 September 2007.

[8] Interview with a district government official, Gulu town, 12 November 2007.

[9] Interview with the Commissioner of Disaster Management and Refugees & the Principal Disaster Management Officer, Kampala, 18 October 2007.

Notions on the conflict in northern Uganda have implications for the humanitarian operational field. Northern Uganda is just one of the many programmes that humanitarian organizations are running. A lot of international staff have worked in other (conflict) areas and most of their programmes are based on a blueprint with little room for contextual adjustment. However, it is interesting to see that for many, the war in northern Uganda is considered to be different from other wars.

> This [situation in Northern Uganda] is not a difficult programme. You don't get shot at in northern Uganda, there is democracy, structure, money, donors. We are making it so difficult for ourselves. Let's pack and leave and concentrate on where the need is higher, Chad, Sudan, Iraq.[10]

This UN official pleads for leaving the region because the situation is not serious enough to warrant their presence and he feels that the different structures that are in place make the situation there 'better' than that in other parts of the world. This was acknowledged by another humanitarian aid worker who said that 'In Darfur people do not have anything. There it is war.'[11] This implies that there is no war in northern Uganda and comparison with other regions in the world makes northern Uganda a 'second-degree' war zone for some humanitarian workers. That hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people still live in crowded and underdeveloped camps with an uncertain future ahead of them is not considered a sufficiently difficult situation. There might be a degree of peace prevailing in the region but there is not yet total peace. For these aid workers, the improvement in security is not seen as a welcome but temporary relief for those who have suffered twenty years of conflict but as an end to the conflict.

Why is this humanitarian situation considered to be so different from others? Many would suggest the presence of a government structure as one of the reasons, as the UN official mentioned. Gulu's district government is indeed functioning and its roles and responsibilities are clear on paper: The government of Uganda is the main authority and humanitarian actors are there to help them. It is thought that this is different in other countries.

> Some international actors, not all, fail to appreciate the humanitarian structures that are there. The structures here are functional. This is not Darfur or a country where there is no government.[12]

Return interventions

When talking to IDPs six months after the peace talks, President Yoweri Museveni stated:

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[10] Interview with a UN official, Gulu town, 13 December 2007.
[11] Interview with a humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 6 November 2007.
[12] Interview with a representative of Gulu NGO Forum, Gulu town, 22 December 2007.

> There is *kuc* (peace) and security. Kony has run away. We are dealing with the cattle rustlers from Karamoja. This is not accidental. It is a result of years of deliberate work especially building our military capacity to contain *peki acon* (old problems) like Kony and cattle rustling. So *kuc* is here to stay. (…) The time has come. Take advantage of this *kuc*, go home and reorganize yourselves. (*AllAfrica* 2008)

The Ugandan government and the humanitarian agencies in northern Uganda are working together to respond to IDP issues. Until October 2007, the National Policy on Internal Displacement in Uganda was used as a framework for operations. On returning to their homes, the policy claims:

> The government recognizes the right of IDPs against forcible return and resettlement in any place where their life, safety, liberty and health would be at risk. (OPM 2004: 23)

However, it depends on how one defines 'risk'. The government claims the lives of IDPs are no longer at risk because in their view the war is over. Such an attitude enables the government to operate within the policy's framework, but risk may be felt differently by others. For many, there is a realistic risk that the security situation will worsen. For them, the government's promotion of return could be a violation of their rights. It is open to debate why the UN and humanitarian agencies are barely challenging the government's return campaign although it is clear that the government has its own agenda and wants to distract all eyes from the unpopular concept of encampment.

The PRDP is one of these distractions. It has been allocated a budget of US$ 38,973,120 out of a total budget of US$ 600 million for a three-year period to 'facilitate the voluntary return of IDPs from camps to their places of origin and/or any other location of their preference as peace returns' (PRDP 2007: 63).

Apart from the provision of 'return kits', there are no suggestions as to how to facilitate the return process. Almost US$ 39 million have been allocated to the return process in northern Uganda, all of which has to be spent by October 2010. As the government is obviously aware, there is no formal peace in place yet but by claiming that the war is over, the PRDP plan can be implemented anyway. This means that the government has started to channel the first of the US$ 39 million through government bodies.

The PRDP is influencing everyone working in the humanitarian community in northern Uganda and the government is closely monitoring the agencies' activities. Many humanitarian workers admitted they had not read the 157-page plan but there is no way of opposing the plan or the timing of its launch. The PRDP was a UN and World Bank initiative and several agencies were involved in its development. The different stakeholders are all committed to the plan at a central level and obviously want to make a success of it. In the meantime, it is generally accepted that the war is over and that people should return to their homes as soon

as possible. Northern Uganda is ready to develop as a region and this is in the hands of the government. Half a billion dollars have been set aside to help the process.

> If you look at the situation critically, it does not make sense. Encampment started in 1997. Before that people also lived at home during war. The situation in northern Uganda is very safe. In places like Nairobi and Johannesburg, death is everywhere. The level of insecurity cannot prevent people from going home. This Kony war is no longer a security threat.[13]
> The donors want early recovery. In theory, our agency is not involved but in practice we have to do it because early recovery is done here. We have a vital role to play. We are most proactive in encouraging people to move and to close camps.[14]

Internally displaced persons

Notions on security and fear

Government and humanitarian actors wonder why people are not returning to their homes. They believe that the fear and doubts of the people surrounding the peace talks are irrelevant and consider other reasons, such as the availability of hut-building materials or the lack of services in return areas, to be more pertinent. It is true that these reasons are mentioned by the IDPs as factors influencing their decision-making about whether or not to move. Nevertheless, the displaced people first mention another reason for not moving out of the camps or going straight to their villages. The reason is first and foremost fear, fear of the rebels who could still kill someone or abduct children. This was mentioned in an interview with a man in his village near Gulu town:

> 'During the day I am here in the village for cultivation, but at night I am sleeping in the (trading) centre. I take my children with me.'
> Interviewer: 'Why don't you spend the night here?'
> 'The situation is very bad ad night. Abductions and killings.'
> Interviewer: 'By the rebels?'
> 'By the rebels and even by the government. Because if you are alone you are an easy target. You have to stay with others.'[15]

Fear of the rebels is obstructing the return process. 'The young people still fear the LRA. When they go back to their villages anything can happen and they can still be arrested.'[16,17]

[13] Interview with a senior humanitarian aid worker, Gulu town, 12 December 2007.
[14] Interview with a senior UN official, Gulu town, 13 December 2007.
[15] Interview in a village in Gulu district, male aged 55, 12 January 2008.
[16] 'Arrested' was used to say 'abducted'.
[17] Interview in a village in Gulu district, male aged 20, 10 November 2007.

Picture 2.2 Food distribution World Food Programme, Palenga Camp
[© Hilde Kroes]

Despite the fact that the LRA has not committed any recorded crimes since the beginning of the peace talks, northern Uganda is far from a safe environment. Several incidents have taken place in which rebels have attacked and looted small villages at night and killed people too. These 'robbers' are called *boo-kec* in the local language, meaning 'bitter vegetables'. People fear them because of the large number of guns available in their communities. Several people in the camps had heard about or experienced incidents with the *boo-kec*.

> This is the real life situation. Two months ago my uncle went back to the village. He was slaughtered. People first have to protect their own lives.[18]

It is fear of the *boo-kec* that is keeping people in the camps waiting for the security situation to improve. But the *boo-kec* and the peace talks are not the Acholi's only concern. The conflict has affected and involved everyone. People have been members of the LRA or the UPDF and both parties are responsible for many deaths and serious atrocities. Years in IDP camps have resulted in a perfect understanding of who knows who, and feelings of revenge and clan disputes are likely to increase when people go to isolated places where there is less social and

[18] Focus group discussion in Anaka's main camp, male aged 28, 19 December 2007.

military control. The fear of revenge is a major concern among those who were previously abducted (JRP & QPSW 2008: 10).

> People fear revenge. They fear atrocities in their own village. For example with two clans, one plans revenge if the other resettles in the village.[19]
> Some people were in the LRA and some in the UPDF. This will be a problem in the village unless there is a programme. For example, when a retired UPDF soldier came back, he wanted to slaughter the people sleeping in his house but could not because there were so many of them in the hut.[20]

Having witnessed several failed attempts in the past, there are doubts about the success of the current peace talks. Why move out of the camps while there is still a risk that the peace talks might fail? For some people it would be a worst case scenario: If they left the camps now as they might be forced to go back to them if the security situation deteriorated again.

Two years of relative peace is nothing compared to twenty years of conflict and a decade of living in camps. People are waiting for something tangible to come out of the peace talks, either the actual signing of a peace deal or the moment that 'Kony comes out of the bush'.[21] For some it feels like the war is still going on and that the rebels could attack at any moment. Others see improvements in the security situation but are sceptical about whether they will hold in the long run.

Apart from living in hardship for twenty years, people have not had any future prospects: It has been impossible to plan or have dreams. The improvement in the security situation does not mean people can easily take up where they left off twenty years ago, plan ahead and have faith and belief in the future. The government and the humanitarian agencies are denying them this by demanding people return home because northern Uganda is, in their eyes at least, no longer an emergency situation.

Perceptions of home are often mixed. On the one hand there is a general desire among IDPs to go home, but on the other hand thoughts of home bring back memories of the time when they lived in fear because of the atrocities committed by the LRA. In principle, the Acholi people never resisted being taken to the camps as it would be a temporary solution and offer protection. However, this temporary solution has turned into a long-term problem. The years in the camps have negatively affected people's lives. The obvious tendency among IDPs is to idealize and romanticize home as being a better place than where they are now. However, perceptions of home seem not to impede or enhance return. The ma-

[19] Focus group discussion in Anaka's main camp, male aged 29, 19 December 2007.
[20] Focus group discussion in Anaka's main camp, male aged 25, 19 December 2007.
[21] 'Kony coming out of the bush' is the equivalent to Kony being caught or killed in the place where he is now hiding, namely in 'the bush'.

jority still remain in camps or at new sites. Acholi patterns of mobility show that home is not necessarily linked to place and time.

Conclusion

The Ugandan government and the humanitarian aid agencies consider August 2006 as a moment of breakthrough in northern Uganda's history. The ceasefire that resulted from the first talks was considered a serious attempt to end twenty years of conflict and the level of security drastically improved after this. No rebel attacks have been recorded in Gulu and Amuru district since then but despite the peace talks' failure to conclude the conflict, the war in northern Uganda is now considered to be over.

However, as Lambach (2007) explains, the level of violence in an area is not an effective indicator of the extent of a conflict. People's security regularly deteriorates and death and injury rates can remain high in a former conflict zone (Lambach 2007: 10). In northern Uganda there has been almost no violence recently but that does not mean that the conflict has ended nor does it mean the beginning of a post-conflict situation. People fear the rebels, the *boo-kec*, revenge and clan rivalries. People in the camps are still dying of disease and hunger even though there is now 'relative peace'. The level of violence has dropped but the situation should not be mistaken for a post-conflict situation: The situation in northern Uganda is still violent, uncertain and volatile.

Claiming that the war is over implies that the war 'started' one day, that there was a life before the conflict and that there will be a life after the conflict. Interestingly, it has proven to be hard to attribute a certain event or a certain year to the beginning of the conflict in northern Uganda and it is hard to define the war-torn situation in the north. It is not important to attempt to unravel the features, causes and results of the war. What is important here is how the definition of war and peace relates to humanitarian interventions and how the IDPs themselves perceive their security situation and how this influences their decision to leave or stay in the camps.

If we look at the conflict in northern Uganda as a 'socially constructed process' (Richards 2005), then the conflict here is not an event in itself. It is part of a structural problem between northern and southern Uganda – as well as between the Ugandan government and the Acholi people. In that sense, the situation in northern Uganda can indeed be identified as a 'no war no peace' situation. The current peace talks and even peace itself will not solve the structural problems in northern Uganda. The tensions between north and south, the government and the Acholi will remain. They started many decades ago and there is no indication that they will disappear in the near future. IDPs are, of course, aware of these tensions and the structural political problem in the north and their perceptions of

the future in political and social domains are influenced by this knowledge. The peace talks and peace are just (important) fragments of a long historical and political struggle between northern and southern Uganda. The government would deny the structural complexity of the region and the humanitarian agencies working there lack the historical knowledge and the feeling for specific political nuances.

There will always be an element of insecurity that particular groups may find difficult to live with. IDPs have already voiced their fears about the return of the rebels and of the *boo-kec* who loot and rob people in the villages. People who have committed crimes during the war – for instance as a rebel – also fear revenge from community members. In their daily lives, the ceasefire has not offered a breakthrough. Violence has continued, others have entered the stage. People do not tend to think in rigid time distinctions, in terms of the end of the conflict and the start of the post-conflict period. The IDPs have not changed their perception of the security situation: Rebel activity may have decreased but as long as people *think* it is still a potential threat in their lives, it is difficult to talk about a major change in their situation.

The Ugandan government and the humanitarian aid community have an unrealistic image of how northern Uganda will be in the near future. The fact that the peace agreement has not yet been signed is of huge significance to the north. The war is not over, and it will not even be over when a deal is signed. Twenty years of conflict have changed people and their societies.

The internally displaced of northern Uganda have dealt with violence for centuries, more intensely in some periods than in others. Volatility is part of these people's lives and they have adjusted their strategies based on their experiences. In line with Hilhorst (2007: 12), their normality is based upon survival. Their patterns of mobility indicate these strategies and their perceptions of their own security, which are very different from the linear thinking of the government and the humanitarian agencies in Uganda. The planned return approach promoted by the government and some of the humanitarian agencies seriously undermines the displaced people's rights and their authority to make their own choices. No conditions have been established to facilitate the IDPs' return nor are they participating in the planning and management of their own return. The internally displaced should be protected at all stages, security threats should be tackled and, above all, every effort should be made to produce a positive conclusion to the peace talks so that the internally displaced of northern Uganda can plan their voluntary return home in safety and with dignity.

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3

Political parties and intra-party democracy in East Africa: Considerations for democratic consolidation

Josh Maiyo

Political parties are essential institutions for the proper functioning of a democratic society and perform important functions for the promotion of democracy by mobilizing citizens and linking them to government. To effectively carry out these functions, political parties are expected to incorporate democratic ideals in their internal processes and functioning. Intra-party democracy, as an element of participatory democracy, is widely perceived as necessary for the development of a democratic culture in the wider society. The attainment of these democratic ideals depends on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated in the organizational rules and practically implemented in political party processes. This chapter[1] *examines the state of internal party democracy among political parties in East Africa. It seeks to expand existing knowledge on intra-party democracy in Africa with specific reference to how processes of institutionalization, inclusiveness and (de)centralization influence levels of participatory democracy among political parties in the region. While debate continues on exactly how much democracy is good for political party effectiveness, the consensus is that intra-party democracy is desirable for its role in increasing levels of participatory democracy in the wider society. The discussion draws on democratic theory and normative approaches to intra-party democracy developed largely from studies of political parties in western democracies while juxtaposing this on empirical research in Africa. International democracy assistance programmes use these models to propose that political party reform processes in-*

[1] An earlier version was presented as paper at a seminar on Intra-Party Democracy at the Africa Studies Centre, Leiden University on 9 September 2008. The arguments presented here are based on results of empirical research conducted with political parties in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania from September 2007 to January 2008.

clude aspects related to the internal organization such as intra-party democracy (NIMD 2004). This chapter seeks to determine if and to what extent these models are adequate for the study and analysis of African political parties and party systems. It concludes that whereas intra-party democracy is a desirable ideal, African political parties are products of distinct socio-economic and historical circumstances to which existing models do not fit wholly and need to be reviewed.

Introduction

Political parties perform certain crucial democratic functions in the wider society such as augmenting citizen participation in the political processes, widening the aggregation of diverse political interests, facilitating orderly and democratic transfer of political power, promoting government accountability, and imparting legitimacy to the political system (Matlosa 2005). In Africa, political parties also serve as channels of resource distribution, patronage, upward mobility and expressions of indigenous and ethnic aspirations.

It is generally accepted that political parties cannot fulfil their democratic functions if they themselves are not democratic in the conduct of their internal affairs and how they present themselves to the electorate. These assumptions depict intra-party democracy as essential for the creation and growth of well-functioning and sustainable democratic institutions: Firstly, it encourages a culture of democratic debate and deliberation of critical issues and therefore collective ownership of decisions. Secondly, it promotes party unity through reduced factionalism and/or fragmentation. Thirdly, it creates legitimate internal conflict management systems and fourthly, it reduces the opportunistic and arbitrary use of delegated authority.

Correlations are also made between increased intra-party democracy and greater party effectiveness and subsequent electoral success on the one hand, and the strengthening of democratic culture in the wider society on the other (Scarrow 2005). Internal democracy is indispensable if political parties are to fulfil their role as legitimate and credible agents of democratization. The extent to which political parties can attain intra-party democracy depends on the extent to which processes of effective membership participation are formally stipulated and implemented in practice in the party's organizational rules and procedures. If there is ineffective enforcement, or complete absence of such rules, the party may be faced with significant institutional and operational challenges.

The enormity of the challenge facing African political parties is compounded by the fact that, unlike the majority of their western counterparts, few African nation-states display a distinctive cultural or ethno-linguistic homogeneity. They are heterogeneous along ethnic, regional, religious and/or clan cleavages, and are therefore highly fractious. Political competition and organization tends to follow these pre-existing fault lines, which in turn determine the structure of political

parties. Compared to their European counterparts, African political parties are products of distinct historical, socio-economic and political conditions that influence their identity, organizational structure and functioning.

Manning (2005: 718) characterizes African parties as 'not (being) organically linked to any particular organized social group, and so have often resorted to mobilizing people along the issues that are ready to hand – ethnicity, opposition to structural economic reform – without regard for the long-term consequences'. The majority of African political parties are characterized by weak organizational strength and a lack of institutional capacity, their decision-making processes are unstructured and power tends to be personalized in the party leader and a few of his cronies who are usually wealthy enough to bankroll the party (NIMD 2004; Wanjohi 2003). The role of the party membership is reduced to a bare minimum, usually to endorse decisions already made by the elite. Political mobilization assumes the form of personality cults and loyalty is to the party leader as opposed to the party as an institution.

Political parties in East Africa, as elsewhere across the globe, continue to grapple with these ideological, institutional and structural challenges with the potential to compromise their survival, legitimacy and effective functioning. The challenges often result in undesired outcomes such declining membership, electoral losses, lack of cohesion, factionalism and instability, weak coalitions and a poor state of internal democracy (Meinhardt & Patel 2003: 33). These factors ultimately undermine political parties' effectiveness as agents of democracy in the wider society.

Contemporary democracy assistance programmes developed in the west frequently approach the study of and interventions in political party development in Africa with a set of indicators and criteria by which political parties can be analysed and measured with regard to their institutionalization, organizational strength, as well as internal democracy (NIMD 2004). These tools often come with a list of 'Dos and Don'ts' that sets minimum standards for party behaviour and organization (NDI 2008). The question however remains as to whether these models based on western theoretical analyses and assumptions on the role and functions of political parties are practical, useful and acceptable to political practitioners in African party political environments. The following section delves into the contemporary conceptualization of intra-party democracy and its applicability to African settings. This is followed by an empirical examination of the state of intra-party democracy in East Africa that examines whether or not political parties in the region conform to these models. The chapter then concludes with an analysis of the practical and theoretical applicability of existing models and proposes ways in which these could be improved.

Conceptualizing intra-party democracy

The primary democratic function of a political party is to link the citizenry with the government (Sartori 1987: 11). To play this role effectively, political parties have to provide opportunities for effective participation by party members, activists and leaders in the party's decision-making processes. Intra-party democracy (IPD) thus refers to the extent to which political parties' decision-making structures and processes provide opportunities for individual citizens to influence the choices that parties offer voters. Discourse on intra-party democracy is anchored in theories of *participatory democracy* which can be described as processes that emphasize the broad participation (in decision-making) of citizens in the direction and operation of political systems. Membership participation is a central feature and variable of research into IPD.

Intra-party democracy is not a universally popular notion however and debate continues among policy makers and comparative political theorists regarding the desirability and feasibility of intra-party democracy. Various arguments have been advanced for and against IPD based on differing views on the efficiency and effectiveness of democratic decision-making processes. This is certainly the case in East Africa where a combination of increased internal democracy coupled with low institutionalization, a lack of effective and independent conflict resolution mechanisms as well as a chaotic political culture in a highly heterogeneous society threaten social cohesion and could be a recipe for open conflict. In this section, both sides of the argument are explored with a view to establishing a workable context-specific compromise.

Too much democracy? Intra-party democracy and party effectiveness

The iron law of oligarchy (Michels 1962) argues that political parties are inherently undemocratic and have a tendency towards oligarchy. According to this argument, intra-party democracy is cumbersome and leads to inefficient decision-making processes that are at variance with the ultimate desire for well-organized, structured and institutionalized party systems. This view is further supported by arguments that intra-party democracy weakens political parties and compromises their ability to compete against their opponents and is therefore undesirable (Duverger 1965: 134). Proponents of this view argue that 'in order to serve democratic ends, political parties themselves must be ruled by oligarchic principles' (Teorell 1999: 364).

Intra-party democracy, it is claimed, impedes decision-making, precludes parties from choosing candidates they regard as most appealing to the electorate and transfers key political decisions to a small group of activists at the expense of the broader party membership (Gauja 2006). Intra-party democracy is also seen to

Picture 3.1 Electoral Commission advert
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reduce party cohesion while increasing the risk of internal dissention. This impinges on party efficiency as more time and energy are spent on internal competition and conflict resolution than on the core priorities of electoral and governmental success.

These arguments underline the position that intra-party democracy does not necessarily lead to better political party effectiveness and electoral victory, and neither does it contribute to increased democracy in the wider society. On the contrary, oligarchy seems to be a more appealing option for political parties in presenting a united front, both to the electorate and the opposition (Wright 1971: 446), especially in highly fractious and heterogeneous societies in Africa. Many African leaders have used this argument in compelling ways to defend autocratic single-party rule or the total proscription of political parties in the name of national cohesion, development and state-building (Okuku 2002).

Oligarchic political party structures are characterized by elite and leadership control of the party at the expense of the party membership, more often than not leading to undemocratic and authoritarian government. This reflects the prevailing situation in the majority of political parties in both authoritarian African states as well as those undergoing political liberalization. This would suggest that while institutions may change, political culture is yet to follow suit and political parties in such societies tend to have highly centralized and non-inclusive

decision-making processes and are not, therefore, internally democratic. Political parties then fail to fulfil their function as agents of democratization contributing to increased democracy.

Proponents of the competitive model of democracy (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1956; Downs 1957; Sartori 1987) argue that a system of competitive political parties is necessary for effective interest aggregation and their channelling in competition for government. A balance therefore needs to be struck that ensures the growth of effective and competitive political party systems as well safeguarding and strengthening participatory democracy in the wider society. Only then can intra-party democracy promote the efficiency and competitiveness of political parties while at the same time increasing democracy.

The case for intra-party democracy

The choice between direct (participatory) democracy and representative democracy is normative and ideological. Proponents of direct democracy who favour direct citizen participation in governance processes decry the failure of representative democracy through the political party system as an ineffective alternative. How then can this gap be bridged and what institutional safeguards can be built into representative democracy to guarantee acceptable levels of citizen participation in the absence of direct democracy? How can intra-party democracy fill this gap without compromising the effectiveness and efficiency of political parties?

The appeal of intra-party democracy lies in the fact that it may 'facilitate citizen-self rule, permit the broadest deliberation in determining public policy and constitutionally guaranteeing all the freedoms necessary for open political competition' (Joseph 1997: 365). This approach combines perspectives of participatory and deliberative democracy that emphasize the central features of participation and contestation. Participatory democrats place a high premium on citizen participation in the political process and a sense of civic responsibility. According to Van Biezen (2004), only then can a political system warrant the label of 'democracy'. McPherson (in Teorell 1999: 368) proposed a pyramidal system of intra-party democracy 'with direct democracy at the base and a delegate democracy at every level above that' supplemented by a system of competitive political parties. Since a truly participatory model of democracy in the form of direct Athenian democracy is not feasible due to the complexity of societies, political parties bridge the gap between citizens and government by providing avenues for citizen participation through effective intra-party democracy.

The deliberative theory of democracy has gained ground of late by emphasizing that democracy is a product of deliberation among free, equal and rational citizens (Elster 1998). This approach sees democracy as a process rather than an

outcome. Dryzek (2000) concurs that democracy is thus a process of 'deliberation as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights or even self government'. This emphasizes the process by which opinions are formed, policies formulated and programmes developed. All these models present normative approaches to the concept of intra-party democracy. They are by no means conclusive or incontestable but chart the broad parameters within which more refined and context specific structures and processes can be advanced in favour of intra-party democracy.

Functions of intra-party democracy

Normative theorizing aside, research on intra-party democracy tends to focus on a utilitarian perspective that seeks to establish empirical causal relationships associated with processes of intra-party democracy. Research remains inconclusive on whether and to what extent parties need to be internally democratic to promote democracy within the wider society. According to Scarrow (2005: 3), political parties that practise intra-party democracy 'are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, to have more responsive policies, and, as a result, to enjoy greater electoral success (…) [and] strengthen democratic culture generally'.

Other arguments in favour of intra-party democracy suggest that it encourages political equality by creating a level playing field in candidate selection and policy development within the party; and ensures popular control of government by extending democratic norms to party organizations such as transparency and accountability. It also improves the quality of public debate by fostering inclusive and deliberative practices within parties (Gauja 2006: 6).

In East Africa, political parties are largely characterized by a top-down organizational structure where power and decision-making are highly centralized. This leaves little room for deliberative decision-making processes involving the party membership. This organizational structure has been inherited from the colonial legacy where colonial administrators and the political elite dictated to and made decisions on behalf of the native population without consultation (Malyamkono & Kanyongolo 2003: 273). Political parties thus tend to be autocratic or oligarchic in their organizational structures where conformity is preferable to the critical debate of issues and is enforced through covert and overt pressure, and illegal sanctions including suspension and even expulsion from the party. These practices lead to severe limitations of inclusiveness and transparency while breeding patrimonialism that compromises intra-party democracy.

Political parties are perceived more as vehicles to contest and attain public office and less as institutions for democratic consolidation. The desirability of intra-party democracy is more likely to be viewed in terms of its use in improving the overall political party effectiveness against competitors. This denotes

an outcome-oriented approach but, as the discussion above suggests, this liberal view of democracy is incompatible with the participatory perspective of intra-party democracy (Wanjohi 2003; Salih 2003; Oloo 2007).

The success of intra-party democracy in Africa lies in understanding the motivations of individual agency as well as the functional aspects of political parties. While contemporary democracy assistance programmes that prescribe attitude change away from a result directed towards a process-oriented approach may be desirable, this could prove difficult to achieve. A fine and pragmatic balance must be struck between an emphasis on party processes that entrench democratic culture by increasing citizen participation with result-oriented approaches that strengthen political party effectiveness. Political parties should not be seen just as 'incubators that nurture citizens' political competence' (Scarrow 2005) but also as channels of political contestation, resource allocation and interest aggregation. In polities characterized by low levels of civic awareness, intra-party democracy provides opportunities to expand civic education and awareness through participation, while at the same time devolving power and decision-making processes to a broader section of society.

Political party systems in East Africa

Political party systems determine the form and substance of political competition among parties, which in turn determines the way in which parties organize internally and present themselves to their opponents and the public. A party system refers to the classifications of internal and external networks and relationships of political parties. They comprise 'the alliances, coalitions, negotiations and debates' that political parties engage in and that form the 'crucial aspects of political life, the structure of the governing polity and the nature of political stability' (Salih & Nordlund 2007: 43).

Uganda and Tanzania are one-dominant-party systems where both the CCM and the NRM enjoy electoral success and uninterrupted periods in power. Kenya has had a two-dominant-party system since the 2002 elections. Uganda has six political parties in parliament, Tanzania has five and Kenya has no fewer than twenty-three, almost all under either the PNU or ODM umbrella parties. While Kenya has had competitive multiparty elections since 1992 and Tanzania since 1995, Uganda has only had one (in 2006). Pluralist politics are therefore still in their infancy there and Uganda can be described as having a dominant authoritarian party system.

While political parties form the mainstay of political organization and representation, their level of institutionalization is still relatively weak. In such circumstances, dominant party systems have a negative effect on competitive poli-

Table 3.1 Party systems in East Africa, January 2008

	Parties at independence	Single-party rule	Multi-party elections	Registered parties	Parties in Parliament	Party system
Uganda	3	1969-2005	2006	35	6	One-dominant party
Tanzania	6	1964-77-1992	1995/2000/2005	19	5	One-dominant party
Kenya	2	1964-66, 1969-1991	1992/1997/2002/2007	156	23	Two-dominant party

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union

tics. In Uganda for instance, opposition parties operate under severe constraints imposed by the authoritarian NRM government (Chege 2007). A lack of institutionalized structures within political parties leads to the development of personality cult politics. President Museveni, for instance, does not seem even to respect his own NRM party. During the 2006 elections, he set up parallel structures for his campaigns that were ran by close associates from the military. It is these parallel structures rather than the civilian party taskforce that are credited with ensuring his victory in the elections.[2]

Similarly, President Kibaki in Kenya abandoned his sponsoring party (NARC) and set up a new political party, the PNU, just three months before the general election in December 2007. His campaign secretariat was run by professionals drawn from the private sector while politicians associated with his coalition partner parties were shunned, leading to numerous complaints, disorganization and dissent.[3] This portrays a system where political elites have scant respect for political parties as institutions and only see their value as convenient tools for contesting elections and which can be discarded once they have served their purpose. Political parties tend to be dormant after elections and only revive during the following election cycle (Chege 2007: 25).

Dominant party systems pose a challenge to democracy in general and may lead to less intra-party democracy since they dominate the legislature and monopolize the law-making process. In most cases, parliament loses its sovereignty as an independent arm of government; it simply exists to rubberstamp and legitimize decisions by the executive organ of the ruling party. This scenario is made worse in simple majority or first-past-the-post electoral systems that prevail in all three East African countries. In a situation where the vote is divided among

[2] Dr Ssali Simba, Interview 13 September 2007.
[3] *Daily Nation*, 1 December 2007.

numerous parties, it is possible for a party without a majority to form the government. This was the case in Kenya after the 1997 elections in which KANU formed the government with less than 36% of the total votes cast (Wanjohi 2005: 75). Governments in dominant party systems can be less accountable to the legislature and the wider electorate but the opposition may well be too weak to hold it to account. Such party systems are therefore resistant to structural change and reforms that are likely to weaken their stronghold on power.

This not withstanding, legislation governing political parties has been introduced in all three countries under various political party acts. Legal regulation of political parties is becoming a norm in the region and is widely seen as a positive development, especially where public funding of political parties in concerned. This strengthens the competitive capacity of opposition parties against the ruling party which often relies on state resources that offer undue advantage. Reforms in party laws however contain significant shortcomings regarding enforcement, oversight, the independence of regulatory bodies, and the possibility of state interference. Additionally, provisions in existing party laws in Tanzania and Uganda prohibit the formation of coalitions, thus denying party members and political parties the freedom to decide what form of political organization best suits their own interests.

In light of the weak institutional and organizational capacity of political parties in the region, legal regulation is likely to encourage intra-party democracy by fostering processes of accountability and transparency and ensuring regular elections, financial accountability and the institutionalization of inclusiveness. Party law also serves to encourage institutionalization and organizational capacity of political parties in order to improve their competitiveness in elections. Regulation encourages parties to offer better policy options and ensure that capable candidates emerge from competitive and credible selection processes. It also increases party responsiveness and accountability to its membership and raises levels of membership participation in party activities and programmes, thus reducing oligarchic tendencies and the overwhelming powers of party leaders.

Party law is by no means a panacea for low intra-party democracy or weak organizational and institutional structures or for extending democracy to the wider society. Political parties are a reflection of the societies from which they emerge and their effectiveness depends largely on the political culture and other context-specific variables. Any programmes that promote democracy through political party assistance should be cognisant of these factors. In weak democracies with hegemonic parties for instance, the state machinery can still be employed to thwart the interests of democracy. In countries undergoing democratic

transition, party law can be useful in the consolidation of democratic gain and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

Intra-party democracy: An empirical perspective

Institutionalization: Organizational rules and regulatory framework

Political parties are, by definition, organizations whose procedures for the conduct of their affairs are stipulated in articles of association that are usually deposited with the registering authority. Almost all political parties in East Africa have developed party rules and regulations governing their party affairs and these are usually contained in documents such as the party's constitution, its rule book or manifestos and strategic plans. The conduct of internal party affairs is legally regulated by national legislation either in the country's constitution or in various political party acts.

Party law provides general guidelines regarding internal democracy within political parties. These include requirements for periodic and democratic internal leadership elections, evidence of a national outlook, the sanctioning of discriminatory practices and a guarantee of membership participation. Political parties are expected to comply with these regulations by adopting them in their own party documents.

Virtually all the registered political parties in the region have, at least on paper, party documents that espouse and guarantee processes of internal democracy through leadership elections, membership participation, the selection of candidates, policy formulation and finances. In practice though, there are still wide gaps in degrees of implementation. African political parties are generally characterized by low levels of institutionalization and East Africa is no exception. Party law does not, for instance, define what it means by 'periodic and democratic' elections, leaving room for interpretation. Additionally, there are hardly any provisions for monitoring and verification. Political parties are left to define how and to what extent they adhere to these regulations.

Most political parties, especially the new ones, do not have broad-based structures or offices across the country as they are confined to the main urban centres. Where rural support does exist, it is usually based on ethnic, regional or other parochial cleavages (Oloo 2007). The lack of countrywide appeal and representation gives incumbent parties, such as the CCM and the NRM, ammunition against opposition parties which they brand as tribal and divisive elements. Political fragmentation means that in countries like Kenya, no single party can muster the requisite support to win an election and form a government on its own. This has led to a culture of coalition arrangements that are structured along ethnic and regional lines. More often than not, these coalitions are fragile power-sharing pacts and are not negotiated on principles of sound party ideology in the

interest of the party membership and/or the electorate. The result is further political and social polarization which may ultimately result in open conflict.

In terms of ensuring ethical conduct, party documents have elaborate disciplinary mechanisms and procedures but parties are more concerned with recruiting and retaining members than seeking to discipline errant ones. Most parties do not have the capacity, manpower or resources to engage in such exercises. And due to the elite's control of party organs, there are hardly any structural provisions for the party membership to hold the leadership to account. All parties prioritize membership recruitment drives, mobilization and sensitization, and policy propagation as the key elements in their strategic plans.

The challenge of institutionalization lies less in legislation and more in the implementation of the existing provisions within party documents. While all the parties have institutional and organizational structures to promote intra-party democracy, these are often not effectively implemented in practice. Informal institutional arrangements, such as cronyism, ethnicity and patronage, tend to take precedence over formal institutional structures. Party ideologies and policies that emerge through such structures are usually unrepresentative and non-inclusive of the wider party membership, thus compromising the effectiveness of a party as a potential mobilizing force and a focus for aggregation of wider social concerns and aspirations. These failures subsequently impede the degree of intra-party democracy.

Founding principles and policy formulation

The majority of the independence parties in East Africa were founded upon a liberation ideology of African nationalism. Structurally, they were organized as mass movements embodying the aspirations of Africans for self-government and liberation from colonial rule (Wanjohi 2003). The ideological foundations of the independence parties have not changed much in spite of the passage of time and societal changes. Parties like the CCM still exhibit organizational characteristics of strong centralization associated with autocratic tendencies designed for the consolidation of power. This is often characterized by the deliberate stifling of internal and external criticism, dissent and opposition.

Parties formed in the early 1990s were essentially anti-establishment, pro-democracy movements created in response to and as a means of resistance to the excesses of the authoritarian one-party state (Oloo 2007). These were formed largely out of civil society and pressure groups that fought for political pluralism during the single-party regimes and later coalesced into political parties. In this category fall parties such as the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) in Kenya, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) in Uganda as well

Picture 3.2 Demonstration of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Uganda
[© Josh Maiyo]

as the National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR-Mageuzi) and the CUF in Tanzania. A relatively new category of 'coalition' political parties is also emerging in Kenya. These are umbrella parties usually formed out of pre-election pacts by parties that agree to field a single presidential candidate. The run-up to the 2002 general elections saw the establishment of NARC and in 2007 the ODM and the PNU as the main coalition parties going into the elections.

While most new parties espouse principles of human rights, fundamental freedoms and genuine democracy, they have in practice largely been motivated by a single issue, namely the removal of the incumbent ruler and his/her party from power (Wanjohi 2003). These parties generally do not espouse any distinct or identifiable ideologies or programmes different from the independence parties. They are easily recognizable by their ethnic, regional or religious affiliations and the social cleavages they represent as opposed to any distinct policy or ideological position (Oloo 2007).

Their internal organization and institutional structures do not therefore reflect principles of intra-party democracy. Uganda's DP is perceived as historically representing the interests of the Buganda in the central region and Catholics, while the UPC has Protestant leanings and draws the bulk of its support from the north and eastern parts of the country (Ogutu 2007). The outcome of general elections in Kenya since the introduction of multipartyism shows a clear trend in

which parties and candidates draw support and win elections based on regional and ethnic support bases or strongholds. Party alliances have also been forged along ethnic lines (Oloo 2007). Not all parties however conform to this model. In Tanzania, opposition party members and leaders argue that, over time, they have broadened their support bases. This may be the case for parties such as the FDC in Uganda which, although drawing the bulk of its support from urban areas, seems to cut across ethnic and regional cleavages.

Policy formulation

Policy development under such circumstances is mostly a centralized and top-down process. Policy documents are drafted by departmental heads, national executive committee members or consultants at the national level and are then presented at party secretariats for discussion and improvement before being ratified at a delegates' conference. This is the general trend across all parties in all three countries. Interviews with KANU, CHADEMA and FDC officials indicate that members play a minor to insignificant role in policy formulation. This is contrary to party documents such as manifestos and constitutions that talk of membership consultation through workshops and conferences to initiate policy development. For the CCM for instance, the process is initiated by the central committee then approved by the National Executive Committee and eventually adopted by the national delegates' conference. Most parties follow the same pattern, which lacks inclusivity of members' views in the development of such crucial party documents as strategic plans, campaign manifestos and party platforms. Participatory democracy, a central component of intra-party democracy, is thus compromised.

In general, the use of opinion polls is a relatively new phenomenon. Some parties claim to use this tool in policy formulation but polling is not restricted to party members. They instead use public opinion polls, the results of which give a general reading but do not necessarily reflect the wishes of party members. There is no evidence therefore of intra-party democracy in ideology and the policy-formulation processes within political parties in the region.

The national party leadership is, in principle, answerable to its membership through its national delegates' conference, which serves as the party's highest decision-making organ. In practice however, there is hardly any accountability to the party's membership since they do not participate in the policy-formulation processes in the first place. Lower party leadership levels are expected to be accountable at their respective levels to the higher organs but lack of accountability at the national level often deters commitment to accountability in the party branches.

Membership

One of the significant challenges for the institutionalization and democratization of political parties in Africa in general is the lack of a distinct and disciplined party membership (Oloo 2007). Political parties are characterized more by supporters as opposed to registered card-holding members. Party affiliation is fluid and membership participation in multiple parties is not uncommon. While the recruitment of members is delegated to the branch or district level, most parties do not have structures beyond the major urban centres and, in some cases, only have supporters in their regional strongholds. Card-carrying membership mostly ended with the demise of autocratic single-party rule when having a party card was proof of political loyalty and patriotism. Membership was in most cases through coercion, hence the negative attitudes seen towards registered card-carrying members. When political parties become dormant after an election and there is a lack of political activity for members, parties' external credibility and internal democracy are adversely affected. Decision-making processes then move to the parliamentary caucuses or other central party organs.

Intense competition for electoral support among the multitude of new political parties places a low premium on restricting participation in party activities to registered members. Party elites fear alienating potential voters should they restrict participation, for instance in party primaries, to registered members (Muite 2007). Party law across the region does not make any stipulations regarding party membership and although almost all parties have regulations regarding party membership, these guidelines are often ignored. Instruments such as party constitutions set out members' rights, responsibilities and obligations. All the parties studied refer to the existence of a membership register organized at three levels; branch, district and national level (or headquarters). Interestingly though, none of the parties could actually produce documentation to support the existence of a membership list or give exact figures.

Declining or low party membership in old and new parties respectively can be attributed in part to not carrying out effective membership recruitment drives. The parties are limited by their lack of institutional structures and resources to allow mobilization and penetration countrywide. With the exception of the dominant ruling parties (the NRM and the CCM), most parties charge a minimum fee for basic membership (either annually or a one-off subscription). It is worth noting, however, that due to massive rural poverty, many cannot afford to pay the membership fee and the practice in Kenya for instance is for prospective candidates to buy cards for distribution to intended supporters at grassroots level.

The role of party membership in the formulation of party policies and the selection of candidates is negligible. The delegates' conference or congress is generally described as the party's highest decision-making organ and its deci-

sions are binding. In practice, however, these delegates are usually carefully handpicked by party operatives according to their loyalty to particular party elites from their own regions and calculated to give as much support as possible to the regional party stalwarts. In many cases, parties do not have any real structures at the grassroots level, from where delegates should be democratically elected. The delegate selection process is yet another demonstration of the politics of the personality cult, sycophancy and patronage as opposed to genuine processes of intra-party democracy. Although there are stipulations regarding members' roles, rights and responsibilities, these are not implemented in practice. In most cases, party conferences simply serve to endorse and legitimize party platforms, election manifestos and elected office holders.

Effective communication between the party and its members is a key component in ensuring a constant exchange and inclusion of members' views in party planning. This is another significant challenge facing African political parties due to the lack of infrastructural capacity. Public rallies, party meetings and individual correspondence seem to be the most frequent forms of communication between parties and members. Some parties are slowly embracing new technology such as mobile telephony and the Internet for communication; about half of the parties studied have websites with basic party information though most are not regularly updated. Advertisements in the media, billboards and leaflets are used during election campaigns but do not form part of regular party communication strategies. Intra-party communication is more often than not one way as members rarely take the initiative to communicate with the party or party officials.

With limited resources to hold public rallies and conferences, the physical communication afforded through such forums is sporadic. Party caucuses for special interest groups, such as women's and youth wings, are crucial to achieving inclusiveness and greater intra-party democracy but these are not fully developed or operational in most political parties. Except for the DP's Uganda Young Democrats (UYD), the CCM's Umoja wa Vijana (Youth Wing) and Umoja wa Wanawake (Women's Wing), there is not much evidence of a revamping or strengthening of these institutions which are only mobilized during election campaigns.

Leadership and candidate selection

One of the key processes for expanding inclusiveness in party procedures and decision-making is the recruitment and selection of party leaders and candidates.

Picture 3.3 Interviewing Uganda Young Democrats
[© Josh Maiyo]

These processes allow parties excellent opportunities to demonstrate their inclusiveness by providing opportunities for participation by members and supporters. It is therefore important that parties make choices that ensure such processes are not only inclusive but also free and fair, and are seen to be so.

Leadership selection

Electoral systems in East Africa, as in many African countries, are single-member parliamentary (constituency) and presidential systems. This means that the selection of a party leader is the equivalent to selecting the party's presidential candidate, should the party choose to field one at elections. Whatever the case, the choice of party leader determines the image as well as the course the party will take. This is more so in African party systems characterized by oligarchy. In most cases, overwhelming power and influence are concentrated in the party leader or a few of his cronies who hold significant sway over party policies, programmes and the selection of other leaders and candidates. Technically, almost all the political parties surveyed select their national leadership through the delegates' conference, a form of party caucus in which representatives from the lower branch or district levels of the party meet at the national level. Ac-

cording to most party rule-books, these delegates are supposed to be elected by party members at the branch, district or constituency levels and are supposed to be representative of women, youth and other marginalized groups.

Convening a national delegates' conference is a huge logistic undertaking for parties with limited financial means. Coupled with the acrimony, confrontation and friction that the exercise raises, many parties shy away from or totally avoid holding such events unless they absolutely have to, usually in order to meet legal obligations. In less institutionalized political parties, party positions are divided up in boardroom deals between the party's elite, usually among its founders, chief financiers or regional and ethnic chieftains. Delegates' congresses are subsequently mere pomp and ceremony and are meant to legitimize already agreed upon leadership positions (Oloo 2007; Wanjohi 2003).

Highly centralized political parties, such as the CCM, equally have less inclusive leadership selection processes. The Central Committee is the most powerful organ of the party with overwhelming power over the nomination and recommendations of party members for the positions of chairperson and deputy chairperson of the party; the President of the Republic of Tanzania; MPs and members of the House of Representatives. Not only does the organ nominate members to contest leadership positions, it also has a supervisory role in monitoring the implementation of party elections as well as the appointment of district party leaders. Such a highly centralized system is characteristic of ruling parties in one-dominant-party systems that have often retained power since the era of single-party rule. This is the case with the NRM in Uganda where the influential National Executive Council nominates candidates for top party positions such as president, (deputy) chairperson and secretary general as well as treasurer. Those nominated are more often than not simply endorsed by the national conference.

The lack of inclusive and democratic leadership selection processes with no clear mechanisms for neutral and independent dispute arbitration can have negative consequences for party unity and cohesiveness. Consequently, intra-party rivalry frequently spills over into open conflict and possible party splits. Kenya has perhaps been the theatre of the most divisive party wrangles arising from undemocratic and non-inclusive leadership selection processes. In Kenya in 2002 for example, the then ruling party, KANU, disintegrated after incumbent President Daniel Arap Moi unilaterally appointed the relatively untested Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of his predecessor and first president Jomo Kenyatta as party leader. The senior party elite who had been waiting in the wings and looking for a democratic and inclusive succession process broke away to become the Liberal Democratic Party and teamed up with the opposition to form the Rainbow Coalition, which removed the KANU from power.

KANU lost extremely badly in the ensuing election and has not yet recovered. Subsequent wrangles over leadership elections in 2006 saw Uhuru's leadership of KANU annulled in court, only to be reinstated later. This was followed by a split within KANU with the creation of a new faction, the New KANU. In 2007, similar leadership wrangles brought about splits in no less that four leading parties in the run-up to that year's general election. Some of the parties affected were the ODM, FORD-Kenya, KANU and NARC.

Undemocratic and unrepresentative leadership selection processes have significant and often negative consequences for party cohesion, unity and effectiveness in contesting elections. Internal wrangles often lead to a weakening of parties, splits, defections and the formation of new parties or the revival of ones that have become moribund. Impartial and independent conflict resolution mechanisms as well as institutional respect for electoral results are necessary for the success of intra-party democracy and safeguard against oligarchy. In societies where regionalism and ethnicity are the organizing principles, wider considerations of national security and stability are at stake. Democracy assistance programmes should, therefore, carefully counterbalance the promotion of intra-party democracy with a view to political stability.

Candidate selection

Candidate selection is a fundamental process in a political party's engagement with its membership and the wider electorate. The process by which candidates for elected positions are chosen is perhaps as important as the type of candidates selected. The result determines the party's profile against its competitors during elections as well as determining the loyalty of its members and supporters. The degree to which party members and supporters are included in this process is significant in determining the party's electoral success.

The most open and inclusive form of candidate selection is the direct ballot or party primaries where eligible party members or supporters pre-select party candidates through direct elections. There are variations to this model depending on who is eligible to vote in the primaries. In most western democracies, participation is restricted to registered party members but this is not the case in African parties as most do not have a registered membership. The process is usually open to citizens eligible to vote in the general election.

All the political parties studied have clear party rules and guidelines on candidate selection. In most cases, an election board is set up to vet interested candidates who must be approved by a party organ before they can be given the green light. The more centralized the party structure, the tighter the control on vetting and clearing candidates. On the other hand, a party needs to ensure that potential candidates are selected on specific criteria that will strengthen the party

going into an election. Some considerations include a candidate's ability to finance their own campaigns, party loyalty, electability, adherence to the party's ideology and platform, and the ability to work with fellow party members.

Eligibility criteria for both parliamentary and presidential candidates closely mirror provisions contained in the country's constitutions. In most cases, interested candidates collect application forms from the party's national secretariat and pay an application or nomination fee. This is a convenient fundraising strategy for the party. Conversely, the high fees charged can be prohibitive and may deter capable but less wealthy candidates and render politics a preserve of the rich. The high costs of campaigns funded by individual candidates only serve to exacerbate the situation and may breed a culture of political corruption in campaign financing.

Not all parties follow this pre-selection procedure. Due to the immense logistical and financial requirements for such a national exercise, some parties prefer to have a centralized candidate selection process in which applicants are vetted by the appropriate national party organs and nominated directly. This is usually the practice with smaller parties with less capacity to mobilize and organize nationwide party primaries. Though less acrimonious, such a process denies party members any role in the selection of its candidates. The need for inclusivity in party primaries by opening the process up to all potential voters regardless of party membership has potential costs for the party. This can be the case in situations where parties have no clear membership records or where parties fear alienating potential voters in the actual election by restricting candidate selection to registered members.

Logistical difficulties, limited financial resources and the fear of ensuing wrangles and divisions are but some of the factors that make party elites fail to carry out open, transparent and inclusive leadership and candidate selection processes. Poor institutional and organizational capacity, inherent structural weaknesses and pre-existing tensions between different camps and loyalties impede the free and fair selection of leaders and candidates. Consequently, these crucial party activities are often carried out by central party organs and are characterized by careful regional, ethnic and personal power balancing and horse-trading that ensure the loyalty and satisfaction of leading and influential party figures. Party leaders usually prefer to keep such powerful kingpins in their camps as opposed to having them defect and either pose serious competition to their parties or take with them a huge number of much-needed votes come a general election.

All these processes add up to the emasculation of intra-party democracy by alienating party members and reducing then to mere pawns in a high-stake game between party elites. It is not surprising that membership loyalty and allegiances are not to particular parties but to individual party leaders with regional or ethnic

bases. Interventions in favour of increased intra-party democracy in leadership and candidate selection should therefore take into consideration their social, economic and political implications, the country's unique political culture and the expectations of the different social groups and the stakes involved.

Conclusions

Political parties are essential institutions for the proper functioning of a democratic society. As social organizations designed for contesting and attaining political power, they play an even more significant role in societies undergoing democratic transition. Political parties serve several functions including determining the content of the political order, selecting authoritative leaders, resolving disputes, maintaining order and promoting the various interests of the community among diverse and contending social forces. In young democracies characterized by weak institutions, fragile social cohesion, heterogeneity, corruption, rampant poverty and the possible threat of conflict, the role of political parties cannot be under estimated.

In East Africa, political parties face higher expectations than in established western democracies and to achieve these objectives, political parties have to offer genuine avenues for effective membership participation not only to form credible and well-functioning governments but also to enhance social order and security. Intra-party democracy is, therefore, essential for the creation and growth of sustainable democratic institutions and will help foster and deepen a democratic culture within the wider society.

An adequate institutionalization of party structures and processes is necessary to secure and enforce the principle-agent relationship between party members and elected party representatives. The deliberative model of democracy involving wider social representation is necessary to ensure that party decision-making and operational procedures are debated freely and collectively agreed upon among all members as equals. This necessitates active support for institutionalized decentralization in which lower party organs and members are empowered and included in the party's decision-making processes. This means that the representational capacity of political parties should be institutionalized in such a way that they are geared towards the articulation, realization and protection of the interests of the membership, as opposed to the prevailing situation where elite interests supersede or ignore the interests of the wider society.

To address some of the systemic, institutional and structural weaknesses of the party-political environment, all three East African countries have enacted political party laws. However these are not aimed at reforming the entire party political and electoral systems but only target the regulation of political parties, laying down guidelines for their registration, funding and conduct. The legal

regulation of political parties is widely seen as a positive development, especially where the public funding of political parties in concerned. With regard to intra-party democracy, party laws have significant shortcomings as they do not set out clear guidelines and specific requirements for membership participation, accountability and oversight that ensure higher standards of adherence, especially on issues of corruption and party finance. More effort should thus be made to entrench proper procedures in party documents to create a culture of respect for institutionalization, accountability and transparency.

Intra-party democracy appears to be significantly influenced by unwritten informal arrangements in the conduct of party affairs. Not all informal institutional arrangements are necessarily negative or detrimental to intra-party democracy. On the contrary, they can be complimentary and serve to solve conflicts arising from competing interests among party members and the leadership. This may, in turn, serve to promote the efficient performance of formal institutional arrangements although some informal arrangements may indeed enhance participatory democracy by promoting a culture of debate and consultation within the party. It is, therefore, necessary to identify and encourage such arrangements that may be critical to the enhancement of intra-party democracy while guarding against those that might impede its promotion.

The lack of inclusiveness in ideology and policy formulation processes is glaring amongst all the political parties in the region. This is one of the most centralized and non-inclusive aspects both institutionally and structurally. Party formation and ideological orientation are usually the preserve of a few individuals who characteristically become party ‘owners’. These founders tend to centralize power and decision-making prerogatives among themselves. More often than not, the process of policy formulation is outsourced to expert consultants or associates of the party leadership. The process thus severely compromises intra-party democracy by disenfranchising party members, diminishing the sense of ownership and compromising party loyalty. Such practices only serve to entrench personality politics, and loyalty to the party is substituted by personal loyalty, which further diminishes prospects for party institutionalization.

It needs to be determined whether and to what extent party leaders and members of African societies value the role of party ideology, and whether this has any significant place in contemporary African political party organization. What is the place of ideology in young democracies grappling with high levels of poverty, unemployment, insecurity and other development challenges? Is there a preference perhaps for pragmatic party programmes and platforms as opposed to ideology? What is the role of party leaders’ individual agency and do these leaders hold the same values as those in western democracies? These and other

issues need to be considered to better understand the underlying mechanisms behind the nature and character of political parties in East Africa.

Regarding participation in leadership and candidate selection processes, most parties fail to hold internal leadership elections. A large number of parties especially in Kenya are yet to hold credible internal leadership elections following their formation and are perpetually being led by interim officials. When elections are held, there are critical deficits such as significant delays and they are often marred by corruption, bribery, threats, intimidation and, in some cases, open violence. Conflicts arising may be so intense as to result in party splits. Newly enacted party law in Kenya and Uganda and a review of enforcement mechanisms in Tanzania are intended to rectify these anomalies. The issue of party law and political-party regulation however remains contestable. It is debatable whether indeed aspects of intra-party democracy can and should be externally legislated by the state or be left to self-regulation within party structures and institutions. Nevertheless, efforts can be made to strengthen a culture of respect and the acceptance of electoral results. Where conflict arises, independent, credible and mutually respected conflict-resolution mechanisms should be strengthened. This may include formal and informal mechanisms that combine possibilities for arbitration as well as legal redress.

In terms of candidate selection, there are strong tendencies towards centralization, the imposition of unpopular candidates, the granting of automatic nomination, vote rigging and manipulation of the rules. Although most parties have clearly stipulated internal rules regulating the selection of party candidates, they are not fully adhered to. The scenario is also compounded by a lack of clear, impartial and credible conflict-resolution mechanisms. Where conflicts arise, national courts are hesitant to arbitrate, preferring to leave such disputes to be resolved through internal party machinery. Only recently have arbitration powers been granted to the registrar of political parties, but external regulators are either hesitant to interfere or lack the independence or capacity to intervene. So while institutional arrangements theoretically enhance intra-party democracy, in practice, both the absence and, where they exist, weak internal and external enforcement undermine free and popular participation in candidate selection processes.

The effectiveness of intra-party democracy should be seen not in isolation but as part of a whole set of context-specific variables that determine the character and functions that political parties serve in different democratic settings. As an element of participatory democracy, its appeal should be viewed not only in its ability to encourage a culture of democratic engagement and collective ownership of decisions but also in promoting party unity through the incorporation of processes that reduce factionalism and fragmentation. The attainment of these democratic ideals will only be realized if processes of effective membership

participation are formally stipulated and implemented in practice in the party's organizational rules and procedures. While the debate continues on how much internal democracy is good for party effectiveness, consensus may be found in developing mechanisms and approaches by which intra-party democracy serves to increase and deepen levels of participatory democracy in the wider society.

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4

How the youth of Soweto have turned language into a transformable object in the context of a changing society

Pierre Aycard

This chapter[1] *presents an up-to-date analysis of the Soweto mixed-language, Iscamtho and demonstrates how the youth, who often have Iscamtho as their native language, have taken it and language-transforming behaviours in general to a point where it has become the usual way of expressing oneself. Iscamtho, multilingual behaviour and language-transforming behaviours are now not only the first way of speaking that the youth learn but also the one which they master best and promote in more and more private and public settings. It has now moved beyond the borders of Soweto and has become a symbol and feature of the democratic South African society.*

Introduction

South Africa has always been a multilingual society but it is only since 1994 that eleven languages have officially been acknowledged. In a context of multilingualism and language contact, there have been several mixed languages in South African history. The most famous was Tsotsitaal but the language that has been most active for the past four decades has been the street language of Soweto: Iscamtho. This chapter demonstrates how, through the political and social history of Soweto and South Africa, Iscamtho has become a symbol of youth culture and

[1] It presents the results of five months of field research in the township of White City-Jabavu in Soweto, South Africa, which was conducted between August 2007 and December 2008. The article follows an MPhil thesis entitled "Speak as you want to speak" (Aycard 2008) achieved at the African Studies Centre & Leiden University, 2008.

how, through the development of this youth culture and the recent political and cultural freedom, it is now a major linguistic feature of South Africa. The youth are depicted as the agents of this evolution, and their responses to social and political developments are the vector of Iscamtho's change of status.

Iscamtho has many names and the word Iscamtho itself means 'to talk' or 'to chat'. The present generation of speakers commonly calls it Ringas – from the English 'ring', as several people who speak or chat can form a ring. However many other names such as tsotsitaal (the 'gangster language'), scamthotaal or sekasi (the 'language of the township') could be used. The language was born from a criminal slang but its main characteristic is that it has been, from the start, a multilingual and ever-changing code. It works through the grammar of another language, which serves as a *matrix language*. In it are included lexical items from diverse languages, included items proper to Iscamtho, usually derived from previously existing Zulu items. Its speakers value the incorporation of new and unexpected items from any language, as well as new items. As a South African multilingual code, it has been a symbol of diversity and equality among the speakers of all the languages of Soweto. Recently, the promotion by the new regime of these same values of diversity and equality, together with the new recognition offered to youth culture from African townships, has turned the multilingual Iscamtho into an accepted language in many spheres of Sowetan and South African society.

The first part of the chapter analyzes the socio-historical processes through which Iscamtho appeared and reached the status of *lingua franca* in Soweto. The following section then focuses on the political and social developments that South Africa experienced during democratization and during which Iscamtho appeared as the very symbol of the new multicultural South African society. And the third and final section details Iscamtho's new position in the different spheres of society and the complex status it has achieved.

Multilingualism, mixed codes and the development of Iscamtho

Soweto was officially established in 1963, its name being an acronym of South Western Townships. About 15 km southwest of Johannesburg, it consists of a complex of townships for African people that the Johannesburg City Council and later the apartheid government developed from the 1930s onwards in response to a lack of accommodation for the thousands of black families who had come to Johannesburg seeking employment. It also helped to enforce the racial segregation of residence areas following the 1923 Urban Areas Act and the 1950 Group Areas Act (Beavon 2004; Carr 1990). After several townships had been built in the 1940s and 1950s, the government, through the Minister of Native Affairs – the designer of *Great Apartheid* and the future Prime Minister Dr

Hendrik Verwoerd – decided in 1955 to divide the African townships into ethnic zones. Officially, the purpose was to preserve the cultural specificities of each ethnic group but tactically it was nothing but the implementation of a divide-and-rule strategy within African townships by the racist regime. From 1955 and when Soweto was formally established in 1963, the townships of Naledi, Mapetla, Tladi, Moletsane and Phiri were reserved for Sotho- and Tswana-speaking people; the township of Chiawelo was for Tsonga- and Venda-speaking people; and the townships of Dlamini, Senaoane, Zola, Zondi, Jabulani, Emdeni and White City-Jabavu were for Nguni-speakers, mainly Zulus and Xhosas, but also Swazis or Ndebeles. As a result of the township planning policies, Soweto was divided into homogeneous linguistic zones, with Zulu and Sotho dominating the public sphere and achieving the status of *linguae francae*.

However, the linguistic division had a limited impact on the diversity of languages in the life of every Sowetan: a family was considered to speak Zulu, Sotho or another language depending on the language of the head of the family. However, in the multi-ethnic context in Johannesburg, it was common to have inter-ethnic marriages, which resulted in several languages being spoken in any one household. In addition, houses were usually overcrowded because of the presence of extended family members, who might well have a different language, or tenants who would rent a room in the house or a shack in the backyard. Thus, it was usual for Sowetans to grow up with several languages in their homes, although there would be a general family language – normally from the father's side unless there was no father at home to dominate exchanges in the house. Within the ethnic classification into Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos and others, there was also a great diversity in terms of languages, as many dialects of the officially recognized standards always coexisted in South Africa (Makoni 2003). Those dialects, rural standards and urban variants could even coexist under one appellation and so there was much more linguistic diversity than was officially acknowledged in the ethnically divided townships.

When the formal construction of several townships on the area which was not then yet known as Soweto began, the most significant African locations in Johannesburg where the so-called Western Areas, especially the township of Sophiatown. As a freehold township where African people had long-term leases on housing, Sophiatown attracted many Africans who had been forced to leave their areas of residence around Johannesburg with the enforcement of the 1923 Urban Areas Act in the 1930s and 1940s (Beavon 2004). In addition, numerous impoverished rural migrants – Blacks, Coloureds and Whites – had settled in Sophiatown when South Africa was hit by an economic recession in the 1940s and they often could not afford accommodation in their own designated areas of residence. In this context of racial mix, local gangs developed a slang known at

first as Flaaitaal and later as Tsotsitaal, from *tsotsi* (a criminal) and *taal* (language), and which was based on Afrikaans grammar but included many words from African languages, mainly Tswana and later Zulu (Ntshangase 1995, 2002).

Tsotsitaal became an iconic feature of the culture of Sophiatown, which today still remains as a Golden Age in the history of South Africa for African urban populations: Sophiatown was a place of jazz music, intellectuals and writers, black journalism, political activism and the mythical gangsters who epitomized the anti-system culture of Tsotsitaal. However, the concern of White residents about the increasing Black population around the White-designated areas led to the decision, in March 1951, to demolish the Western Areas. In 1955, people were forcefully relocated to the newly established townships of Diepkloof and Meadowlands, east and west of the already existing Orlando East and West, and to Rockville in the centre of present-day Soweto.

Tsotsitaal would thus spread in Soweto where it came into competition with the local urban language, itself originating from a criminal slang: Iscamtho. Iscamtho was born from Shalambombo, a slang created in the Nguni-populated slums of Nancefield and Orlando in the 1920s by the Amalaita gang, under its leader Nongoloza (Ntshangase 1995, 2002). It was renamed Iscamtho as it changed from being a criminal language to a youth language in the 1960s. Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho are similar in the way they work: One language operates as the matrix of the code, providing the grammar in which lexicon from other languages or lexicon typical of the code is integrated. In the case of Tsotsitaal, the matrix language is Afrikaans; in the case of Iscamtho, it is mainly Zulu or Sotho, as the Amalaita gang was composed of Nguni speakers in Nancefield and Orlando, and was allied with the AmaRussian gang, composed of Sotho speakers from the Moroka squatter camp (Ntshangase 1995, 2002). But quickly any language of Soweto would serve as a matrix. The similarity between Iscamtho and Tsotsitaal lies in their status as criminal languages, and in the mechanisms of construction of the code. But the languages chosen to build it are different.

Iscamtho had a low status: It was spoken almost only by men, as female speakers would be categorized as prostitutes, shebeen[2] girls or any other socially unacceptable category; it was spoken among the youth but not with the older generations, who would consider this insulting; and it was not to be spoken at home where the home language(s) were always spoken. However, the social and political situation in Soweto was marked from the 1960s and increasingly from the mid-1970s by violence in all parts of the township. Gangs had been around on the Witwatersrand from the 1890s, and their prestige over urban youth grew

[2] A shebeen was an illegal bar, run at home and usually by women. Today, many still exist but they are now legal.

Picture 4.1 Orlando East by night
[© Pierre Aycard]

continuously. Indeed, gangsters were seen by many youth as prestigious actors of urban life. First of all, they were enemies of the apartheid police; they were against the system and could fight its agents with firearms; and finally, they could rapidly access economic gain through their illegal activities. The criminals, dressed in expensive clothes and driving nice cars, were a source of interest for the youth (Van Onselen 1982; Glaser 2000; Ntshangase 1995, 2002). The gangsters' prestige explains the interest of the youth in their language. Iscamtho epitomized urbanity, street-wisdom and city-slickness, and it was an inevitable style accessory for street boys. The youths therefore appropriated the criminal language and made it their own. Taking some of the gangster's attributes, or even becoming a gangster themselves, were also means of obtaining some of the social recognition and self-respect that the regime and the police denied Africans in general, and African youths in particular.

From the 1950s onwards, Soweto experienced all the African languages in South Africa and many of their dialects, and two mixed codes.[3] Afrikaans was also spoken by residents, as it was the regime's first language, especially among the police. English was also present as an official language but Afrikaans had an advantage in this domain. English remained strong as a language of the media and politics. To reach to all Africans, whatever their language, political organizations, newspapers and magazines had been using English since the first half of the twentieth century. The multicultural and multilingual character of the African communities around Johannesburg, and especially in Soweto, as well as the social and political conditions under the apartheid regime created a specific African urban culture marked by a certain disregard for ethnic divisions and multilingualism. The everyday experience in Soweto was that everyone was multilingual, and although urban variants of Zulu and Sotho quickly fulfilled the role of *linguae francae*, all languages were considered equal, despite some discrimination against the less-represented Venda and Tsonga languages that were considered as being rural and a sign of backwardness.

In a context of resistance to the apartheid regime, African communities were marked by solidarity, which was necessary to sustain the poor economic conditions, the equally poor standards of accommodation and permanent harassment by the police. Moreover, in a system based on the division of the population on racist grounds, solidarity between all Africans whatever their ethnic background was the political expression of opposition to the system. And so was multilingualism, which has always had a very positive social value in Soweto, where it is considered an individual's duty to be able to communicate with everyone. Multilingual skills are expected of all members of the community, who are entitled to speak their own language but at the same time should understand other people's languages too.

Multilingualism has a social function too: When there are many languages being spoken, it is essential to be multilingual if one does not want to be 'fooled' in social exchanges or to sometimes miss crucial information, especially in exchanges with the Whites. Multilingualism developed both socially and individually in Soweto with a wide-scale switching and mixing of languages. Quickly, the most emblematic vector of the language mix was the mixed codes, Tsotsitaal and Iscamtho. However, if these two were in competition to be the youth's favoured language, Iscamtho took the lead in the 1970s (Ntshangase 1995, 2002) at the time of new political opposition by school students to the regime when the

[3] There are other mixed slang languages used by criminals that are based either on Shalambombo or Tsotsitaal, and which are known by the names of the gangs: for instance, the '26 language' is spoken by the 26 gang, the '28 language' by the 28 gang. These languages, however, are only spoken in prisons or between members of the same gang. Thus they cannot be considered as a common feature of life in Soweto.

government wanted to impose Afrikaans as the medium of education in all scientific subjects. The students' opposition reached a climax in June 1976 with the Soweto uprising, which left thousands dead in a three-month period. As a result of the opposition to the implementation of teaching in Afrikaans, as much as to the brutal repression during and after the uprising, youth in Soweto could not bear to speak Afrikaans any longer: Tsotsitaal was abandoned by the younger generations and Iscamtho became the only youth language in Soweto.

The constantly high levels of crime and violence in Soweto in the 1970s and 1980s took Iscamtho to another level: It became the first language of the youth and in many cases it became their native language too. Especially in the heart of Soweto, which comprises the townships of White City-Jabavu, Jabulani, Zola, Zondi, Emdeni and Mofolo, permanent gang warfare raged from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s with murder, robbery and rape being daily events. The new political opposition to the regime in the 1970s had to address the reasons for crime and violence, but no decrease in crime levels was seen. Many of the leaders of the 1976 uprising left the country, but the younger generations developed organized political resistance, and were often supported by their parents who had initially abandoned the struggle after the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. With the rise of the United Democratic Front and the loss of government control over Soweto during the 1980s, local leaders and civics began to organize Soweto's social life. This involved self-justice, and the people's court easily sentenced those who were 'convicted' of crimes or were 'proven' to be agents of the regime to death. The exercising of this so-called people's justice often involved extremely violent measures, such as the so-called 'necklace' whereby a tire filled with petrol was placed over the person's shoulders and neck and set alight.

This kind of violence was often committed by the younger generation of activists who felt entitled to fight using any of the means at their disposal. The United Democratic Front's slogan 'Liberation Now, Education Later' in a way legitimized the involvement of the youths in violent actions. One of the targets of youth violence was the gangsters themselves, as school students and their parents were often the victims of gang violence. The students would organize defence groups and track down gangsters who were then shot, burnt or beaten to death by teenage commandos wearing school uniform. However, gang violence never diminished: South Africa's bad economic situation in the 1970s forced many to turn to crime as a means of survival for themselves and their families. Muggings and rapes could happen to anyone at any time. Especially commuters on trains were at risk of being shot or stabbed on their journey to or from work. In addition, many youth pretended to be involved in political movements and joined the 'comrades' for the sole purpose of committing crimes: Those were the 'comtsotsis', who were not gang members but in fact were nothing more than crimi-

nals. The extraordinary violence in Soweto in the 1980s culminated in an increase in jackrolling at the end of the decade: This was recreational gang rape and abduction for the purpose of (gang) rape, which became a constant risk for all women in Soweto (Mokwena 1991). As political repression by the state became increasingly violent towards the end of the 1980s, especially after the second state of emergency in 1986, the number of youth involved in gangs did not decrease, and many new gangs appeared in the 1990s. Crime was seen as a solution when the economic situation for township youth was desperate and offered no future prospects. When committed against Whites, crime could be legitimized by the township residents. If the White regime killed the African population and reduced it to misery, why would it be shocking to steal from Whites, even if this involved killings in the process?

The permanent violence in Soweto led many youth to be involved in criminal and/or clandestine activities. In this context, Iscamtho spread as it was seen as a criminal language with useful functions. It was a language of secrecy, and used words in different situations with new meanings or introduced new words that allowed a person to speak without being understood by those outside the criminal sphere. It was a strong identity marker and a sign that the speaker knew the township and its dangers. As more and more youth became involved in violence in one form or another, and went to prison for criminal or political reasons, Iscamtho became their everyday language and also started to develop within households. The youth, who were less and less under their parents' control, started to use Iscamtho between themselves at home and even in exchanges with their parents. In some parts of Soweto, such as Zola or White City-Jabavu, the majority of households had at least one member involved in violent activities which would turn Iscamtho into one of the household's usual languages. It finally became a normal feature in the lives of many families, and as the youth started having families themselves, they would teach their children Iscamtho from an early age. The first generation of native speakers was born around 1980 and Iscamtho became a native language, although it was very rare for Iscamtho to be a child's only native language. The political and social upheavals experienced by South Africa in the 1990s changed the status and place in everyday social life of Iscamtho, and gave it a more positive meaning.

Iscamtho as the multilingual embodiment of youth culture in the 'new' South Africa

After four decades as the most extreme totalitarian racist regime in the world, South Africa became a multicultural, multilingual, liberal democracy in 1994. Its

Picture 4.2 Backyard in White City-Jabavu
[© Pierre Aycard]

1994 and 1996 constitutions laid the foundations for a new society promoting equality and diversity. The country's linguistic policy is a good example, as it recognizes eleven official languages and also protects a number of languages of indigenous and migrant minorities and religions. More generally, the democratic regime has promoted diversity and respect for each and every individual and encouraged cultural exchange among all groups in South Africa.

The coming of a democratic regime did not really change the living conditions in Soweto, and poverty and crime in the township have remained a problem. However, the events of 1994 and the preceding negotiations represented a psychological liberation for the youth, and an opportunity to express themselves freely and voice their aspirations for the future. In this respect, Iscamtho and

Soweto's multilingualism represented a materialization of the new regime's ideology of equality. Iscamtho reflects this equality because it can be constructed on any matrix-language – except Afrikaans which remains excluded, even though more Soweto youth are now showing an interest in it. Anyone can turn his/her own language into Iscamtho by introducing an Iscamtho lexicon into its grammar – or a lexicon from another language, especially English or Afrikaans. They will then produce a unique Iscamtho understandable to others, provided they know the matrix language well enough to follow it. Virtually every youth in Soweto speaks more than three languages and it is not unusual to find individuals who master the local variants of up to ten languages. In addition, Iscamtho speakers see it as a challenge to introduce as many unexpected features into their language from as many languages as they can find. Iscamtho can therefore be seen as a patchwork containing a piece of every language in South Africa and, in this perspective, it epitomizes South African multiculturalism.

The multilingual diversity of Iscamtho, which makes it representative of South Africa in all its diversity, is fully understood by the time the youth grow up as they have been speaking it since they were born. Even if this is not the case as some families remain attached to using one of the more 'proper' languages at home, they would still have learnt mixed urban versions of the official African languages. In fact, there are very few families who will have kept using strictly standard versions of Iscamtho after living in Soweto for a long time. The urban variants of languages result from decades of language contact and contain elements of English, Afrikaans or other languages heard in Soweto. Thus, even a child growing up in a family where Zulu is the language spoken at home would acquire, through what his/her parents consider as Zulu, some elements of the other languages which are partly contained in Soweto Zulu. In fact, the Sowetan variants of each language are so hybridized and influenced by Iscamtho that the present youth has difficulties explaining the difference between Iscamtho and Soweto Zulu or Soweto Sotho. If there is still a distinction, especially for those who know the standard languages well, it is unclear for most youth what this distinction is. The difference lies in the acceptability of speech in a setting where a respectable attitude and level of formability are expected, and which would lead to a number of typical Iscamtho terms being dropped. The distinction is not however fundamental and urban Zulu and Sotho are becoming closer to Iscamtho. In the future, the distinction may well disappear.

As a result of the hybridization of the languages, one can speak of a multilingual native acquisition of language or multiple native competences (Canagarajah 2007). While being spoken to only in Zulu, a child would in fact learn elements of Sotho, Tswana, English, or Afrikaans, and these would form part of his/her native speech. And as the child would be exposed early on to urban vari-

ants of several languages (from relatives, neighbours, on the street or at school), s/he would develop a natural ability to speak each of these languages and would, with a native competence, increasingly mix languages, and understand mixed speech. Multilingual speech is what really defines the Iscamtho-speaker. More than a rigid model of mixed-code, Iscamtho is an attitude of code-mixing which consists in permanently playing with languages, transforming them and (re)inventing them.

When the regime change occurred, it was for Black South Africans more than a political reversal: It was also the opportunity to be politically, socially and culturally acknowledged as being equal to the Whites who had dominated the country for centuries. Thus, the nine African cultures of South Africa were to receive more attention, for instance with the 'officialization' of their languages. But, the urban township culture also became more acknowledged and valued. In this respect, Iscamtho became the expression of the pride of being a youth in Soweto: Soweto is a mythical place to Black South Africans, as it was a centre of the struggle and the largest of all the townships where most charismatic leaders once lived, and also because it is seen as the place where new trends are born. While Soweto was considered a violent, dangerous and uncontrollable place by the old regime, coming from Soweto under the new regime now means being part of the Sowetan myth. The use of Iscamtho outside Soweto is a source of prestige: Iscamtho is typically Sowetan and its speaker is recognized as coming from Soweto. As such s/he becomes interesting to outsiders. Youth who have the opportunity to move out of Soweto appreciate being able to demonstrate their linguistic skills. There are other mixed codes in South Africa but Iscamtho is the most diverse and complex, since no place other than Soweto is the melting pot for as many languages. Iscamtho is immediately recognizable by non-speakers as the language of Soweto, and it provokes reactions of curiosity: People want to hear the Iscamtho-speaker and to try to understand and learn his/her language. Iscamtho is not only an expression of Sowetan pride, it is in itself a source of additional pride. There has actually been a reversal in the reactions of outsiders towards Iscamtho. In the past, it might have been recognized as a tsotsitaal, the language of a 'bad' person; but today it is appreciated and admired, and outsiders want to learn it.

Many consider Iscamtho as the ideal South African language because it is the permanent expression of the new South African pride at being diverse and complex. The concept of 'new South Africanness' is not only a nice subject for political speeches, it is actually promoted in South African society through commercial campaigns advertising 'proudly South African' products and behaviour, or on television where diversity and multilingualism have been voluntarily pictured in many programmes. There are a lot of dramas – or 'soapies' as they are called

in South Africa – in which language switch and language mix are represented, and in which South African people from all racial and linguistic backgrounds meet harmoniously. Those constructs of an ideal, mixed society are artificial, and reflect neither the reality of the interracial mix or true life in a township. But, they find a resonance in the everyday experience of Iscamtho speakers and their attitude towards language.

However, Iscamtho does not only reflect diversity: It is also a means of expressing creativity and imagination, two values which for Soweto youth are an integral and essential part of the dream of a new South Africa. Iscamtho speakers are not only free to transform and enrich their language: It is socially rewarding to show the ability to invent the language as it is being spoken, and there is often competition between speakers to use an item which the interlocutor does not know or does not expect. This attitude has been inherited from the early days of Iscamtho but it is also closely tied to a cultural movement that has been the most emblematic post-apartheid trend since the early 1990s, namely *kwaito* (Stephens 2000; Peterson 2003; Satyo 2001). The term kwaito was coined from Iscamtho *amakwaitosi* (gangsters), which is said to originate from the Afrikaans term *kwaai*, meaning 'angry'. In a certain dimension, kwaito appears to be an extension of the South African gangster culture, which was already supported by musical trends such as jazz, reggae, or pantsula music, although in that case, kwaito rose as gangsterism went down. Kwaito is also an entire cultural movement, which integrates music, clothing and dance styles aimed at fun and partying, rather than politics and the demonstration of opinions. The new musical style was born in the townships of Johannesburg and Cape-Town where the youth started mixing local music, hip-hop and house music. The first nationwide kwaito hit was the song 'Kaffir' by Arthur Mafokate, which was released in 1995. The word *kaffir* is Afrikaans for 'nigger' and the song was an example of the newfound freedom of expression that the township youth could enjoy, as it was critical of the Whites' racist attitude towards Africans. However, kwaito is more directed at fun and enjoyment, and the main quality in kwaito songs is their ability to make people dance.

Kwaito also promotes creativity and freedom within speech: Iscamtho and other urban mixed codes are the natural vector of kwaito song, and kwaito artists look for linguistic creativity in their lyrics. Kwaito values the permanent creation of language and unexpected features are used by the artists and appreciated by their fans. It is common for new forms created by a popular artist to be spread in Iscamtho and become typical Iscamtho features. An important agent in the spread of Iscamtho is a radio station specializing in kwaito music and created in 1997: YFM, for Youth FM. Based in Soweto, this station only plays kwaito and other styles appreciated by the youth, such as hip-hop. Its presenters are from Soweto

and some of them are renowned kwaito artists. On air they use their own language, namely Iscamtho. Debates and discussion programmes in which the listeners can phone in and participate are mainly conducted in English, but Iscamtho is also largely used.

The creative linguistic attitude of Iscamtho was spread through the development of kwaito: A number of kwaito artists performed during the official ceremonies marking the election of Nelson Mandela as the new president in 1994 and television programmes for the youth appeared around the same time in which kwaito was played and the youth language was used. As mentioned earlier, language mix developed in television dramas. Iscamtho found itself well represented on television since the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), with its three channels, is based in Johannesburg and many actors and presenters originate from Johannesburg and know the Soweto language. Since the use of a mixed code in a television programme depends on the ability of the actors or the presenters to speak it, Iscamtho is naturally more represented than any other South African youth language since it has had more air time. The status of superstars reached by some kwaito singers also played an essential role, especially concerning the most prominent South African star of the last decade: Zola7. This singer and actor, whose real name is Bonginkosi Thuthukani Dlamini, grew up in the township of Zola in the heart of Soweto. Iscamtho is his first (and native) language. He became famous as an actor in the controversial series *Yiso-Yiso*, which in a realistic and violent way pictured the life of Soweto youth, and in which he played the role of a gangster. After participating in the soundtrack of the series, Zola7 released his album *Mdlwembe*, which was one of the biggest hits ever in kwaito music. Since then he has released three more albums and became the presenter of a weekly show on SABC1 that is very popular among the youth. He also played the role of a gangster in the 2005 internationally recognized film *Tsotsi*. The popularity of Zola7 and his regular appearances on television definitely played a role in spreading Iscamtho throughout South Africa. He speaks Iscamtho in his shows, sings in Iscamtho, and a number of adverts bearing his image use a motto in Iscamtho.

Through YFM and the efforts of Zola7, Iscamtho has come to be used by youth all over the country and not just in Soweto. Kwaito fans strive to speak the same language as their idol and often adopt typical Iscamtho features. Today, Iscamtho seems to be influencing other mixed codes in different parts of the country, whereas these codes would previously only reflect on a local distribution of languages. In addition to YFM and Zola7, a more recent agent of the spread of Iscamtho must be mentioned, although its influence is not yet measurable. In July 2007 SowetoTV, a new television channel, took to the airwaves in Gauteng (which includes the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas) and it benefits

from a slot on the national DsTV, the South African satellite television provider. SowetoTV was set up and is run by Sowetan people in their twenties and thirties for whom Iscamtho is (one of) their first language(s). The channel aims at representing Soweto and its culture. Thus, even though Iscamtho is not the only language it uses, it is heard on most programmes, especially on a youth programme entitled *Dlalangeringas* (Let's speak Iscamtho) and a cultural programme on life in Soweto entitled *Ziwamporoma* (It's happening). SowetoTV also broadcasts retransmissions at night of local parties where kwaito music is performed, thus increasing the airtime of the Iscamtho language. The many SMSs received by the channel from viewers from all over the country confirm the interest of South African youth in the Soweto language. Some of these messages are even written in Iscamtho even though they originate from places such as Durban or Port-Elisabeth where the local mixed language is quite different from that in Soweto. The democratization of South Africa opened the door for the social recognition of township youth and their culture, and Iscamtho as an embodiment of the imagined new society quickly took advantage of it. Soweto is the largest and most emblematic township of South Africa and its youth language has benefited from the cultural liberation and promotion of Black culture in the different media. But, Iscamtho and its Sowetan character have also been agents of the development of youth culture in the post-apartheid era. The former criminal language is today so much part of the everyday life of the youth in the institutionalized media and in the cultural vector that it has obtained a new social meaning and is now gaining a new respectability that benefits its speakers and allows them to use Iscamtho in many more settings than previously.

New meanings and new status of Iscamtho

Iscamtho has been a native language for about thirty years, and the first generation of native speakers is now starting to have children who are native speakers themselves. Iscamtho has been a language used in many households from 'Deep Soweto' for two or three decades. In the rest of Soweto, it is rarer to find Iscamtho as a language intensively used at home, but in the parts of the township which were overwhelmingly hit by gangsters it is common. The youth use Iscamtho when addressing their parents, although this is more the case in exchanges with the father than with the mother, since it is customary to address one's mother in her own language and Iscamtho still keeps some of its character as a male language. But in White City-Jabavu for instance, about half the youth regularly use Iscamtho to address their mothers and the others use the Iscamtho lexicon when using another language as a mark of respect.

Respect is an important issue when using Iscamtho: traditionally, a younger person should show respect when addressing older persons by using their lan-

guage(s), by modulating his/her tone and by avoiding slang. The present youth still strongly believe in the importance of showing respect when addressing older people. However, in the parts of Soweto where Iscamtho has been a common language at home and in the everyday lives of people for two or three decades, there are very few elders who would strictly refuse to be addressed in Iscamtho, especially if they know the youth who are talking to them. In townships such as White City-Jabavu, Zola or Jabulani, many youth were raised by their grandmothers and mothers, as many fathers were involved in violent activities and died at a young age or were in prison. The children are rarely under tight supervision after the age of nine or ten, and as they talk with their friends in Iscamtho many are used to sometimes addressing their mothers and grandmothers in Iscamtho too rather than in another language. Older people have got used to Iscamtho because many of them used either Iscamtho or Tsotsitaal when they were younger, although not as intensively as the youth of today. In addition, the youth do not consider their language as improper *per se*. If what is said is insulting, if the tone is not adapted or if the attitude of the young speaker is disdainful for instance, there will be a lack of respect but to an increasing number of youth, the simple fact of using their language is not sufficient to be considered as disrespectful. Not all youth would naturally address an unknown elder in Iscamtho, and those who would do so are the youth who have been used to speaking Iscamtho to others for a long time. Many are former criminals and may have been in prison.

There is often a certain pride and pleasure in teaching the *tsotsi* language to children: It establishes a more intimate relationship with one's child, niece or nephew than the use of a standard language would and, as standards are not usually favoured to the benefit of the urban variant anyway, their would be many Iscamtho features even when speaking to the child in a language more 'proper' than Iscamtho. Iscamtho is more often used by a father or an uncle than a mother or an aunt. However, this is changing and many girls who are reaching their twenties are native speakers and feel no stigma in addressing their children in Iscamtho. Teenage pregnancy is common in Soweto and it is usual to see young single mothers. These teenagers, if they are themselves Iscamtho speakers, naturally speak to their child in Iscamtho, even if they still live at their parents' house. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS is resulting in a number of children being brought up by an aunt or uncle, and in such cases there may be more tolerance towards the child's linguistic choice. Those social factors are not directly responsible for the transmission of Iscamtho but create a climate in which Iscamtho is more easily a permanent feature than in 'traditional' models of families, in which the respect of the family language might be more tightly protected.

Picture 4.3 Township of Chiawelo
[© Pierre Aycard]

There is still a certain gender division in the use of Iscamtho, a reminiscence of the time when it was socially unacceptable for a female speaker to use the language. But this tendency to a gender division is less today, and even when they do not speak it all Sowetan girls and young women now understand Iscamtho, which therefore really is a *lingua franca*. Many teenagers and young adults have it as a first language and the use of Iscamtho by females in the media has also become usual. The stigma cast on women who speak Iscamtho has not yet completely disappeared, and there are still conservative reactions to what is proper or improper for women in social relations. But one category of women now use Iscamtho as their main language in most situations, regardless of who they may be talking to, and especially with men: young lesbian women in Soweto use Iscamtho as an identity marker. Between them, it is usually the language they prefer to use and it is a means of affirmation in society. The former male-only character of Iscamtho seems to be used as a reaction by lesbian women to impose their identity and status and mark their equality with men.

Iscamtho, after developing in exchanges of all kinds in private settings, has reached one of the most intimate spheres of life: The relationship to the sacred. Native speakers pray in Iscamtho even though it may be difficult to do it publicly. In church, for instance, it is not a problem to use Iscamtho in one's relationship with God but a person might try to avoid negative remarks by older people in church, and not speak Iscamtho. It might be used in prayers, which are not spoken, when one addresses God in one's thoughts. The second important sacred relationship that Soweto youth maintain is directed at the ancestors: In African cultures where speaking to the ancestors who live around people in spirit, to protect their descendants and guide them in their lives, is still a very important cultural element even in communities that have been urbanized for a long time. Traditionally, the rule is to address the ancestors in their own language, to be understood by them and to show them respect. But in fact, many youths tend not to respect this rule, advancing different explanations to their behaviour: Firstly, the youth often do not master the standard language, which is considered to be the ancestors' language, and when using it with the ancestors there will be a point at which a youth will have to use his/her own language, Iscamtho. It is often involuntary but unavoidable. Secondly, some consider that speaking to the ancestors is a matter for one's soul, not a question of language. Whatever the language they use, the ancestors will understand them and will respond positively to their demands. Finally, a minority of the youth argue that they inherited Iscamtho from their predecessors and, as a consequence, the ancestors must know Iscamtho too and will not be offended if they are addressed in this language.

The second domain in which Iscamtho developed in the past fifteen years is the public sphere. Iscamtho has long been a *lingua franca* on the street between the youth, and now also with older generations, as the youth from the past have grown older and have not lost their knowledge of Iscamtho or the pleasure of speaking it. It is, therefore, natural to address younger people on the streets in Iscamtho, and often older people too, especially for youth who consider Iscamtho as their native language. If everyone is allowed to use his/her own language, why should native Iscamtho speakers be discriminated against? As it has become more common and more widely accepted, Iscamtho is now used in shops and in contact with the township administration. There is still a risk that a customer or shop-tenant will not appreciate the use of Iscamtho but there are usually too many customers waiting in the queue for a shopkeeper or a civil servant to discuss it. The youth who have had encounters with the police (former gangsters or prisoners), also have no problem using it with police in the township: This is not always advised, as one might appear suspicious but it is not considered improper and it is not unusual.

One domain does not officially accept Iscamtho but does so in practice: school. In the school yard, the students speak Iscamtho with each other and this has been the case for a long time. But in the classroom, teachers are supposed to use the official school language, which will be one of the recognized languages spoken in the township, since the Constitution and the Bill of Rights guarantee the right to access education in one's native language. This has resulted in schools using all the different languages heard in Soweto. From the age of ten, education is supposed to be given in English, but many teachers speak Iscamtho and probably use it themselves in their everyday lives. So although it is not a common vector of education, teachers regularly use Iscamtho to make their point clearer and to ensure that their pupils follow lessons without any problems. Iscamtho is thus used here and there when the children have difficulties with comprehension. The issue of greater recognition of Iscamtho in the education system, is an important one considering its growing number of native speakers: Many youngsters are officially considered to speak Zulu, Sotho or another language but do not actually understand the standard versions of these languages, which are the ones used at school. If school is their main means of learning the standard language, the difficulties they encounter with it is a source of the failure in their curricula. It seems likely that in the future the growing number of youth who know only urban variants or Iscamtho will force the authorities to acknowledge that standard languages are not adequate for Soweto's educational system.

Finally, and as mentioned earlier, the use of Iscamtho is spreading in the media. This not only concerns television dramas or radio programmes but also commercial slogans which are now using Iscamtho. The main slogan of SABC1, the public Nguni-speaking channel, is *Mzansi fo sho*, a Iscamtho sentence meaning 'South Africa for sure', in which *Mzansi* is derived from the Xhosa word for 'south' (*umzansi*). In Iscamtho, *sho* is also the usual way to say 'yes'. Another famous slogan which can be quoted is *Hola 7*, used in advertisements for a cellphone company, CellC, in which the kwaito star Zola7 appears. *Hola 7* is a greeting in Iscamtho but it comes from the criminal slang of the 28 gang that is famous as a gang of killers. It originally constitutes a threat of death, as the number 7 symbolizes blood. Finally, the Tastic brand of rice uses the slogan *Dankie Mama*, in which *Dankie* is originally Afrikaans for 'thank you'. These examples illustrate the new social status of Iscamtho, which is now more respectable and acceptable in business dealings. Its importance among the young generation is being recognized, and even businesses acknowledge the need to communicate in it to improve their commercial results. More than half of South Africa's population live in African urban townships and the majority are under the age of 30. Businesses can no longer avoid using the most representative and fastest-developing language.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the social processes through which Iscamtho has developed from being seen as a criminal language to being the language of the youth, and then adopted the status of native language. It is the *lingua franca* in the township of Soweto among all generations, and has also become the language of the media, culture and advertising. The example of Iscamtho shows how the growing influence of a generation (the youth) and a place (Soweto) in a society which has experienced tremendous changes in the past fifteen years, has turned an ever-changing code and language-transforming attitudes from which it results into a common, native, socially acceptable and widespread way of speaking. The growing influence of *kwaito*, as well as the regular improvement of the social position of some first-language Iscamtho speakers, should continue to improve the social meaning of Iscamtho and to reduce the negative stigma still associated with it, mainly by older and rural people. According to optimistic estimates by NGOs, there might be up to four million speakers in Soweto, although the government acknowledges only two million. Between 5% and 10% of South Africans today can speak or at least understand Iscamtho. This number will continue to grow in parallel to the number of young people in South Africa, who are fascinated by Soweto, learn Iscamtho through television, radio and *kwaito* music. Iscamtho is emerging as a reference for speakers of all local mixed codes in South Africa, and its symbolism of 'unity in diversity', to use the official device of the Republic of South Africa, makes it a tool of integration for African youth across the country. There are two questions for the future: Will Iscamtho benefit from official acknowledgement, especially in the field of education? And will it be able to help integrate other South African communities, White, Indian and Coloured, and really become a language for all South Africans and not just one for all Black South Africans?

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5

How linguistic features and social arrangements can interrelate: The position of Swahili and its speakers in Bujumbura

Lianne Belt

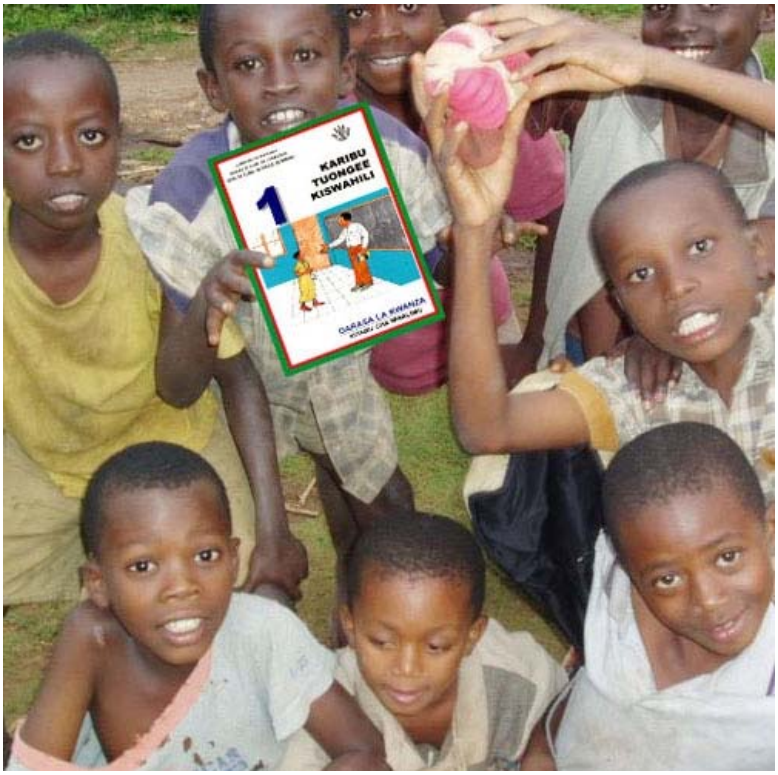
Within the sociology of language, interdisciplinarity combines the study of social structure and language use, focusing on the interplay of language and society. Using the example of Swahili speakers in Bujumbura, Burundi, this chapter shows how linguistic features and social arrangements can interrelate. Changes in sociolinguistic patterns reflect social and political changes and pressures, and the Swahili language and its speakers in Bujumbura have experienced simultaneous changing appreciations.

Introduction

Swahili is considered unique among the African languages of the modern world for the dynamism of its development. The language goes back at least to the tenth century when it was used along the East African Coast but it spread to Eastern and Central Africa only about two hundred years ago with the arrival of foreigners. Arab traders, merchants, missionaries, administrators, politicians and educators all played a part in this spread and today Swahili is widely used as the *lingua franca* in Eastern and Central Africa. In Burundi and Rwanda however, appreciation for the language changed several times over the years: Initially it used to be the language that united people from different backgrounds but it later changed into the language of strangers, Muslims and ‘uncivilized’ people. It has

recently changed again and is increasingly now being seen as a language of the region.

This study of Swahili and Swahili speakers in Bujumbura is based on research carried out between June 2007 and January 2008 and the work of Dickerman (1984), and covers the history of Swahili and its speakers in Bujumbura from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. Focusing on different time periods, the chapter deals with the interplay of language and society and demonstrates the changing status of Swahili and the social status of its speakers since the language was adopted in Bujumbura. It highlights the underlying factors that caused these changes and shows their relationship with political decisions. In conclusion and to illustrate how linguistic features and social arrangements interrelate, and how changes in sociolinguistic patterns reflect social and political changes and pressures, the history of Swahili and its speakers in Bujumbura is discussed.



Picture 5.1 Children proudly showing their first Swahili study book
[© Lianne Belt]

The introduction of Swahili to Bujumbura

Trading contacts in the Lake Tanganyika region with the Swahili traders of the Indian Ocean intensified after the 1830s and Ujiji, at the western end of one of the main overland caravan routes, rapidly grew in importance. Through simple day-to-day contact between merchants and the local population, Lake Tanganyika slowly became a 'second Swahili coast', with many of the defining Swahili characteristics being adopted, including the Swahili language, Islamic architecture and clothing, and Islam itself.

A large market, situated in present-day Bujumbura, attracted many people, including the Germans. They had created a base in Bujumbura in 1897 but their activities were more of a military nature, although from 1907 onwards they changed their position to one of a more administrative nature and it was designated the *Residentur* (Residency) of Urundi. They decided that Bujumbura would be the only entrance to the interior. Employees came from almost every different ethnic group in East and Central Africa, were often Muslim and frequently spoke Swahili. In 1909 the Germans founded their first government-run school in Bujumbura and as Swahili was the only official language in Ruanda-Urundi, it was decided that it would be used as the language of instruction. The German schools served to educate the chiefs, sub-chiefs, assistants of the colonial administration, supervisors and anyone else who enjoyed studying. 'Those who succeeded at school could hope for employment as secretaries with the government or traders' (Dickerman 1984: 55). The Swahili language, supplemented by the defining characteristics of the Swahili culture, was instituted in Bujumbura and all its inhabitants spoke the language as a *lingua franca*.

The downward spiral

After Germany's defeat at the end of the First World War, Belgium was given the mandate over Ruanda-Urundi. Initially they preserved the linguistic policy of the Germans, mainly because Swahili was also used along Lake Tanganyika's coastal line in the Belgian Congo. Not being able to speak Swahili was inconceivable but in the long term many new rules were enforced which resulted in the social, economic and linguistic situation of Bujumbura's inhabitants changing considerably.

Bujumbura became more stratified as the Belgians sought to establish separate economic and geographic spheres for the different racial groups and just as lines were being drawn between rural and urban areas, so too were boundaries laid within the town (Dickerman 1984: 102).

To 'control' the Africans, a separate residential area was set aside for non-Muslim Africans with full-time, salaried employment. Most Swahilis, with their

hodgepodge of occupations, were not allowed to live there. The stratification became even stricter when Asians [and Arabs] successfully pushed the poorer Swahilis who had moved in later out of the Asian commune (Matongoni) into an adjacent area called Kabondo (Dickerman 1984: 134).[1] The Swahili group had to pay higher taxes than others and they were harder hit by the educational measures taken in 1927 in which the Catholic Church took over almost all the educational responsibilities and the language of Catholic instruction changed to Kirundi in primary schools and French in higher education.[2] The missions 'received official sanction – and funds – to spread their influence by working with the young elite, who would in turn bring their followers into the Christian fold' (Ibid.: 132). They educated the chefs and the auxiliary executives like male nurses, agronomic assistants and veterinaries who would assist the colonial administration (Karangwa 1995: 138). Muslims who did not agree to convert to Christianity were denied access to training and the skills demanded by the European administration and companies. This was also true for artisanal instruction.[3] As a consequence, 'professions which could be learned without formal instruction became increasingly prevalent among the Muslim community' (Dickerman 1984: 126).

A growing geographical separation between Catholic and Muslim Africans underscored the increasing economic and educational isolation of the latter, and by the end of the 1920s 'the divisions within Bujumbura's population and the communes allocated to them were firmly drawn: Europeans, Asians, Swahilis, and other Africans, each group with its own neighbourhood, each with appropriate occupations' (Ibid.: 135).

In the mid 1930s, two new communes came into existence. One was Buyenzi, the '*village des Swahilis*' that was designed for the Swahilis who were transferred from Kabondo, Mbugani or Matongoni. The people living here were likely to be born, marry and die locally. The other commune, closer to the centre of town, was Belge where the inhabitants were Christians or traditionalists (Ibid.: 192).[4] They were often men who had come to Bujumbura as young adults in the search for work, who returned home to marry but did not necessarily ever bring their wives and children to Bujumbura. They were usually able to speak French and had steady employment in a good job that they had been able to get by virtue

[1] The justification for this racial separation given by the Asians and the colonial administration was public health.

[2] The Protestant missions continued to use Swahili as the language of instruction and in their services. The pastors' mobility in the Great Lakes Region, where Swahili was still the most common language, encouraged them to keep Swahili as their working language.

[3] It is said that the Catholics, whose schools were often located outside Bujumbura, frequently did not accept *anyone* living in Bujumbura. See Dickerman (1984: 133).

[4] Although not commonly practised, Swahilis were allowed to live in Belge in order to practise their commercial activities as shop owners.

of being educated at a mission school. This was in contrast with those living in Buyenzi who were often poorly trained, changed jobs regularly and were no longer the administration's 'right hand'. The Belgian administration's new stratification policy had as an effect that 'Islam no longer exercised the attraction to immigrants it once had. Newcomers to Bujumbura now found a large, reasonably stable community of Christians and unconverted Africans among whom they might live' (Ibid.: 193). Consequently, by 1948 Muslims were no longer the majority even though there had been three times as many Muslims as non-Muslims in Bujumbura in the 1930s. 'Swahilis had been supplanted as the focal point of Bujumbura's African community.' (Ibid.: 194). As a reaction to this, the Swahilis increasingly formed a real community in which they regrouped individual nationalities and different ethnicities: Congolese, Ugandans, Rwandans, Rundi, people from Tanganyika and Arab-Swahilis. Four elements created a sense of unity among them: Occupation, religion, language and residence. Swahili became not only a means of communication but also a means of identification towards other people who did not speak the language. Islam brought them a cultural framework and a social stratification that cut them off from the rest of society (Karangwa 1995: 162).

Even without professions in the colonial administration, the Swahilis in Bujumbura lived quite well, better than the Rwandans and the Rundi. This intensified the name-calling between the two groups. The Swahilis were successful in their work in commerce but this success was often ascribed to be as a result of illegal commerce and theft, and not due to their sharp business sense and their open minds. A negative image of the Swahilis started to emerge and spread through the population, with the term 'Swahili' in the end becoming a synonym for a thug, liar, thief and a generally dishonest person. And when the Swahilis, who distinguished themselves by dressing in the *kanzu* and the veil, were seen as being cheats and liars in the eyes of their compatriots, their language also became the language of thugs, liars, thieves and the uneducated. Muslim youth were said not to have had a 'social education', like the children in the rural areas. If a person spoke Swahili, he was seen as someone from 'town' and regarded as being bad. They were seen as people without a Rundi social education but with a foreign social education (i.e. strangers). People who had grown up in the city had learned no manners, it was said, whereas people from the countryside could work in Bujumbura but had had more social education.[5] As a result, within non-Swahili surroundings, the use of Swahili provoked mistrust and occasionally disdain (Karangwa 1995: 165). From 1950 onwards, (new) polygamous marriages were prohibited, with the result that especially Swahili women became or stayed single more frequently. The government did not believe that these women were

[5] Interview with G. Nijinbere, a RTNB journalist, 25 September 2007.

really single and thought that they were either still in an illegal marriage or were working as prostitutes. The high taxes that were levied on single women by the Swahili clerks as a result were called *kodi ya malaya* (tax on prostitutes) (Castryck 2006: 146-147).

Not only the Belgian administration made divisions and distinctions between the different groups in Bujumbura; Africans created them too. They started to align themselves ethnically at elections, which served to exacerbate ethnic and regional rivalries, or formed associations along ethnic lines. Belge became the home of ethnic associations, while in Buyenzi, the only formally recognized associations were those that drew their membership from the Muslim African community as a whole (Dickerman 1984: 252).

By the end of the 1950s, Bujumbura resembled a vast formation of stratified rock, with strata composed of 'people of differing occupations and national origins. There was also order and logic to this melange, with specific groups dominating certain activities. This configuration was the product of the changing requirements of the colonial political economy and of the recruitment procedures by which these needs have been met' (Ibid.: 259, 260). These strata also reflected linguistic attitudes. The new Francophones considered Swahili to be a language of the *non cultivés* and uneducated, and even that of thugs and thieves. The Swahili language, as a result, ended up at the bottom of the linguistic pyramid, below French and Kirundi.

Towards independence

Towards independence, it seemed for a while that the Swahili community had experienced some sort of revived. In 1955, women in Buyenzi protested against name-calling and the high taxes they had to pay. Their protests evolved in overt resistance to paying taxes and they filed a petition in 1956. The protests were taken over by the men in the Swahili communes in 1957. These actions by Swahili men and women were the first signs of political resistance to the colonial administration and, as such, were a symbolic step towards the decolonization of Burundi (Castryck 2006: 153). But there was more to come.

Great enthusiasm in Buyenzi emerged for the leader of UPRONA, Prince Louis Rwagasore, the son of Urundi's *mwami* (king) Mwambutsa. The Swahilis supported his activities and were excited about working for him, knowing that the Belgian officials were unhappy about such activities. Rather than being systematically and progressively excluded, Swahilis were at the very heart of Rwagasore's cooperative (Dickerman 1984: 255). They were frustrated and wanted independence, they wanted an end to the high taxes, chances in Rundi society, freedom of commercial activities and to be able to visit the countryside. The Swahili were of great help to UPRONA. They connected UPRONA with

other Swahili speakers fighting for independence, like those in Tanzania and Kenya. In Burundi they helped with propaganda and mobilization upcountry, and they organized meetings. Although they were not very well educated, they had open minds. 'Their mobility, which is part of their intermediary position at the margins of Burundian life, proved to be not only a carrier of goods and people, but also of ideas' (Castryck 2006: 7). However, the Belgians warned the Rundi about the Swahilis and said that if the Swahilis won power, they would suppress the Rundi, and the Rundi culture would be lost. A law was passed that stated that (most) Swahilis could not be chosen or vote themselves on the ground that they were not 'nationals'. Some though could obtain political rights based on Rundi descent but there was another reason why Swahilis were not able to be elected: They were not educated, thus not eligible to be a deputy or a minister.[6] That was exactly why, after independence in 1962, everything reverted to the way it had been before for the Swahilis. Most of the Congolese had left because of the independence of Congo in 1960, and the Rundi had taken over their positions in the administration. The Swahilis, not well enough educated, returned to the informal sector. 'Eventually, the Muslims in Burundi decided [again] to openly withdraw from participating in the social and political sphere by setting up their own educational system of Qur'an schools' (Grohma 2005).

The slow comeback

The colonial government in Belgian Africa had given advantages to the African languages of the natives, although they had also used French. After independence though, this completely changed, with French becoming the most important language, while Kirundi was given an inferior status (Karangwa 1995: 178). Swahili was left without status but was still used in Bujumbura, especially in commercial areas.

In the first years after independence, the Swahilis received little opposition at a sociological or political level. After all, it was the Swahilis who helped win independence. Even the Catholic Church was defending Swahili by stating that Swahili, being a language used by its neighbours, could serve as a second African language in Burundi[7] although for practical and emotional reasons this did not happen. First of all there were not enough teachers available, and second, the administration was indifferent towards it. French was the language of power and influence, not Swahili. Some still had negative feelings towards Swahili and saw it as a language of the uneducated and the illiterate, and thus despised it. For others, it brought back memories of oppression and the injustices of Belgian rule.

[6] Interview with Prof. E. Mworoha, 19 December 2007.

[7] Proposition by the President of the Rundi Academy, Priest J.B. Ntahokaja, quoted in Karangwa (1995: 192).

The firmness of the Congolese, as officials responsible for order and chores, made them dislike Swahili (Karangwa 1995: 192-193). Ten years after independence, Swahili was spoken even less in Bujumbura and Kirundi had taken over as the main language, since many Congolese had returned to their home country and more Rundi had moved into Bujumbura.

Although Swahili and its speakers were still marginalized, the hard work of the Swahilis during independence resulted in the re-introduction of the Swahili language on the radio in 1961. This pleased the Swahilis but the language did not win the hearts of the Rundi. Nevertheless, over time, things slowly changed for the better for Swahili and its speakers. In 1995, Karangwa described Burundi as a monolingual country, with the inhabitants of Bujumbura being bilingual, with Swahili in second place after Kirundi and ahead of French and English. He noticed that '[l]e kiswahili n'est pas généralement consideré comme une langue d'incultes' and that 'l'image positive de cette langue est plutôt répandu entre les deux ages, les plus jeunes et les plus vieux étant les plus nombreux à y croire, dans les mêmes proportions auprès des deux sexes' (Ibid.: 289, 290). At the time of his research, Burundi was entering a period of civil war marked by ethnic violence, with fighting between the Tutsi-dominated army and armed Hutu rebel groups. The fighting was causing widespread civilian casualties and although not directly influencing the situation of the Swahili speakers in Burundi or appreciation of the language itself, indirectly there were many changes in the country due to the war, changes that had a positive effect on how Swahili was seen and on its speakers. Let us now discuss some of these factors of change.

The position of Muslims during the civil war

The people in Buyenzi, primarily Swahili-speaking Muslims, are said not to have participated fully in the ethnic rivalries and are lauded for their contributions to maintaining peace (Rockfeler 2002). Muslims are said to have opened 'their doors to shelter those who were running for their lives' during war, with as a result a 'growing number of new Muslims' (Grohma 2005). As shown by Belt (2007), something similar happened during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda when 'Muslim identity became a new horizon for many who were exhausted of being persecuted due to their Hutu or Tutsi origin' (Ibid.). This might have had the effect that the negative view that people had about Muslims and their language, Swahili, changed for the better.

Former refugees

The recent wars and the subsequent upheavals in Burundi have paradoxically increased knowledge and the use of Swahili. This is partly because the refugees who fled to neighbouring countries acquired Swahili in the process. The lan-

guage is widely used in the refugee camps, especially by children, and these refugees are now returning and continue to speak Swahili (UNESCO 2006). Moreover, the new regime in Burundi is largely made up of former refugees, people who joined the rebellion – often outside Burundi – and people who lived in a Swahili-speaking country due to the war and are therefore fluent in Swahili. They are more disposed towards the promotion of Swahili in Burundi and, as a result, many present-day politicians speak Swahili. One of those interviewed said: 'People accept Swahili now because even the new president speaks it. In Africa one follows the opinion of the president, so if he thinks Swahili is important, it is indeed important.'[8]

Muslims in the new regime

Many present-day politicians speak Swahili and are also Muslim, like Hussein Radjabu (the CNDD-FDD party chairman until February 2007), Dr Yves Sahinguvu (first Vice President), Saïdi Kibeya (Minister of Education and Scientific Research) and Hafsa Mossi (Minister of Information, Communication, Relations with Parliament, and Government Spokesman) and 'for the first time in Burundian history Islam was treated as an integral part of society instead of a marginal or repulsive appendix to it' (Castryck 2006: 8). But there are also worries about the future position of Muslims in Burundi as it seems that the openness towards Muslims is already drawing to a close again.[9]

Regionalization

Due to political crises in the 1990s, Burundi (and Rwanda) have started to open up. They have joined the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) [10] and focused their policies for regional integration increasingly on the Swahili-speaking east. Burundi (and Rwanda) chose to apply for entry into the East African Community (EAC) in 2007.[11] In addition, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi have become very important for the country's imports and exports since those from Congo were disappointing. When joining the EAC,

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8 Interview with A. Ndayisenga, a 26-year-old university student, 25 July 2007.

9 See: News24 (2008) *Burundi jails Radjabu over plot*, 04/04/2008, http://www.news24.com/News24/Africa/News/0, 2-11-1447_2299906,00.html (accessed 7 November 2008) or Info Burundi, *Jusque quand restera Hussein RADJABU en prison*, http://www.info-burundi.net/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2798 (accessed 7 November 2008)

10 COMESA is a preferential trading area with twenty member states stretching from Libya to Zimbabwe and has as its objective the promotion of regional economic integration through trade and investment.

11 The EAC is the regional intergovernmental organization of the Republics of Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of Burundi and the Republic of Rwanda and aims at widening and deepening cooperation among partner states in political, economic and social fields for their mutual benefit.

Picture 5.2 Lianne Belt interviewing two Muslim Swahili speakers
[© Lianne Belt]

Burundi accepted its treaties as they were, with English as the working language and Swahili as the *lingua franca*.

Swahili education

As a result of its EAC membership, it was decided in 2005 that Swahili would be re-introduced into Burundi. There were three main reasons for this. The first was geo-political. All of Burundi's neighbours use Swahili, and with the introduction of Swahili in schools, Burundi wanted to become more integrated in the region, especially economically. Secondly, Swahili was recognized by the African Union (AU) as a language that would provide a link between several states. Thirdly, Swahili education in schools was a condition for joining the EAC. In recent years, African countries have become increasingly aware of the importance of linguistic diversity, with the result that language policies being developed nowadays are mostly aimed at multilingualism. This offered Swahili new chances.

Swahili on radio and television

Since joining the EAC, Swahili can be heard more frequently on radio and television. It has been given more importance by the Burundi government and journalists urge politicians to speak Swahili when being interviewed. Although different radio stations give different value to Swahili in their programming, all realize that it is a language that should not be ignored. With their broadcasts in Swahili, people with no knowledge of Swahili can become familiar with the language, and people who already speak Swahili can be more involved in society.

The importance of Bongo Flava

Swahili in Burundi has become popular through music too. When spending a day in Bujumbura, one can hardly avoid hearing Swahili in Bongo Flava: East African hip hop.[12] 'The Swahili lyrics and phrases tackle the usual East African hip-hop subjects like poverty, ambition, success, money, HIV and AIDS, education and experiences we can all relate to such as love, education, beauty or loneliness' (Kitakufe 2006). Bongo Flava is everywhere in the city centre, in bars, in discos and on minibuses. Bongo Flava artists from Burundi, Tanzania and Kenya perform regularly in Bujumbura and their songs are played on the radio as well. Young people hear the songs every day, learn the lyrics by heart and discuss their meaning. In this way, they learn Swahili without having to make a concerted effort to do so. Bongo Flava has, in fact, been an important reason for many young people becoming interested in the language.

Swahili and religion

Swahili is increasingly part of Burundi's churches, especially the Protestant churches. Protestant pastors from the US and the UK who initially worked in the Swahili-speaking former British colonies are now travelling to Burundi and other countries more frequently, taking Swahili songs with them from Tanzania and Kenya, and also a positive attitude to Swahili. Protestant churches attract many young people who are less averse to Swahili than their parents and who love the Swahili religious songs they find there. The Catholic churches mainly use Kirundi and French in their services and hardly any of them offer daily Swahili services although they can provide Swahili translators if necessary.[13]

Swahili is always used in mosques. Sermons are in Arabic and translated into Swahili, and the Qur'an is in Arabic but with a Swahili translation. A Kirundi translation of the Qur'an is said to be in the process of being written.

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[12] See also on AOL Music: *What is Bongo Flava?* http://video.aol.com/video-detail/what-is-bongo-flava/372535766 (accessed 20 October 2008).

[13] One exception is said to be Minevam, a Catholic church in the centre of town that offers Swahili services with translations in Kirundi.

Conclusion

The position of Swahili and Swahili speakers in Bujumbura has changed several times. The linguistic features and social arrangements were interrelated over a century ago but were influenced by political factors. Both were important in Bujumbura in the period before and during German rule but the situation changed under Belgian rule. More people, including Rundi, arrived in Bujumbura and Swahili speakers were increasingly discriminated against by the Belgian administration. As a result, the positive image of Swahili was damaged to the point that Swahilis were seen as a marginal people and their language became marginalized in Bujumbura. A brief revival by Swahilis during the struggle for independence did not result in significant changes in their position or that of the language and it was only during and after the civil war that their situation changed for the better.

Looking at the history of Bujumbura and at the interplay between linguistic features and social arrangements, it would appear that language and social status are indeed interrelated. Political decisions have sometimes contributed positively and sometimes negatively to these changes but have always been a factor in the appreciation of the Swahili language and its speakers. With this in mind, it will be interesting to see if future developments in Bujumbura will keep on following the found interplay of language and society as we have described in this paper.

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6

Peer groups and human anchorage: Girl migrants making it work in N'Djamena, Chad

Jonna Both

Issa Serge Coelo's short film about a taxi driver in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, shows the military repression, the fear of robbery and the poverty and insecurity that people in this city endure in their daily lives.[1] *One does not expect girls, living independently in small peer groups, to find a proper way of coping in such a volatile environment. For at least three decades, N'Djamena has been an unstable and insecure environment but young girls and boys from southern Chadian villages nowadays actively seek access to the city in search for jobs and new experiences. This chapter deals with young girl migrants – aged 10 to 19 – from southern Chad, finding their ways in N'Djamena, and looks specifically at the importance of peer groups to understand how they cope in this urban setting.*

Introduction

On the corner of a block in Chagoua[2] and built against the wall of a big compound, two very small rooms made of mud faced each other. A small wall partly closed the 'compound' off from the street. These two rooms were home to twelve girls who together paid FCFA 14,000 a month to live there. The doors did not close well from the inside and at night the door handles were tied with string to keep them shut. During the interview with the group of girls living there, I was bothered by the wall I was leaning against in the middle of this small compound,

[1] Issa Serge Coelo, *Un taxi pour Aouzou*. Movimento Production, 1994.
[2] A quarter of N'Djamena.

while trying to stay in the little space of shade on a mat we had brought along.[3] Then I realized the walls had been plastered, probably after the rainy season, with sand from the street, which explained the black plastic pieces[4] and other waste visible in them. We formed a big group; eleven of the girls that lived in these two rooms, a baby, a research assistant and a girl from the neighbourhood. One of the girls had stayed on her mat inside one of the rooms as her finger was badly infected and she was in a lot of pain. The other girls, varying in age from twelve to seventeen, were dressed in colourful T shirts and third-hand skirts. They were spending their Sunday together – their only day off – and did not often go out, tending to stay home in the evening unless they went out with 'brothers' from their home village. By helping each other find jobs as domestic workers, mostly in the northern, Muslim parts of town, they had managed to save some money for their rent and for the goods they wanted to buy to take back to their village.

The group's living conditions are typical of a lot of other young rural migrants in N'Djamena: the tiny rooms they share with so many, the way their rooms open onto the streets and can barely be closed off, the proximity of the *chef de race*,[5] the single mother in their midst and the girl's untreated infection. Although the proximity of girls from the same village and with whom they feel at ease cannot remove their harsh urban living conditions, their closeness helps the girls survive in N'Djamena and is essential for coping in the city.

To explain the importance and dynamics of these peer groups, the following issues will be presented in this chapter: The local context, a short historiography to embed the topic of migrant peer groups in the literature, an interpretation of the important functioning of female peer groups in the face of migration and new, uncertain urban landscapes, the characteristics of groups, the importance of emotional support, solidarity and safety one finds from being a member of a peer group and, finally, the role of brothers and boyfriends in the urban landscape.

Living in N'Djamena

N'Djamena is an urban region in which *se debrouiller* (managing to cope) has become normal practice.[6] Its recent history, the constant threat of violence and

[3] An attempt to visit another group of girls at their home was not realized. They proposed meeting somewhere else because they did not have any shade at home and no mat. For us, this would not have mattered but the girls felt it was unacceptable to receive visitors in such circumstances.

[4] The remains of black plastic bags are found everywhere on the streets of N'Djamena. They swirl around the city with the Harmattan as the Saharan sand and winds blow them through the air. A girl in the research used this *léddar* as a metaphor to describe men. 'Men are like *léddar*, the wind will come and take them.' V. got married two years ago. She is now about fifteen, has a baby and is working as a domestic servant. Her husband had already been 'taken by the wind' to another girl (Walia, 2 December 2007).

[5] See Both (2008).

[6] See, for example, Waage (2006).

rebel attacks, the poverty of its people, an imposing political elite, job (in)security and regular flooding in the rainy season make the city an insecure environment. Political tensions are influencing daily life and specific factors over time have contributed to tensions between southerners (mostly Christians or animists) and a diversity of northern (mostly Muslim) kingdoms and political-military fractions, between southern farmers and northern/central pastoralists and between Muslim traders and local people in the south (Magrin 2001). There was fighting in N'Djamena between 1979 and 1982 when southerners in the capital were pushed back towards the south of Chad. Today there is still occasional fighting in the city centre or on the outskirts of N'Djamena when rebels from the northeast attempt to take power, as they did for example in April 2006 and February 2008. Political power and with it (oil) money and the means of repression in the form of the army and the police are controlled by a specific part of the population. Such power distribution renders others defenseless in everyday life in the face of 'the law'. In other words, the political and economic climate in Chad plays an important role in the period described in this research. Traders and market women in N'Djamena face the daily threat of displacement and dispossession in a city where heavily armed military forces, both Chadian and French, are a visible presence on the streets. But fortunately this is also a city in which people create alliances and have not given up trying to make things work.

> Under Habré,[7] there was no democracy. Nobody came here (to N'Djamena). Now there is democracy and inflation. Everything is expensive but we have to cope (...). (Gua, 19 years old)[8]

The girls in this research project link their mobility to the 'democracy' created under President Déby, the current president. For the last ten to fifteen years, it has been relatively safe to travel to N'Djamena from the south of the country as security has improved.[9] However, according to Gua, the kind of democracy that President Déby has created in Chad means that the resources of the state are primarily in the hands of his close affiliates, his kin and those he maintains reciprocal relations with, such as traders, and who have the means to build large houses and employ more than one southern youngster in their household. Girls from the age of eleven onwards are now joining the exodus from southern rural areas, according to the media and NGOs. Their arrival *en masse* to work in

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[7] Chad's former president, now facing trial in Senegal.

[8] All the names of informants have been changed for reasons of privacy.

[9] Although there is mounting evidence of conflicts between (state-armed) cattle herders and farmers in the south over the last fifteen years (Both 2008; Magrin 2003), local militias (*codos*) and the national army are no longer fighting each other in the rural areas.

N'Djamena is, unlike elsewhere,[10] a relatively recent type of mobility. The girls demonstrate their independence by choosing migration as a new generational freedom but at the same time the impoverishment in the south is making their farming parents realize that they do not have the means to provide for their children and it is therefore difficult to convince their daughters to stay in the villages.

Coming from the south of Chad

A large group of girls and a lot of boys in N'Djamena, estimated to number between 900 and 1000, come from the village of Beduigrui in the Department of Mandoul in southern Chad. The local circumstances in Mandoul, as in other southern regions, are complicated: Farmers need to sleep in their fields to protect their crops at night from the growing numbers of (commercial) cattle herders in the region and weapons are increasingly being used to resolve these kinds of conflicts between farmers and herders. Southerners feel abandoned by the local administration, which is no longer staffed by local people but by those from the northeastern (ruling) part of the country. They feel unable to defend their rights in local conflicts with alleged state-armed and state-supported pastoralists. The groups approach each other with a political memory of slave raiding, and a historically imposed colonial divide between southern animists and northern Muslims plays an important role in the region. In addition, most of the soil in this cotton-growing area is exhausted and the land does not generate the money it used to in the past. Nevertheless, the girls in N'Djamena did not often refer directly to the problems faced by their villages but explained their move to the capital as a chance to earn money to purchase their own utensils and clothes. The element of adventure was considered an important factor too. They had saved up for the journey by engaging in petty trade in *billi billi* (local millet-beer) or fried beans at the local market, had chosen their day of departure (usually a market day) and left on a minibus without informing their parents.[11] Their routes to the capital, where they would become domestic workers, correspond with the migration routes that most of their fathers and brothers also once explored.

The girls' regrouping in the city is often mentioned in the media ("sharing overcrowded places, boys and girls sharing rooms, that's how they get pregnant or get AIDS") and they are very visible on the streets. Living on the outskirts of the city, they walk to and from work in the centre or the north of town in small

[10] There are many studies of similar migration patterns for other areas, ranging from Europe (Moch 1993) to the rest of the world (Oudedraogo 1995; Bastia 2005; Moya 2007), that analyze dynamics such as historical phenomena.

[11] Parents were sometimes aware that their daughters were planning to leave but were often not informed of the exact day or time.

groups, carrying each other's babies to work and walking hand in hand. Outsiders comment on the way they walk and dress, describing their style as *villageois* (rustic) in a city where a lot of people are attempting to adopt middle-class standards. Most of the youth cross specific urban boundaries between the northern (Muslim) parts of town and their own southern quarters, borders that their parents' generation are much less likely to cross. Their mobility coincides with a very insecure urban landscape and a political environment that makes their coping strategies interesting to investigate.

Picture 6.1 Next generation of migrants
[© Jonna Both]

A historiography of group formation: Girls and migration

Though comparable small-scale women's networks have proved essential for survival in migrant settings for women worldwide, those of young girls have rarely been addressed in the literature. The social networks of adolescents were until recently seen as marginal to the survival of youth because they were thought unlikely to possess the social or economic capital that is inherent in adult networks. To explain the social relevance of the understudied networks of female adolescent peers in N'Djamena, it is necessary to understand the larger body of literature on female migration.

There is a certain amount of literature on the specific interplay between gender and migration. Studies generally cover a large geographical and historical space and focus on domestic workers and prostitutes, presenting an image of vulnerable female migrants (Moch & Fuchs 1993; Moch 2003; Lawson 1998; Schrover 2003; Brennan 2004; Moya 2007, Nyanuti Ondimu 2007). The way in which the migration of women was perceived in the past related to ideas about women's vulnerability or stemmed from moral concerns (Moloney 2006; Soderlund 2005; Pittin 1984). These issues predominate in current studies on child migration as well. In particular, girl migrants seem to be easily connected to prostitution and (sexual) exploitation in contemporary migration discourses. Much of this is based on ideas about women and children being inherently vulnerable and easy victims, especially in connection with globalization and large-scale corruption in some countries (Agbu 2003). As a result of these fears, information on the migration of girls rarely extends beyond information about trafficking in certain areas, a discourse that is strongly shaped by NGOs. Regular migration patterns and forms of female self-organization have not received much attention.

Like many researchers working on the topic of girl migrants, Bouju (2005) tends to take a great deal of agency away from the girls and portrays them only as the victims of normless, lawless and patriarchal societies, in his case in Mali. He concentrates solely on a group of female migrants who experienced pregnancy as a result of sexual abuse. The focus of other researchers is only on the violence experienced by domestics in the workplace (Human Rights Watch 2005; Nyanuti Ondimu 2007; Blagbrough 2008). It is striking how they do not always deal with these facts critically or look beyond the paradigm of exclusion and violence to explain the social position of these girls.

What is problematic is that the above-mentioned researchers leave little room for diversity and agency regarding young female migrants, while in the field one is likely to encounter a diversity of experiences in which some girls are better able to address their urban working and living circumstances than others. The research described in this chapter, on the contrary, deals with how young girls living together in the city function as a group in a variety of ways. In N'Djamena

these small groups mediate and facilitate well-being for the girls, a topic not often dealt with in research on domestic workers in Africa because most of it concentrates on live-in domestics. Their position is likely to be quite different from that of many of the girls in the present research. Live-in domestic workers are frequently equated with exploitation, violence, invisibility and falling beyond the scope of the law (Human Rights Watch 2005; Blagbrough 2008). Jaquemin (2004) did however distinguish three groups of domestic workers with different social positions and living conditions but did not elaborate on the difference this makes for the girls involved. The girls followed in this chapter, who are living and working in small groups in N'Djamena independently of classificatory parents or adults, appear to form a relatively new group in the literature.

The importance of peer networks in the face of uncertainty

Very few studies consider the importance of finding peers in town as the main focus of their attention, or only do so when studying gangs or street boys. However, there is reason to believe that this process is critical for girls too. Although Moch & Fuchs (1993), Schrover (2003) and Ross (1983) emphasize the proximity of solidarity as being important for the survival of (poor) female migrants, the types of grouping found in N'Djamena are not comparable. But according to Ross (1983) and Moch & Fuchs (1993), the networks of poor women are especially valuable in the absence of state assistance or any sort of social-security benefits. This particular observation is of importance in this study.

The recent tendency in Africa to explain urban coping mechanisms has been to stress the creativity of the urban poor and, more specifically, urban youth. This literature focuses almost exclusively on male youth in the urban setting. Simone (2004) stresses the redundancy of social networks needed by youth to survive in volatile African cities but his analysis is not applicable to the way the girls in this research found their space for manoeuvre, and seems biased towards male youth. Female groups are more inwardly directed in N'Djamena and rarely make use of loose ties to improve their own position. How urban survival mechanisms (in Africa) might work differently for girls is thus still to be studied. Rwebangira & Liljeström (1998) and Moyer (2006) have been pioneers in the field by describing in more depth how girls and young women in town look for human anchorage and need to create a space of belonging. Together these two studies offer valuable insights that have inspired this research to consider the contemporary positions of girls in African societies and the way they try to make things work. Relationships and networks matter and adolescent peer groups need contact with other such groups to protect them from risks.

Grouping in N'Djamena

This chapter started with the example of girls from Bedigrui living together in impoverished circumstances. All of the girls present stated it was they themselves who had wanted to move from Bedigrui to N'Djamena and that they had saved for their journey by engaging in petty trade at the local markets in the south. Some had only recently arrived and were likely to spend a year or more in N'Djamena before going back to their village of origin. Others in the group came longer ago, had saved what they came for and would be leaving within a few months and newcomers would take their place in the group over time. Though it was hard to establish a direct relationship between the girls in town and their initiation groups, there are certainly links. For example, moving away from one's village in small, same-age groups is something the community is already familiar with because of the process of male and female initiation rites in villages. This does not mean that migration in these small groups is a subsequent step but the idea of being away temporarily from one's village as age cohorts is not completely new (Leonard 2000a, 2000b) even though urban migration by girls still generates a lot of moral concerns in the villages concerned.

Moving into small peer groups living independently in the city was seen as something relatively new in N'Djamena in 1993[12] and two important explanations were put forward in the local media. The first presented this as the consequence of girls choosing to move out of the households of classificatory parents in town where they were sent by poor rural parents and were often exploited as domestic workers and not adequately remunerated. As such, going to live with peers was seen as an empowering act, a consequence of maltreatment or exploitative kin relationships. Secondly however, this pattern of girls living on their own was associated with work in prostitution. The new development of grouping emerged just before the time when southern girls working in northern households was identified as a major economic niche, which explains why prostitution was seen as the only way for girls to survive independently of their kin before then. Nowadays it is widely known that girls find domestic work, especially in Muslim parts of town.[13] The group-formation process seems to have followed on from foster-care constructions and then started to gain importance through the practice of *suivance* (chain migration) from southern villages.

While the need for a group in town to generate a type of independence from (exploitative) family and for practical reasons (for example, sharing rent) was legitimate, once it was established as a 'system' it became something to be aimed

[12] See *Notre Temps* (1993).

[13] The girls themselves come from animist or Christian backgrounds. Coming from a different background seriously affects their position in the city and their room for manoeuvre but is not extensively touched upon in this article. For more information, see Both (2008).

at on departure, a mechanism on its own. To leave one's village to go on an adventure is nowadays undeniably linked to those coming back to the village with consumer goods and exciting stories. The girls do not necessarily leave the village together[14] but are sure to meet up with each other in town.

At a meeting in the southern village of Bewala with girls and mothers, a young girl told us that she had been to N'Djamena. When asked if she had found agemates in the city (those with whom she was initiated), she said they were all living in N'Djamena but that they did not all live together. Only one of the girls from her initiation group had not been to the city and she was one of the chief's daughters. In fact, the chief had asked my research assistant and me if we could talk to his daughter, who had been threatening to leave one day soon, to discourage her from going. When we met the girl herself in a group of women, she laughed and said she had never been to N'Djamena but that she would go soon and come back and shock us all, meaning she would impress us by coming back with beautiful clothes. A half-sister of hers then joined the group. She had been to N'Djamena and indicated she would not want to go again. We asked her why, on the basis of her experience, she had not advised her sister not to go. She claimed to have done so but that it did not prevent her sister from wanting to go. She herself had returned due to intimidation:

> I don't like the city. I prefer to stay here and go to school. I don't see the importance of staying there (in N'Djamena). There are men there who want you and you don't want them but they don't leave you alone, they are even capable of killing you. Here if you don't want it (to be with a boy), they leave you alone.

The girl preparing to leave was still exited about leaving and bragged about the way she would look when she came back. Her ambitions would only be realizable though because of the presence of her peers in N'Djamena. The new generation of girls is longing for beautiful clothes that the older generations of women do not recognize from their youth. The wish to be publicly admired is something Leonard (2000a, 2000b) described as new for the same region and related it to the relatively new regional practice of female circumcision. A one-to-one relationship between the group of *promotionelles* (girls with whom one has been through the initiation ritual) and the groups formed in town was hard to establish. Many girls said: 'All the others are in N'Djamena' but they did not necessarily live with them. Nevertheless the coming-out of girls after initiation and their return after a stay in N'Djamena seemed not to be so very different. A girl's return from N'Djamena is celebrated because she will bring (small) gifts and her parents are happy to see her return. Dressing up, receiving attention and

[14] Although on a market day in Bekolo in December 2008, nine girls from one village left for N'Djamena together.

standing out because of one's clothing, 'exotic' language[15] and behaviour seem to be important for adolescent girls in the villages, something that both occasions – the return after initiation and that after a stay in N'Djamena – have in common. Temporary separation from parents and the family is an element that both experiences have in common. This is a comparison that only counts for some of the girls in the research however. For example, some young married women who leave the village of Dono-Manga make the decision to go and work in N'Djamena as a result of being the youngest woman in a polygamous household (Both 2008). And for them, finding a group in N'Djamena might not be as relevant as it might be in the case of migration from Bedigrui and its surrounding villages.

The experience of being in a liminal phase for a while is another aspect of the initiation period that seems to be of relevance when it comes to understanding the social position of girls in small groups in N'Djamena. In the process of living in the city: Especially at the beginning, an experience of liminality may be central for newcomers, reducing the expectations one has of the environment and explaining how one can gradually learn to deal with city life and one's likely achievements. Inherent in the process of liminality is the social phenomenon of developing solidarity and equality, which also explains some of the group dynamics observed in N'Djamena. For example, none of the groups of girls studied displayed any clear forms of hierarchy.

Characteristics of small groups

Although there is no direct connection between the groups of young girls participating in initiation and those that find themselves together in town looking for domestic work, there is some overlap. In a group of five, four of the girls had undergone initiation together, while the other had experienced it a year earlier. It is also common to find half-sisters in small groups or at least girls that are related, although they do not necessarily arrive or leave together. A lot of girls come alone like the girls from Péni did.

Victorie, Denise and Irene all have the same father but different mothers. Victorie and Denise are fifteen and sixteen and came to N'Djamena together two years ago. Irene is fifteen and came a year later. Mami's mother is a younger sister of Denise's mother and Mami, who is fourteen, has been in N'Djamena for fifteen months, having come on one of the famous mango lorries from the south. The father of Clarisse, who is thirteen, is a cousin of Irene's father. Clarisse came to live with the other girls two months ago. Knowing that they would easily find each other in town had been important.

[15] Having learned Chadian Arabic in N'Djamena is seen as an asset on returning to one's village as it distinguishes those who have been to N'Djamena from those who have not. It is used as a secret language and excludes inexperienced youth.

Victorie: We already knew in the village that the Sara lived somewhere in Chagoua (a quarter of N'Djamena) so we went and found them. The first night we slept at the home of 'sisters' who had left before us. It was them who helped us find work.

For those moving in and out of these kinds of groups, the girls offer an important safety net as well as places of 'comfort'. Without peers in town, the girls would probably not have considered this type of migration. When asked if they would have come to N'Djamena if other girls from their village had not been there, they explained:

How would we come? It is because we have friends here that we came. (Victorie)
They are sure that they will find girlfriends there. (Staff of the *Cooperation Suisse* in Bedigrui)
They might travel alone, only to find *le group national* over there. (Mothers in Bewala, Bedigrui)

Regangner les camarades (relocating friends) is central for many in moving to town and is nothing new in rural-urban or other types of migration. The issue of copying the migration behaviour of others is discussed by Thorsen (2007), Hahn (2007) and many others. How these peer groups then work in the city has not been extensively investigated but helping each other find jobs is crucial to survival in the city.

What is your work?, I ask 14-year-old S.
S: I work in housekeeping for FCFA 15,000 a month.
Me: Are you paid on time?
S: That is always a problem. They ask you to wait. But we eat together. They are OK. This is my third job.
Me: Can you tell me about your previous jobs?
S: I didn't like my first job and at my second employers they accused me of stealing something, so I quit.
Me: What happened?
S: I went to my big sister and we went to see my employer together. They dropped the accusations but did not pay me for that month. It took me 10 days to find a new job. A friend helped me to find it.

Peers help each other find jobs and this makes it easier to move from one job to another if one is not treated well. Knowing that peers can help is reassuring.[16] Many of the girls we spoke to knew how to define where their boundaries lay. They would quit a job if they were insulted to the extent that they could not bear it anymore, had not been paid for a few months, were not given money for a minibus if it was too far to walk to work, were accused of theft or received bad (old) food at work. They knew they could changer jobs without problems be-

[16] Moch (1993: 42) recognized the need for peers to help poor women migrants in Paris find their first job. After that they seemed to move on to other jobs on their own as they had become 'familiar with the means to find work'.

cause they could rely on others and their own growing experience to find a new one. It is in this respect that 'brothers' also came into the picture.

> Me: You say that you quit a job if you are treated badly but how about if they pay you FCFA 25,000[17] but treat you badly?
> A: You have to quit. Also if they give you old or mouldy food, you cannot stay.
> Me: Is that the same for you younger girls?
> V: It is the same. If you are treated well, you stay, if you are treated badly, you leave.
> Me: Isn't it extremely difficult to be without a job? Would you not prefer to keep a job even if you are not treated well?
> V: If you do not have a job or if you are ill then perhaps your brothers will be able to help you (and give you food) if you have to stay at home.

The groups discussed so far have specific characteristics: They are made up of same-age girls and are fluid in their composition, with members coming and going independently of others or with only one of the others. Some will have stayed for two years, saved all they came for and be almost ready to go back. Others have just arrived. The groups are often based on the same village background and are almost always constructed around half-sisters. Yet girls frequently travel alone and only reconnect in town. Speaking the same languages is another reason why they group together in the multilingual setting of N'Djamena. Living together, helping each other find jobs and taking care of each other's babies are important group characteristics. At times of illness, the others contribute money to help buy medicine (although they sometimes cannot raise sufficient cash). The rent is paid jointly and saving money in a *tontine* means that they all receive a larger amount of money at a certain time that enables them to buy clothes and utensils to return home with one day.

Concentrations of affection

The groups offer something else that is more difficult to measure in terms of input and output, namely affection, friendship, loyalty and solidarity. Walking behind these girls in town, one could often catch them holding hands and their small gestures of touching and closeness seem very natural. It is this kind of closeness and trust among peers that live-in domestics are normally deprived of, something that might make them emotionally more vulnerable. Girls carrying each other's babies or playing and cuddling a baby to sleep are common scenes in the villages the girls come from, and having similar physical closeness in a harsh migrant setting in the city seemed important as a coping strategy.

[17] Research assistant Guedengao suggested this question. FCFA 8,000 to FCFA 10,000 was the average monthly income for most girls.

Their touching and teasing during a group meeting in Walia, on the outskirts of N'Djamena, was commented on by a few of the adult women present. We talked about the differences between their positions as older domestic workers and those of the young ones, with the older women indicating that the biggest difference was that the latter had fewer worries. The young girls, according to them, worked and went home and slept, whereas the older women felt more troubled and worried in their daily lives. In response to this comment, two girls (who had been tickling each other and leaning against each other) giggled, which led one of the older women to say: 'Look at them; they play like children', emphasizing the difference between the generations.

It is difficult to explain the influence or importance of this closeness in exact terms but there are indications that the trust and physical contact are of importance to the well-being of such adolescent girls in an urban setting. This is both generational and culturally influenced. Not only the obvious functional aspect of being part of a group but also the affection and friendship it brings are vital in helping to understand why girls can laugh, make jokes and tease each other under such difficult circumstances.

Limits to peer-group protection

While the extent to which these peer groups can serve as a safety net should be carefully formulated, it would appear they generate a type of agency for young girls. Nevertheless, there are situations in which individuals are unable to experience the protection of being part of such a group. The girls this chapter started by describing how they had twice been robbed at night while they were in their rooms. Speaking about safety they said:

> During the day it is OK. The night is the problem. People come like that. Two times we have been attacked. They carried a big knife. They took everything because we girls were afraid.

The *chef de race (*a community leader) who lives just around the corner confirmed the robbery:

> They took the clothes and cooking pots the girls had already bought. I do not sleep well at night. When I hear something, I go out with my torch. There is no (street) light. The first time someone came and warned me. We went there right away but the thief had already taken their things.

Chagoua, where these girls live, is known for its thugs (*colombiens*). Some of the girls had never been robbed even though their houses were similarly located, while others had left this quarter of town because of the threat of theft. A lot of the girls deliberately do not go out at night or go only occasionally with brothers from the same village. Some mentioned being free to go out without adult super-

vision but this was not seen as a benefit of being in N'Djamena. Though adults in town and parents in the villages accuse their youngsters of leading frivolous lives in N'Djamena, a recurring theme when speaking to these girls was that they felt less free in N'Djamena than in their villages. One fifteen-year-old girl from Dono Manga in Walia said:

> F: In the village we have a system; when there is a full moon, we beat the drums and we go out to dance. Here we are afraid. We don't go out.
> Me: Why don't you go out here?
> F: In the village you work in the fields, you grow some peanuts and then in the evening you go dancing. But here when you are so tired from work and you have to walk home, how will you dance? And we don't have a space here.
> Me: But why do you say you are afraid?
> F: We don't have a space.
> Me: But just outside the gate there is a big open space isn't there? Can't you dance there?
> F: But that is not our space, it is the property of the state. We are afraid to dance there.

Picture 6.2 Mixed group of women and girls in Walia
[© Jonna Both]

Being in a group does not automatically protect these girls from external threats and the environment they live in. In their small groups, the girls can face up to threatening situations, but being alone generates increased feelings of insecurity. This was obvious when walking long routes home from work in the evenings. None of the girls liked to walk home alone and if they had to, it was because they worked in a different area from their friends or because they had to work late. These girls would move significantly faster and were less approachable, also for me as a researcher, as they displayed a more closed attitude. While going home from work in a small group meant laughter, being able to reflect on things together and jokes with other people along the road, girls who walked alone seemed more serious. This however did not mean that a girl walking alone would not be able to mobilize others to her aid if something happened, as sooner or later she would encounter girlfriends or *frères de village* along the road.

Specific streets in town were considered especially unsafe by a lot of the girls, one being the old bridge to Walia and others included roads in the most northerly parts of town or small streets after dark in the peripheral quarters they lived in. The risks they envisaged were mostly related to the presence of *columbiens* and soldiers. The girls claimed that they did not carry anything with them for protection as they knew that any man would be stronger and could use a knife against them.

Being and moving in a group does not mean that one's safety is guaranteed and a sense of freedom is experienced. To a certain extent, the small groups of girls were inwardly directed for reasons of protection. Walking home together and not going out at night enhanced their safety. Interestingly, Simone (2004) paints a picture of highly active, outgoing, network-seeking youngsters in African cities who are securing their livelihoods, and stresses creativity as the way of survival for young people in Africa. There might be a very specific gender aspect to this. The girls in this research seemed much more likely to rely on their small group of same-age acquaintances for their survival. In some cases, 'parents' (a *chef the race* for example) or boys from the same villages are mobilized to offer assistance or security.

Frères de village

Where do the girls' male counterparts figure in this picture? Do they form a part of these close networks or are they part of the uncertainty girls face in the city? Are the boys from the same villages the reason the girls go to N'Djamena in the first place? Some girls did indeed mention having followed a boyfriend or a husband, afraid that he would marry someone else in town if they were not around. Migration by boys was common before girls started to leave too. The

following is taken from a mixed group discussion with adolescents from Dono Manga:

> Me: Someone told me that girls come to N'Djamena because all the young men are here and not in the villages?
> Dono (24-year-old male): This is to some extent true but that is not all: We (boys and girls) grew up together, we have danced together. We are all the same generation. Now when someone leaves for N'Djamena, it is difficult. You miss that person. That is why people follow each other.

Although they are surrounded by many different people, the adolescents remain focused on those from the same region when it comes to friendships, flirting and relationships. Two girls indicated that they had followed boys to N'Djamena but in both cases they had ended up with a baby and no husband.

Sometimes the proximity of *frères de village* enhanced the girls' safety. When they felt they needed the assistance of a 'brother' or someone more educated than themselves, they knew how to mobilize someone. 'Brothers' fulfil a variety of roles for groups of adolescent girls. For example, they may be required for safety reasons if a girl wants to go out in the evening but at the same time they can be seen as part of the insecure environment itself as these boys have proven themselves to be less than trustworthy in the past. Harassment by boyfriends or husbands is not uncommon. But it is impossible to look at these girls' social networks without seeing brothers in the larger picture. It is in this circle and beyond that there is space reserved for 'classificatory' parents. Community chiefs who represent the villages the girls come from in N'Djamena play a different but significant role in the larger circle around the girls (Both 2008). The inner circle, however, is reserved for female peers only.

Conclusion

The functioning and characteristics of small peer groups are relevant but also relative to the dynamics of safety and survival of migrant girls in N'Djamena. These peer groups form small landscapes of trust and solidarity in the city's larger insecure landscape. They often form the locus of belonging (Moyer 2006) and human anchorage (Rwebangira & Liljeström 1998) in the city for girls not living with parents. Though the value of having peers around in the process of migration has been covered in the literature (cf. Moch & Fuchs 1993; Schrover 2003), no references are found to the context described in this chapter, namely that of young, single girls living together so closely with age-mates. Although it did not form the focus of this study, this way of grouping was a less obvious dynamic of the young male migrants in town who seemed to live more frequently in pairs or alone. This gender-specific type of human anchorage for female

migrants in N'Djamena is different to that seen amongst girls or young women who stay with uncles in the city or who work as live-in domestics.

A type of physical closeness and trust appears very important for individual well-being in town, something girls living in groups seem to find easily and naturally, and which live-in domestics miss out on. Thus while young female domestic workers may seem to be exploited and constrained in situations they are unable to oversee or cope with, they can also be active decision-makers, with the small networks of girls they are able to fall back on making this possible.

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7

Recycling gifts: Ritual and money in present-day *tonw* in Bancoumana[1]

Esther Kühn

Notwithstanding popular economic conceptions of money as a 'neutral instrument of exchange', as something that can be individually owned and is ideal for saving, women from Bancoumana live in a society where money is fluid and whimsical and therefore impossible to save. The RoSCAs run by their associations provide an opportunity for compulsory saving and a socially acceptable reason to withstand claims made by family and friends. Through RoSCAs, members build up rights to a large fund which they use for life rituals, consumer items and debt repayments. Members can organize these rituals in cooperation with their association, which has resulted in an up scaling of ritual. At these events, gifts are given in full reciprocity to establish, strengthen and express social relationships. Money is thus kept in constant motion in a realm different from that of lending. It is shown that the use of money does not necessarily indicate economic activity in the orthodox sense of the word.

Kadjatu Camara's *denkundi*

It is 7:30 a.m. on Sunday morning, 2 April 2006, as I enter the compound of Niagale Coulibaly who is secretary of the Jigiseme[2] women's association (ton) in Bancoumana. At that time there is nothing to be seen but empty benches around a mat. However, in the following half hour about 40 women gather here. Everybody takes a seat and starts chatting. At 8:00 Ami Sinaba, a member of the board, finds her place on the mat and Niagale Coulibaly takes out a large writing pad. That afternoon, Kadjatu Camara, one of the 97 members, will host a *denkundi* (name-giving cere-

[1] This revised article was presented earlier at the European Students Africa Conference 2007 in Basel, Switzerland under the title 'Recycling Gifts: Ritual and Money in Women's Associations in a Malian Town'. I thank many conference participants and Jan Jansen and Sabine Luning for their comments.

[2] Literally, 'help, point of support'.

mony,[3] pl. *denkundiw*). The members have come together to assemble a gift that will be given by the group. As usual, everybody is obliged to give FCFA 500,[4] two bars of soap or two yards of cloth (one pagne). Many members have given their present to the secretary beforehand, to a friend who can be present at this morning's meeting or to Kadjatu Camara herself who brings in the presents that she will receive again in the afternoon. After an hour, the secretary has crossed off all but two names on the membership list. The list includes the names of the 60 members who form a group that has agreed to give a pagne and FCFA 500 at each other's ceremonies, thus providing the mother with enough cloth to make 20 complete dresses with a top, a skirt and a headscarf (a complet in French). Then everybody goes home to continue the day's work. At midday, I visit Kadjatu's compound. She, the female members of her household and some friends, who she has promised three pagnes in return for their help, are cooking the festive meal riz au gras.

That afternoon, two months after the birth of Kadjatu's baby boy, Nuhan Sinaba, he is welcomed into the community by his parents' friends and family, the members of Jigiseme and three other associations that together form the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana'. The event will draw about 150 women, but no men,[5] from all over the village. Visitors are drawn by the banging on calabashes that one can hear from afar. At Kadjatu Camara's compound, a UNHCR canvas has been hung over a mat where she will sit with some close friends and other (classificatory) mothers of her child (*denbaw*). Women are sitting around the mat on benches and chairs watching the musicians, others have gotten up to dance to the music. Everybody is waiting for the festivities to begin. At 16:00 all attendees have taken their seats and a pair of *griottes*[6] starts the ceremony with a speech, offering the large Jigiseme gift to the mother while praising her, her family and her association. This is followed by applause and a song from the public. While a blue baby bath and the twenty brand-new pieces of cloth from Jigiseme are set aside, the money is given to two other women on the mat; they will collect the gifts of money for Kadjatu this afternoon. This kicks off a stream of gifts that will take about two hours to present.

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[3] *Denkundi* literally means 'shaving the head of a child'. At this particular ceremony, which takes place in the morning of the eighth day of a baby's life, the head of the newborn is shaved while a *griot* or imam announces his or her name. The child gets an identity, a path to be accepted in the community. This announcement is an event that is attended mostly by men (women are around to cook and shave the baby's head) and is followed by a gathering involving music, cards and eating. In the afternoon, women have their own event at which men are normally not allowed to be present. Women give presents to the mother of the child for her baby and thereby welcome the baby into the community. If the shaving of the head and the announcement of the baby's name is done for every baby, the men's and women's gatherings are not compulsory and are only organized if a family has sufficient resources. It is therefore a seasonal event. In this paper, when speaking of a *denkundi* I will be referring to the women's gathering. Due to the planning that is required for an event of this size, they are often held long after the baby's head has been shaved.

[4] Approximately € 0.75. For comparative purposes: in 2006 a bar of soap cost FCFA 250, a kilo of sugar cost FCFA 400 and a kilo of rice cost FCFA 250.

[5] In other places, like Bamako, men are allowed to be present but usually do not attend. In Bancoumana the *griottes* immediately stop talking when a man enters the compound.

[6] *Jelimusow*: female traditional bards who sing praise songs and speak in public. The men from their families, *jelikew*, recount history, speak at public events and act as middlemen at marriages or during conflicts.

Griottes speak in changing pairs of speaker and *naamu* sayer[7] to present presents, announce the donor and the gift given and pass on the well wishes of the donor. The presents include money, soap and *pagnes* (including cloth, sheets, baby clothes etc.). These are laid in tubs that stand between the *griottes* and Kadjatu Camara. At the beginning, a lot of attention is paid to every gift but as there are about 300 gifts to be presented, the speeches near the end of the ceremony are much more rushed. Still, the name of the donor and the amount given are always stressed. If a *griotte* forgets a name, she will ask for it as these have to be written down in a long list by a woman who writes frantically at all *denkundiw* organized in cooperation with the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana'. At some point, I decide to give my present. My friend and research assistant, Maryam Keita, asks my 'aunt' Kadjatu Doumbia to present the gift of FCFA 500 (an average-sized gift). She presents it with some of her famous jokes and praise, some for me but mostly for my host parents. A little later the gift-giving process comes to an end with a concluding speech by one of the *griottes*. Sherbets are distributed among the guests, and I get the opportunity to take pictures of Kadjatu Camara and the piles of presents in front of her. Her friends and relatives bring out huge bowls of rice with meat and buckets of hand-washing-water and place them between the guests who have formed little groups. At around 18:15 the women leave in groups, the *griottes* who have performed and old guests are given a little token of appreciation in the form of some money (up to FCFA 1000) or a *pagne*. During the whole afternoon I haven't seen little Nuhan Sinaba at all.

Studying associations in Bancoumana

In the beginning of 2006, I spent three months in the Malian town of Bancoumana on fieldwork.[8] This was followed by a five months fieldwork project in 2007-2008.[9] Bancoumana is a growing community of about 10,000 people, 60 km south of the capital Bamako. As a result of immigration from the region and its location at a crossroads, the town is experiencing reasonable economic growth in an economy that is mainly based on agriculture, fisheries and trade. The population consists mostly of Maninka, Bambara and Fulbe families who tend to live on large compounds with extended, patrilocal families but because of recent immigration there are many exceptions to this regional pattern. My aim was to research the ways in which women save for leaner times or big expenses, like their daughter's trousseau. For three months, I stayed with the Diabate family while doing fieldwork on women's associations and their financial activities. Research methods included participant observation, especially of associations'

[7] *Griottes* speak in short sentences which are confirmed by a *naamu* sayer who responds to every sentence with *naamu* (indeed), *abarika* (thanks) or *amina* (indeed, confirmation of a blessing). In this way, a rhythm is maintained in the dialogue between speaker and *naamu* sayer. These roles are constantly turned and continuously taken over by others.

[8] Doing research for an MA in Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University (Kühn 2007b).

[9] This research was part of the MPhil in African Studies at the African Studies Centre and Leiden University (Kühn 2008).

weekly meetings and feasts, and interviews with 20 women on their activities, memberships and the feasts they had organized.

This paper looks into ways in which women channel money that they have access to, through these associations, into activities that are meaningful for them. I start with a conceptual and historical analysis of the association (*ton*) and the ways it currently rotates money through RoSCAs. This is followed by an attempt to embed this in more general ideas of exchange and kinship that play a large role in Mande. Then I will look at several ways in which people use the basic structure of the organization, both to organize celebrations and to accumulate money, two seemingly different activities which in reality have the same effect in that they make 'good relatives' out of 'strangers'. I will touch on local perceptions of money, which turn out to be of vital importance to the way women organize their associations and rituals, leading us to a fundamental question: Is it all about money or is it not at all?

Picture 7.1 Maryam Keita – research assistant in 2006 – and Esther Kühn at the Bancoumana market.
[Picture taken by Eline van Nes, 28 February 2008]

Women's associations (*tonw*)

The *ton* is a well-known type of organization in the geographical region of the Haute Vallée du Niger[10] and the wider cultural region of Mande.[11] 'The concept of *ton* is used by Mande people (Bamana, Maninka, etc.) primarily to indicate a group of individuals that are bound by the same rules, without necessarily having kin relationships among them or who are bound to each other by an oath' (Haïdara 1992: 117-118).[12] *Ton* is a generic term for 'association, community, group, cooperative' or 'the rules of an association' (Bailleul 2000: 465). So, a *ton* is a group of people who are bound by the rules of the *ton*. In this way, the rules make the group, and therefore the rules and the group are virtually the same thing. Haïdara states that the concept of *ton* also encompasses 'ideas of service, public service and obligation' (Haïdara 1992: 118). For this reason, the word is often used for new groups, like political parties or even 'the nation'.

In the classic French anthropological publications on the Haute Vallée and Bamako, *tonw* play a large role. In the 1960s, youngsters – both male and female – in rural areas gathered in *tonw* to do work in fields owned by the villagers. Members used the money, or other contributions collected, to organize parties (Leynaud 1966). The *ton* was a system through which young people entertained each other and were educated, with adults leading the organization. Young immigrants in Bamako also had their *tonw* through which they organized parties and dancing demonstrations in their new neighbourhoods (Meillassoux 1968). During the 1960s, Meillassoux noticed that women in Bamako organized so-called *pariw*, associations through which they saved money 'with a more modest goal [than the journey to Mecca that men saved for, EK]' (Ibid.: 86). Unfortunately Meillassoux did not continue his analysis of women's associations in Bamako, possibly due to the male bias that reigned supreme at the time.

In Bancoumana I encountered more than 20 savings associations organized by adult women.[13] I estimate that approximately 1000 women are members of these *tonw*, of which the majority meets weekly. Each of these associations has between 23 and 100 members, which is extraordinarily large in comparison to

[10] The region just south of Bamako in the direction of Guinée.

[11] 'The Manden (sometimes Manding) is a space, in some way perhaps a time, and for many, an idea. The space is roughly defined by the headwaters of the Niger and its affluent and lies in western Mali and eastern Guinea; it is occupied by the Malinke [Maninka – JJ], for whom it is a symbolic heartland from which the more widespread branches of their people have left at various time to take on different names (Mandinka, Dyula, Konyaka, and others)' (Belcher 1999, in Jansen 2004: v).

[12] My translation, as are all the translations in this chapter.

[13] I am certain there must have been other groups that I did not find. These will generally have been smaller, less tightly organized groups than the ones that are described in this chapter. By comparison, in Bamako which had a population of about 900,000 inhabitants in 1996, there were more than 10,000 groups with a RoSCA savings system (named ONGs, *tonw* of *pariw*) with on average only ten members (Colleye 1996: 156).

groups elsewhere (cf. Ardener 1995). Members organize events like *denkundiw* and a component of the wedding ritual, celebrate Islamic feasts, have parties and run so-called RoSCAs (see below) or work to earn money for rituals (like the 'Association des Cultivateurs'). This new shape of association has quickly developed into an important type of organization and made a big impact on the wider community of Bancoumana.

The RoSCA in theory and Malian reality

Most women's associations in Bancoumana encompassed, at the time of my fieldwork, a type of 'Rotating Savings and Credit Association' (RoSCA), which in the French literature is referred to as *tontine*.[14] Here I use the term RoSCA only for the mechanism that rotates money, not for the association as a whole since these groups of women do much more than RoSCA alone implies, something that is often forgotten or treated as of minor importance because of a focus on the savings system. RoSCAs are organized all over the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Turkey and their diasporas. Ardener (1964: 201) defined the RoSCA[15] as 'an association formed upon a core of participants who make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole or in part to each contributor in rotation'. This definition is still used in most of the literature on this topic. A RoSCA can work as follows: Ten women gather every week to each put FCFA 1000 in a fund which will be given to one of them. At the next meeting another member receives the FCFA 10,000 from the fund. This continues until after ten meetings every member has put in FCFA 10,000 spread over ten weeks and received the full FCFA 10,000 once.

Research published on RoSCAs can be divided into several groups; the first perspective is an economic one which is mainly interested in describing RoSCAs as a set of financial transactions with the aim of increasing the business success of individual members. Very popular in this genre are Cameroonian RoSCAs (*esusu*) run by Bamileke businessmen in the cities. *Esusu* involve a complicated system with an auction that determines the order in which members take the fund, with the remaining money being lent out to members and non-members until the end of the RoSCA cycle (see Tchuindjo 2000; Van Dievoet & Verboven 1993). The second perspective focuses on 'development' and explains the existence of RoSCAs from a developmental and teleological perspective. This perspective attempts to incorporate RoSCAs in development activities such as strengthening the formal banking sector or empowering women (see Kimuyu 1999; Liman Tinguiri 1992). Here, RoSCAs are increasingly seen as a locally

[14] The word *tontine* comes from the name of the Napolitan/French banker Lorenzo Tonti (1635-1690), a *ton* on the other hand is a Bambara/Maninka word whose background is described above.

[15] Then still called Rotating Credit Association, in reference to an influential article by Geertz (1962).

grounded and cheap alternative to microcredit (e.g. Oxfam America). This is discussed in more detail later. The third perspective is the most important for present purposes and involves a less instrumental view of RoSCAs, focusing on the social aspect of its system of saving; its groups, meetings, etc. It explains the popularity of RoSCAs in wider terms, such as the importance of belonging to a group (for advice, social support, gossip) and the need/want to force oneself to save (e.g. Mekounde 1997; Essombe-Edimo 1993).

Ardener (1964: 201) stated that although the RoSCA might seem like a fair savings mechanism, this is not the case since the person receiving the fund first gets credit from all the members, refunding this only at the last meeting of the cycle. The last to receive the fund is a creditor to all the others until the last meeting, and the other eight move from creditor to debtor. This may be true through the eyes of formal banking systems based on the assumption of inflation and interest, and many writers seem to have made such an analysis using problematic concepts like saving, credit and debt. For most RoSCA members worldwide though, this analysis does not apply (Hospes 1995: 127), and it is certainly not relevant to members of associations in Bancoumana. The ROSCA is used to establish and strengthen social ties other than those with family or existing friends and to build up the right to a large sum. In Mande, people need access to a big sum of money every now and then and through the RoSCA, everyone but the last member that receives the fund gets this sum earlier than they would have without the RoSCA, even in the theoretical case that they could have saved it up themselves without others successfully laying claim to it (cf. Fidler & Webster 1996: 17). The final result is positive for all both practically and theoretically.

Women receive the fund because they have a right to it, wherever in the cycle they receive it (cf. Ardener 1995: 6). Every time someone responds to her name being called by the secretary and handing over her contribution, she builds up a right to the fund whether she has received it already or not. In Bancoumana, and in many other places, the order in which women receive the fund is determined by drawing numbers, i.e. by chance. The RoSCAs in Bancoumana work like the standard one described above, every member takes out as much as they put in and this is usually the same amount for all members. This system implies that a great deal of trust has to be invested in fellow members. In the two large associations with 100 members this may mean that the last person in the cycle will have to wait for almost two years before taking the fund. During these years one member will have brought in FCFA 1,250 or FCFA 2,500 (€ 1.87 or € 3.75 depending on the association) a week, which brings her an enormous amount of money in a country where 80% of the population lives on less than US$ 1 a day. There are other, generally smaller, associations with lower contributions (starting

from FCFA 250, 500 and several with 1,000 a week) where the fund will be smaller and members receive it more frequently.

Turning strangers into friends

Women in Bancoumana frequently told me that they were a member of an association so as not to 'eat' their money. 'Eating money' is a well-known expression in many parts of Africa (cf. Shipton 1989: 71) and deals with an effect that is likely to be well-known to any reader: If you have money in your wallet it will be spent sooner than if the same amount was in a savings account. 'Eating' also points to a situation in which money has disappeared and been used by the community that eats together (Jansen 2005: 86). Peer pressure from an association forces members to save and build up a right to a large amount of money. This is an important reason for many women to join one or several of these associations because at times they too are in need of a large sum, often to organize a ritual like a *denkundi* or to provide their daughter with a trousseau so she can get married.

Money in Mande is, in contrast to popular western expectations, very fluid; it can slip through your fingers like water. It is considered to be impossible (and undesirable) to keep money in one's possession for a long time because of the moral obligation to share, since 'in Mali the creation and maintenance of social networks is the basic goal (and *not* the means) of economic action' (Jansen 2005: 86). Without sharing, one becomes isolated in a society, a great fear since the very notion of a person lies in his/her social relationships (Brand 1996: 145). People lay claim to each others' money, making the notion of ownership a complicated one. These claims are laid because almost everybody is chronically short of money. There is always somebody in one's family, or circle of close friends, who needs money urgently enough that one can't deny giving it if one has it, for example to pay for a doctor's bill or for food.

Money rotating through a RoSCA is spoken of in a discourse of gifts (*ton wari di*, the money to be given to the association). In the end, these 'gifts' result in a web of social obligations. The 'gifts' are the rules that make the *ton*, which explains why women could decide to use such a classic concept for a new system dealing with money.[16] At this level of gifts, deposits can be seen as a string of regular obligatory gifts to other members of the association. One substantial gift from the association is given back through total and obligatory reciprocity. The result is that these gifts are recycled in a way; they are used to create new gifts that will strengthen other social relationships. The postponed reciprocity of

[16] It is interesting to note that women in Bamako's higher social classes refer to their associations as ONGs, the French for NGOs, alluding to a whole different realm than that of their rural counterparts, while performing the same activities (Zoë van Mansveld, personal communication).

RoSCAs does not lead to the power differences and expectations that can arise between 'creditors' and 'debtors' in the case of friends or family who 'lend' each other money when the 'debtor' is in urgent need; in the case of RoSCAs or *tonw* the order and direction of these relations have been determined by a lottery as have the moments when the 'debts' are to be repaid (cf. Mauss 1990: 74 [1925]). Money has an important role in the creation of relationships inside and outside associations.[17] Besides RoSCA's, other ways of shaping relationships with the use of money are the maintenance of debt and the contrasting possibility of claiming someone's money if they have it, in gifts of money and the custom of depositing money with others (to avoid the risk of theft). From this perspective, the RoSCA and 'family and friends' are two realms of social obligations that women can decide to put their money in. Once one is a member of an association with a RoSCA, this will gnerally take precedence because of the obligation to save. Members borrow money from their friends and relatives in order to save in the other realm. Exchange with family and friends has all but disappeared, especially if a woman experiences a windfall and has more money than necessary for the weekly contribution. This will then be shared, creating new possibilities for her to claim money for her contribution some other time. It is, however, interesting to see that once she receives the fund this sum is less likely to be subject to claims. The money that a woman has saved up for months or years becomes more a part of her personal possessions than that earned through trade.

Although the system of the RoSCA gives women a bigger say over their earnings, the most important reason to be a member of an association is the friendship, social activities and mutual support it can provide. Niagale Coulibaly, secretary of one of the largest associations; Jigiseme, emphasizes that the associations have created social relations between members to be more like those between family members:

> This year there are more *denkundiw* than last year because then the association [Associations des femmes de Bancoumana[18]] didn't yet exist. This association hasn't been around for a long time, it was only really developed this year. Before, there were separate associations (…) We have a women's meeting regularly.[19] Unlike before, the women of the village are more like a family now. The money that we save through the association is actually of minor importance. It is especially important that we are friends: Mother, father, sister. We talk together. (Bancoumana, 23 May 2006)

[17] One is obliged to give all kinds of products in Mande, for example meals have to be offered to every passer-by.

[18] The cooperation of four large associations, with as its prime activity the joint organization of name-giving and wedding ceremonies.

[19] Once every two weeks, on Sunday afternoons.

These positive kinship relationships are of great importance in Mande. Individuality, egocentrism and strife are indicated by the term *fadenya* (children of the same father[20]), *badenya* (children of the same mother) refers to harmony, solidarity and team spirit between family members. Strife is an undesirable situation, especially for women, which can be solved by building up *badenya* relationships. Although money has often been said to lead to freedom and thereby to individualism (cf. Kahn 1997, Zelizer 2000), women build up *badenya* relations through their associations, which are by definition groups of non-related individuals.[21] Members of an association treat each other as *badenw*, children of the same mother, with an interest in cooperation and social harmony. This does not mean that there is never any conflict, as this is a goal that in practice can never be attained. The goal of *badenya* can be read from the names that have been given to the groups: Jigiseme (help, point of support), Badenya, Dannaya (trust), Ben ka di (pleasant meeting), etc. Through the RoSCA and its postponed reciprocity members create trust. A group is shaped out of people that would otherwise not have had *badenya* relationships with each other, using money as a tool. These relationships are confirmed by organizing wedding and name-giving ceremonies, activities that before were visited mainly by relatives and friends. It becomes clear that Ardener's assumption about the RoSCA; that members extend credit to individuals and simultaneously save for themselves – with unequal results for members that receive the fund at different moments in the cycle – does not apply here. By giving money through the *tonw*, with the certainty that one will oneself receive the fund at some point, relationships of institutionalized trust are created.

Party!

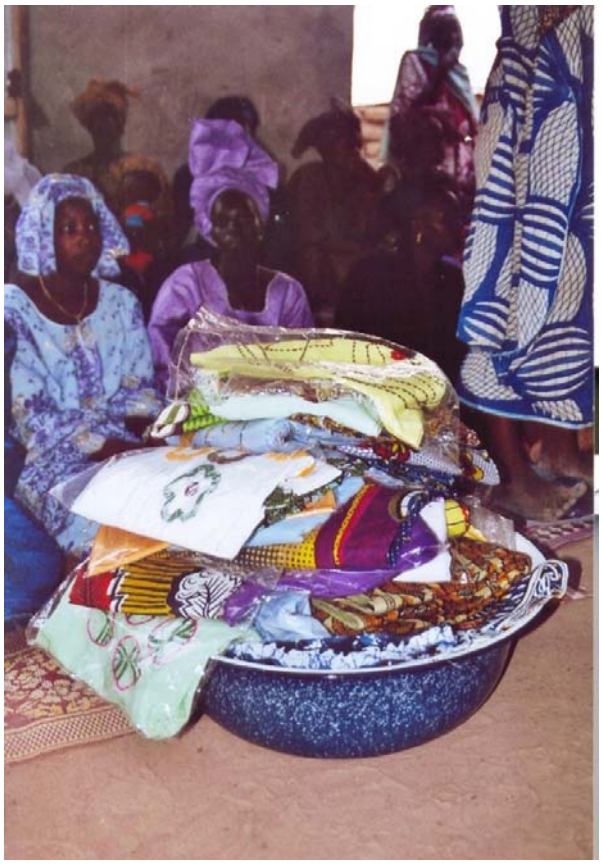
These positive social relationships are confirmed through the organization of rituals, that in themselves are considered to be part of the realm of the family,[22] i.e. a component of the wedding (*bolomafara*) and name-giving ceremonies (*denkundiw*). Both of these ceremonies revolve around the giving of gifts in reciprocal relationships between individuals. A *bolomafara* is that part of the complex wedding ritual in which the bride receives gifts from the women of her village of origin, the village where her parents live. As in almost all other parts of

[20] The terms *fadenya* and *badenya* originate from the structural tensions that exist in polygamous families where mothers are involved in competition over their husband's resources and attention for their children. While *badenya* is referred to very often in practice, *fadenya* is an unwanted situation that demands a search for *badenya* at another level (e.g. all children of the same father are 'children' of the same grandmother).

[21] Although relatives can be members of the same association, these relations should not matter inside this group (cf. Van den Brink & Chavas 1991: 27-28).

[22] Women in Bancoumana who are not a member of a *ton* still organize these rituals for family, friends and neighbours.

the ritual she is not present, her classificatory mothers receive presents for her. *Bolomafaraw* in Bancoumana are rarely given with the large cooperating associations because the family of the bride will have to feed all 150 to 300 guests, having to pay for this themselves because the guests' gifts are for the bride. Strikingly, the only such ceremony organized by an association that I witnessed was with one of the smaller associations, the rich 'Association des femmes des fonctionnaires', even though the organizing mother was also a member of the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana'. She and her family had chosen not to invite the 300 women of the large association but instead the 28 rich wives of civil servants, a choice that might have aided the husband's social network as well. Other *bolomafaraw* are usually organized with friends and family, only because of the huge costs involved in the total wedding ritual.



Picture 7.2 One of the piles of cloth given to Kadjatu Camara at the *denkundi* for her son Nuhan Sinaba, 2 April 2006
[© Esther Kühn]

The name-giving ceremony is very different in this respect. From the outside it looks exactly the same as the *bolomafara* but it is more often organized with the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana' because here the mother can keep most of the presents. As usual, *griottes* and older people are thanked for their contribution (praises and blessings) with a small gift but most of the money received can be used to pay for the rice, ingredients and rents that were acquired on credit. More guests will lead to greater expenses here as well but in contrast to the *bolomafara* to more gifts too.[23]

At the large-scale ceremonies organized with the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana' all donors and their gifts are written down, always by the same woman. The list is not, as has become the custom in Bamako, for the mother to be able to see who has given her what, if she can read it, but instead it is meant for the presidents of the four cooperating associations (cf. Muurling 2003: 112). Their members are obliged to give a gift at all ceremonies of the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana' and the list allows them to check whether this has happened. Members do not have to show up in person but if they have not made sure a gift is presented in their name and they have not given anything through the president of their association, they will be 'accused' in public at the next meeting. This is also the case for the members of Jigiseme who had already given towards the joint gift in the morning. The one time I saw this happen it led to huge debate and showed how the rules that make the association (*ton*) encompass both regular contributions to the RoSCA and presence (and presents) at events where gifts are to be given. For the members of Jigiseme this also includes their contributions to the joint gift that was assembled in the morning, and for which the administration is remarkably similar to that of the RoSCA. The positive effect of these obliged gifts is that the organizing mother can be certain of a minimum number of gifts, giving her the opportunity to get the food, ingredients, rents, etc. on credit. In paying for all this food, she is indirectly being aided by women who have given her a gift but have not shown up, and therefore will not eat her food.[24] Even though, according to many, the existence of associations helps women to organize *denkundiw*, I witnessed only five during my three-month stay.[25] Unlike weddings, *denkundiw* are not organized for every child but it is supposed to be 'better for the child' and the organizing family gains prestige since it shows it can host that many guests. From the low number of *denkundiw* it is clear that

[23] Often money which is a perfectly acceptable gift, and can be used to pay for the event.

[24] I estimate this to be about half the membership of the association (150 out of 300).

[25] Because the organization of a *denkundi* remains costly for the organizing woman and/or her family it is often not celebrated. During my three months of fieldwork there were only three that were organized by the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana', one by the 'Association des femmes de fonctionnaires' and one without an association.

many families still cannot afford to do so, even in the knowledge that they will receive numerous gifts.

While all types of presents are placed in front of the mother, the money is handed over to two women sitting on the centre mat with her. In response to my question as to why the mother does not receive this money (which is not placed in front of her because it may get lost) Kadjatu Camara said:

> The mother sits. She is watching if everybody gives her what she has given her (at a previous gift giving-ceremony). That is also the case for women who haven't organized *denkundiw* because they have received gifts at weddings. Everybody organizes weddings so everybody has to give something. (Bancoumana, 1 April 2006)

Where associations induce reciprocal gift relationships in their RoSCAs, these inter-individual gift relationships are based on reciprocity too. At *denkundiw* and *bolomafaraw* one needs to give at least as much as one has received from that specific person. Gifts are far from free here, and are supposed to stand for the importance that the donor attaches to her relationship with the mother. This mother can, when it is her turn to give 'back', hardly give less as this would be an insult. Where, for example, in the Netherlands the personal relationship is expressed in a gift and it would be considered rude to give somebody exactly the same gift as s/he gave you, the situation is different in Bancoumana. Here it is positive to give a gift of the same size but the type of gift does not really matter: 'at a *denkundi* one can give *tissi* [from the French 'tissue', a thin type of cloth], *pagnes*, sheets or money. Myself, I give money or *pagnes* because these presents are easy to find. Last Sunday I gave money,' said Niagale Coulibaly (Bancoumana, 23 March 2006). At a *denkundi*, all of a woman's female social contacts gather and give something according to the strength of their relationship. These events are the perfect occasion for the mother to find out how strong her social network is; how well she is doing in life.

Different types of associations

The women's associations in Bancoumana can be subdivided into two groups.[26] The first consists of the four large associations with between 50 and 100 members each from all over the village who make weekly contributions of FCFA 1250 to FCFA 2500. These four associations cooperate in the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana' to organize rituals together like the one described above. The second group is made up of smaller associations that have between

[26] There are some exceptions to these groups, like the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana', the 'Association des femmes des fonctionnaires' with a monthly contribution (probably because their husbands receive a monthly salary and put it in a RoSCA through their wives) and the 'Association des cultivateurs' where the members work a field together to earn money for the members to organize *denkundiw* and *bolomafaraw*.

20 and 30 members from the same neighbourhood, contributing between FCFA 250 and FCFA 1,000 weekly at lower profile meetings. In all the associations the meetings are social events; in small associations these are gatherings of women who know each other well and have enjoyable and relaxed meetings that interrupt their hard daily routine. For meetings of the large associations,[27] the women dress up and the emphasis here seems to be more on networking. In all of the groups, the woman receiving the fund at that meeting is supposed to provide tea for the whole gathering. Only when numbers are drawn for the next cycle all members should be present. At other meetings about a-third to a half of the group has a friend take their money to the meeting or gives it to the secretary beforehand.

It is slightly easier for smaller groups to provide additional help for members in need. The 'Association des femmes de chauffeurs de Bancoumana'[28] used to collect an additional FCFA 250 per member if one of them was in desperate need of money, for example to pay a medical bill. However, this sometimes led to conflict if members felt someone asked for this too quickly, possibly out of fear of being left out, or if it was demanded by a member who did not come to the meetings very often and had not contributed when others were in need. As an association with members from only three neighbouring families, the association is a vehicle for women to act as 'the neighbourhood'. Thus, at the meeting on Wednesday afternoon 8 March 2006, money (about FCFA 500) was collected after the RoSCA procedure to give to a woman whose husband had passed away that week. After the meeting women who had some time left went to her place to give their blessing and the money from the association. Large associations rarely make these kinds of gestures because they are too large to decide who will receive a visit and who will not. They may have a fund of money that they can lend to members or other associations in need. When this happens, it is mostly for the organization of rituals.

The large associations are stricter than the smaller ones. Default is not accepted, and it can be seen from their books that this has not happened at all last year. The books are kept by a member who functions as group secretary, being assisted by two advisors who take in and count the money. All groups have presidents whose task is to represent the group, for example when cooperating with other associations. Smaller associations also write down their members' contributions in a notebook but here default happens a bit more frequently, about once or twice a round. Since members know each other personally there is a little more room for flexibility. The 'Association des femmes de chauffeurs', with 27 members contributing FCFA 1000 a week, had a problem because none of its

[27] And the 'Association des femmes des fonctionnaires'.

[28] With members who were not necessarily a driver's wife. Instead most of the members came from three neighbouring families.

members could read or write so they used to ask a child to read out the names during the midday break. The last meeting of a cycle, when numbers were drawn to determine the order of takings in the next cycle, ended in chaos. The school girl made too many numbers for the 27 members before leaving for class and the association was surprised when people drew numbers 43 or 58, read out by me and checked by a woman who could read numbers. It was subsequently decided to repeat the procedure a week later.

Picture 7.3 Group photo of the *Association des Femmes de Fonctionnaires*, 5 April 2006
[© Esther Kühn]

Being a *ton*(*w*) member

With the different types of associations and their advantages and disadvantages, prospective members can strategize. By deciding to become a member of a specific association, several considerations can play a role and women can spread their social relationships or strengthen existing ones. The number of possibilities that a potential member can choose from is increased by the possibility of sharing

a membership.[29] Fanta Diakite, for example, shared her membership of Faiyda with three others. This means the four women contribute FCFA 2,500 every Sunday afternoon, and once in the cycle of about 100 weeks they receive the fund, which they subsequently distribute amongst themselves. Thus women with limited resources can become a member of the 'Association des femmes de Bancoumana' and be invited to their meetings and parties. It is also possible to make several contributions at each meeting and subsequently receive the fund several times in a cycle.[30] Nobody seemed to be a member of two large associations but it was normal for women to be a member of several small associations or one large and one or more small ones. Niagale Coulibaly, the secretary of a large association, for example, earned money from the sale of medicines at the weekly market and, as many others did, by embroidering and selling sheets and curtains. She used this money for three memberships of FCFA 1,250 a week of the large association and made a monthly contribution of FCFA 5,000 to an unnamed association and paid their weekly contribution of FCFA 50, to save for the Tabaski feast. Many women are a member of a small and a large association, of the former to shape *badenya* relations with women from the neighbourhood that they might otherwise have more conflict with, and of the latter to gain access to a large network and receive an extraordinary amount of money once every two years.[31]

During my fieldwork, I met a woman who was a member of four associations with five RoSCAs in total. Ouleye Kante, one of the three wives of a civil servant of the Office d'Agriculture, was involved in trade herself for most of the day. She sold sandwiches with fried onions at offices and workshops, sauce ingredients at the daily market and traded in perfumes. She contributed money to the RoSCAs of the large association, Dannaya, and to two small associations, whose membership was mostly wives of civil servants; Sigiya and an unnamed association (the same as Niagale Coulibaly) where she contributes to both the weekly and monthly RoSCA but does not save for the Tabaski feast. In addition, she is a member of the 'Associations des femmes de fonctionnaires' where she and her co-wives contribute using their husband's money.

[29] This makes it difficult to establish the exact number of members in an association since groups of women are listed under only one of their names in the membership records.

[30] This happens in large associations with long cycles and no opportunities for richer women to resort to another type of association with larger contributions.

[31] Sometimes many members of a small association are members of the same larger group but this is far from compulsory and there are many exceptions.

Are all coins the same?

The sharing of riches is both an obligation and a way of enhancing one's status in Mande. Money can only be usefully productive if it is set in motion. Only then can it be a catalyst for the creation and maintenance of social networks, the ultimate and basic goal since it is one's social networks that make one a person (Brand 1996: 145).[32] The obligation to share applies especially to money (*wari*) since in itself money produces nothing in the long term.

For daily expenses, Mande people have become more and more dependent on money (Jansen 2006: 54), as have people everywhere. There is no exit option from the money-based economy. Storing it for an unknown future, however, as a known but unattainable wealth for others, is perceived as a downright insult. While in the West, money is praised for its durability and the possibility to keep it for future use, in Mande one should show one's riches to announce redistribution.[33] Money, and most other goods for that matter, cannot be individually owned. Muurling describes how the well-known *griotte* Sangungwé Kouyaté is visited by lots of people in the days after a performance at a wedding or name-giving ceremony in Bamako. Visits are made by close family but also by others who have come to ask for money. Shortly after the performance, all the money that was given to thank the famous singer for her praise songs has been given away. 'Saving is not possible,' she said 'because many people in Bamako and the surroundings depend on her income' (Muurling 2005: 184). Money that you 'have' will disappear either because it is given to others or 'eaten' (*dum*) by yourself in an attempt to use it before somebody else asks for it. Money is not as durable as we may sometimes believe. On the contrary, it is easily divisible and without individual properties, making it inviting for distribution.

The savings associations that women have organized in Bancoumana, and elsewhere, provide their members with both group pressure to pay the weekly contribution and with a good excuse to refuse the claims of others. During the RoSCA cycle, members build up a right to the fund but at the same time they do not have any access to their money, thereby shielding it from demands from relatives and friends who are asked instead to lend members money so that they can make their contributions to the association. This idea of compulsory saving is an important reason for people to become a member of an association with a RoSCA.

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[32] At their *denkundiw* women can see how well they are doing in life from the number and size of gifts.

[33] The timeframe of redistribution may differ depending on the medium the wealth is stored in. The golden jewellery that many Malian women owned till the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s could be seen as personal property, more so than money: gold jewellery, received at birth or marriage, did not have to be redistributed until after its owner's death. On the contrary, gold that one has dug is seen as being a windfall and needs to be redistributed as soon as possible to create more durable social relationships (cf. Werthmann 2005).

Muurling explains the redistribution of gifts by showing giving to be a way of receiving blessings that will enhance one's chances in life (Muurling 2005: 185). Roth (2005: 129) explains the moral obligation to give differently, stating that: 'money in Mali represents a far less substantial and durable form in which to store wealth than social relationships'. Money can express and reproduce social relationships, through giving. This counts both for gifts to *griottes*, as well as for money put into RoSCAs. Through a RoSCA, members keep their money in motion for a limited time and create positive social bonds (*badenya*) between 'strangers', by making them temporary creditors and debtors. RoSCAs tie people to the association and the individual members. At the same time, money has become an important vehicle for vital economic exchange; to be able to organize rituals that provide women and their families with much-wanted prestige but also to buy consumer-items. Thereby associations with RoSCAs have been able to attract a lot of women in a short time.

These associations are not necessarily any less personal than those that do not deal with money as directly as they do. The expectation that this may be the case (e.g. Rowlands 1995: 118-119)[34] has been inspired by the assumption that money would be a 'neutral instrument of exchange'. In Western economic thought, money is said to forge superfluous a relationship between buyer and seller. The debate that we are left with is on the moral value of the ultimate effect. Is it positive and liberating or negative and restricting if we do not need social relations with others anymore to survive (cf. Kahn 1997; Zelizer 2000; Klamer & van Dalen 2000: 91)? This conceptual division between money and social relationships is a problematic one both in Mande and in the West. In Mande, a prerequisite for a successful transaction is the establishment, not the denial, of a social relationship between buyer and seller. They greet each other and enquire after each other's well-being and that of their families with standard questions and answers, thereby establishing a short-lived social relationship before proceeding to the transaction. Many small traders try to establish a longer-term social relationship with the owners of stores in order to be able to successfully demand products on credit later. In Mande, it is therefore almost impossible to own a store in a place where one has families or friends (Jansen 2005: 86).

The associations with their RoSCAs provide opportunities to accumulate money in such a way that women can claim it once they take the fund. They have often earned the money through trade, 'the buying of goods to sell more expensively'. Money 'earned' in this way is perceived as a windfall and is therefore susceptible to 'falling' (*tomber*). One day, my host sister Fama Diabate, who

[34] Who suggests calling only those associations that are geared at economic advantages for businessmen, by the name of RoSCA. In his article on RoSCAs in Cameroon, he avoids all other associations, precisely those that are of interest here.

acted as my interpreter, and I were on our way to interview a woman and we found a FCFA 10,000 (€ 15) banknote on the main road. We took it with us and handed it over to my host father who kept it for a week waiting for someone to ask for it. When that did not happen, he gave me the same banknote and told me to use this *particular* note as soon as possible to buy candy for the farewell party that we had planned. I was then to give FCFA 5,000 of the change to Fama. Money that one finds – in this case very literally – disappears very quickly; it cannot produce future material wealth because it will 'fall'.[35] It can be used instead to produce a different type of (useful) wealth, that lies in social relationships. It was, therefore, a good idea to use the money that was found for a farewell party or a RoSCA. Social relationships are the most valuable as are the gifts one gets through these activities; the RoSCA fund or gifts at a party are durable in themselves, in addition to the relationships create. They have not been procured by chance but through a slow and socially accepted method of accumulation. A RoSCA association is thus an appropriate system for saving for large expenses; parties and consumer items. The fund is hardly ever used to invest in small businesses, to improve consumption in the longer term (as many development and microcredit organizations would like people to believe). The most important expense for women is the trousseau that their daughters need to get married. FCFA 25,000 of the standard bride price is, in principle, meant to cover these costs but this is far from enough and often cannot be procured by the prospective husband. RoSCAs are a common way of saving for this purpose.

Are RoSCAs microfinance?

One of the main differences between RoSCA savings associations in Bancoumana and microfinance, are the purposes to which RoSCA funds are put. Microcredit, which is very popular in donor circles, is often mentioned in the same breath as RoSCAs because of its similar technical properties. They describe the RoSCA as an existing savings system that, if members wanted to, could be changed into an indigenous microfinance institute (Guérin 2006: 558), as a culturally appropriate and cheap alternative for microcredit with the same positive results (Oxfam America), or as a type of indigenous microfinance in itself (de Swaan & van der Linden 2006).[36] Although both RoSCAs and microcredit are part of the financial landscape (Bouman & Hospes 1994), RoSCAs are not pre-existing locally organized microcredit organizations; money rotates through

[35] It is a well-known phenomenon in Africa that money that is found or (too) easily acquired has to be distributed freely to make it productive for the – more or less – honest finder (cf. Shipton 1989: 71).

[36] The title of this book, based on anthropological studies into groups with RoSCAs, is, curiously enough, titled; '*Mutualist Microfinance*: Informal *Savings Funds* from the Global Periphery to the Core?' (my emphasis).

RoSCAs to strengthen social ties and people are members for this reason. In addition, the money that members receive from a RoSCA fund is rarely invested in the way development organizations would imagine, namely to start or improve an activity with which one could make more money in the future to improve one's situation and that of one's family. Therefore, a number of development thinkers are of the opinion that the RoSCA as a savings system for consumption products should be replaced by microcredit because this would be safer and encourages investment (see Robinson 2001: 240-241).

In practice, it turns out that clients do not always use and interpret formal microfinance institutions (MFIs) in the sense of an economic investment opportunity either. Thus, *Bhil* farmers in India did not care whether the financing facilities of their new savings and credit groups were efficient: 'Regardless of the success or otherwise of the groups as farmer-managed microfinance institutions, they were perceived as the most important change because they stood for access to a range of other project benefits, whether wages, seeds or credit' (Mosse 2005: 214). Lakwo shows how women in rural Uganda have embraced microcredit to start new businesses. However, the effect is not that they have escaped poverty through increased assets, as donors would like 'investors' to believe (Robinson 2001: 20) but they have gained more bargaining power in their households and communities, i.e. empowerment (Lakwo 2006: 187). Empowerment is certainly an aspect of development. It is not, however, the type of development that is promoted by MFIs looking for donors in rich countries (cf. Kühn 2007a), instead it is only applied in certain aspects of MFI activities. In Latin-America it is becoming increasingly common to extend microcredit for the purchase of consumer items as long as it can be refunded, thereby moving from direct investment for development to consumptive credit (Bakx 2007). At the same time the women's groups that are instituted by MFIs, commercial banks and NGOs as a source of social pressure and support for clients who need to refund their loans rarely remain merely a business-oriented group and start to look like associations with RoSCAs.

Microfinance can be compared to the practice and ideas behind associations with RoSCAs but the underlying utopian neo-l0iberal idea of microfinance, subscribed to by all authors who see RoSCAs as a type of microfinance, is however far from the ideas that underlie the RoSCA in a women's association in Bancoumana, Mali.

Conclusion

This chapter began by asking whether the event described in the introduction was about money. It was about money to some extent, however, not about money as a 'neutral instrument of exchange', a notion that has been discarded as an ana-

lytical explanation by a multitude of empirically based publications, but instead about money as a whimsical thing that carries value, although how much value it stands for and the ways in which it can be used depend on the situation. In Bancoumana, money is 'a far less substantial and durable form in which to store wealth than social relationships' (Roth 2005: 129). To create stable wealth, prestigious social networks are created through gifts of money and other goods. Within the realm of women's associations (*tonw*), this can be seen both in RoSCAs and the rituals organized in cooperation with the association. These groups try their very best to avoid default and provide their members with a credible sphere in which to use money to establish and strengthen social relations with the near certainty that this money will be returned. This oppurtunity of trust is of major importance since people have become increasingly dependent on money for their vital daily expenses (Jansen 2006: 54) that include the main life-rituals. Money is not merely a 'neutral instrument of exchange' or used in economic actions like saving, spending or investing. Instead it is used to establish lasting social relationships.

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8

Negotiating insecurity through mobile telephony in Buea, Cameroon

Barbara Tah Gwanmesia

This chapter proposes that rather than a universal (social) desire for communication, it is a rational, individualistic need for access to opportunities (and the chance to meet established needs) that drives the motivation for mobile-phone uptake and use in Africa. Seeming global similarities in the underlying motives for the adoption and use of mobile telephony camouflages regional variations. This, in turn, glosses over the extent to which a region's historical processes influence its people's adoption and use of mobile telephony. This article looks at how the desire for access to opportunities has driven the uptake and usage of mobile telephony in the Anglophone Cameroonian town of Buea, and how Anglophone Cameroon's history, much like the context in which the phone was introduced, has been instrumental in shaping people's motivations for adoption and use. The primary data used here derives from five months of research in Buea amongst university students, professionals, the blind and members of family households. General survey data and observations in the town, as well as an analysis of some of the literature, are also included.

Introduction

Take a combination of university students, blind people, professionals and some members of family households, toss them into a researcher's cooking pot, stir them well; add some seasoning from general surveys – with the salt of observation here and the pepper of ad hoc interviews there – and you will get (or are likely to get) the most improbable concoction of units of analysis for a research project on mobile telephony imaginable, except, of course, if the aim of the re-

search is to find out if there are any consistencies in how and why people from such diverse groups within a society adopt and use the mobile phone.

How and why people in Buea have adopted and used the mobile phone was one of the questions that drove the five-month research that inspired this article. However, this question was an extension of the main focus of the research, which was to examine the ways in which mobile telephony was influencing and being shaped by daily life in Buea. The question on motivation for uptake and use was therefore only relevant to the extent that, as Bar, Pisani & Weber (2007: 1) have argued, '(...) to fully grasp the social, economic and political impact of mobile telephony, we need to understand appropriation: The process through which mobile phone users go beyond mere adoption to make the technology their own and to embed it within their social, economic, and political practices'. By no stretch of the imagination was I expecting that this spin-off question would produce answers that would task the very premise upon which my research rested. Where I had thought that mobile telephony was strictly a social technology, the answers I got suggested that the innovation is an individualistic technology.[1] And while I had conjectured that the only issue to look into when asking questions about how people from different social groups use the mobile phone was what their various communication patterns indicated about their group micro cultures, I discovered that the act of communicating only represents a means to an end. Conversely, where I had concluded that the manner in which people use the mobile phone is born of a universality of motivation (Katz & Aakhus 2002), I found that people's usage patterns expose the extent to which local social and historical factors configure motivation for use. To explain motivation for uptake and use in a society, therefore, an examination of the history of that region was a prerequisite.

Back to Buea: Much as I had succeeded in identifying ways in which people in the town were using the mobile phone and for what purposes, it would take knowledge of (Anglophone) Cameroon's recent history for me to begin to understand the deeper social and cultural considerations driving motivation for the various uses of the phone in the town.[2] This article now begins with an examination of those historical facts.

The first section of the article is thus a discussion of those aspects of (Anglophone) Cameroon's history that have been instrumental in creating the needs and desires responsible for shaping motivation for mobile-phone uptake and use in the town. An analysis follows of the extent to which the needs and wishes born

[1] 'Individualism' here denotes people's prime attention to their individual needs and wellbeing rather to a communal, social drive to stay in contact. While communication and contact are not to be negated, they are not the primary focus.

[2] Mobile telephony fills three different roles in Buea: A functional role, the role of a communicator and a communication technology.

of those historical processes and prevailing conditions have shaped people's rationale for uptake and use. As alluded to above, the findings will be based on research done among four groups of people in Buea: University students, blind persons, an assortment of professionals and members of family-households. The analysis constitutes two elements: An examination of data gathered through observations, informal discussions and interviews; and findings culled from the study's four participating groups. But first, we turn to history.

So what has history got to do with it?

When answers to questions that seem grounded in the present are traced to the near or distant past, history becomes relevant. In Buea, a rather unexpected detail about mobile telephony came to my attention. I discovered that regardless of how participants from the different groups in the study handled or behaved with the mobile phone, their end goal for its use was analogous – namely, to reduce insecurity, ameliorate uncertainty and expand opportunities. I observed too that those conditions of insecurity and uncertainty mentioned above were not the sum total of that which shaped people's sense of urgency in their pursuit of well-being via the mobile phone. It was, in addition to that, the process that had led people to those states of insecurity and uncertainty. In other words, the historical processes that had lead to the conditions driving uptake were as key to understanding motivation for uptake as were those concerns of insecurity, uncertainty and lack. Therefore, knowledge of how history propelled Anglophone Cameroonians to the context in which the mobile phone arrived was essential to fully understanding the motivation for uptake and use of the technology in Buea. History was therefore relevant. This chapter begins its inroads into the historical particulars informing the conditions that the mobile telephone met on its arrived in Anglophone Cameroon. It takes, therefore, as its point of departure the time in Cameroon's history when the effects of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were beginning to take root in the daily lives of Cameroonians. This was the time when mobile telephony arrived.

History has everything to do with it

As in other African countries, mobile telephony arrived in Cameroon at a time of socio-economic instability and a time when the SAPs were compounding to Africa's woes. In the case of Cameroon, the problem was exacerbated by the unpreparedness of Cameroonians, or, more appropriately perhaps, by the fact that Cameroonians had not primed or equipped themselves for the economic meltdown that begun in 1986 and to which SAPs proceeded to add more coal. Prior to this period, Cameroonians had been living in relative economic stability. As Jua

(2003) points out, before the crisis, the transition from school to employment – that is, from school to independence and thereby a stable life – was an uninterrupted socio-political choreography. In this routinized state of social, political and economic repose, political indifference governed and, arguably, bred complacency in people *(*Ibid.). Then again, there was some justification for this complacency. Between 1970 and 1982, the gross national product (GNP) rose from 300 billion CFA to 2,000 billion CFA (Akoko 2007). It grew by 4.8% annually in real terms between 1960 and 1978, and at a record rate of 8.2% per year between 1978 and 1986. Until 1978, the contribution of agriculture to GNP and exports was 30% and 74% respectively (Ntangsi 1991). This was a direct result of President Ahidjo's Green Revolution, which encouraged agricultural development (Ngoh 1987; Mbuagbaw *et al*. 1987). Cameroon's credit worthiness grew amongst Western nations and they, and France in particular, invested heavily in the country (Jua 1991; Krieger & Takougang 1998; Akoko 2007). The job market expanded and the civil service ballooned as the government, which was the country's main employer, took on large numbers of people. Because both Francophones and Anglophones, though unequally, benefited from the economic climate and the employment rate, Buea's civil-service population swelled. Issues of unemployment or the social integration of youth were not particularly significant as the transition from school to work was fluid for thousands of Cameroonians (Jua 2003). Then in about 1986 things began to change, and by 1994 the situation for even the employed had become testing. While this took many Cameroonians by surprise, the downturn did not start in 1986. There had been indications of future problems as early as the late 1970s but these echoes of impending trouble remained blanketed under the government's reluctance to acknowledge the problem or inculcate outside help.[3] Between 1978 and 1986 agriculture's share declined to 22% of GDP and 51% of exports (Ntangsi 1991) and during the 1986/87 fiscal year, Cameroon recorded a drop of 27.8% in its export revenue due to external (a fall in the price of oil and agricultural products) and internal reasons. Amongst the internal causes were the 'blow-out of public expenditures and a crisis of public finance, a high-cost domestic economy, a stagnant and non-competitive industry in both international and domestic markets'(Eba'a Atyi 1998) and the poor management and misuse of national resources by a casual bureaucratic public administration (Jua 1991; Mbuagbaw & Akoko 2004; Nkwi 2006; Akoko 2007). In all these developments, nothing apparently crossed the radar of the unsuspecting Cameroonian masses who, as a result, did not see the crisis coming. Yet coming it was.

[3] I am still to find literature that suggests preparedness among the Cameroonian masses for the economic meltdown and its consequences.

Having failed to independently manage the emerging crisis, the Cameroonian government eventually signed a stand-by agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 1988 and a structural adjustment loan in June 1989. However this would prove a bitter pill for Cameroonians because, as Jua (2003: 1) noted, 'Intrinsic to the (SAP) program was a commitment to reducing the budget deficit and downsizing the state. Practically, this meant the freezing of employment opportunities in an economy in which the state was the main employer. Generally, the SAP has been a macroeconomic catastrophe, engendering high unemployment and limited growth.' Jua (2003: 2) would also observe that 'It also (…) marginalized youths or reduced their chances for a sustainable livelihood'. Yet more trouble was pending for Cameroonians. In 1993/4 the French government devalued the CFA, sparking unrest across countries in the CFA zone as salaries halved (or dropped even more in some cases), while commodities remained at the same price. Describing the situation as a salary tsunami (in the February 2008 instalment of the monthly debates on topical issues organized by the Fredrich Ebert Foundation Press Club in Yaoundé), a mathematics teacher, Jean Kandem, declared that 'a public service worker on indice 1140 was on a gross monthly salary of FCFA 420,425 but by November of the same year the sum was cut to FCFA 154,287 representing a slash of FCFA 266,138 giving a percentage of 63.3'. In the same debate, economist Dr Francis Menjo Baye claimed that government ambiguity in economic policies and the 'speculative attitudes of economic agents' only left the inflationary tendencies in motion (*The Post Online* 25/2/2008).

For Anglophone Cameroonians who had traditionally had a secondary (lower) status in a Francophone-dominated political system, this was an untenable situation. Jua & Konings (2004: 6) put it as follows:

> In February 2003 it was announced that there were only 57 Anglophone youths among the more than five thousand new recruits joining the police academies. The next month records show that there were only 12 Anglophones among the 172 new recruits into the Customs Department. And, even more significantly, these Anglophones were only given junior staff positions while all the senior staff positions went to Francophones.

Anglophone Cameroonians therefore lost all trust in their government's ability to protect and provide, and developed a resulting sense of uncertainty and fear for the future. People were no longer sure if or when salaries would be slashed, when inflation might hit or when the president might announce a special decree. Writing on the conditions that became the norm in Cameroon from the mid-1980s onwards, Akoko (2007) notes that:

> The crisis (gave) rise to compounding poverty, misery and unemployment, (fermenting) fear, doubt, and uncertainty right down to increase in social insecurity. Armed banditry (became) common place, with bandits operating in open daylight and often

with impunity. More and more young people and whole families even (began) dreaming of or migrating to the West to seek greener pastures.

Seemingly trapped in a state of perpetual uncertainty, Anglophone Cameroonians had become distrustful. Mobile telephony would, thus, make its inroad into an environment undermined by tension, insecurity, distrust, fear and a new proclivity among harried Anglophone Cameroonians to use whatever appeared in their line of vision to reduce and negotiate their sense of vulnerability.[4] With its ability to allow instant access to relevant information, instant access to people and instantaneous real-time results, the mobile phone came to Buea with the remarkable potential of becoming anything and everything in the hands of people constrained, restricted and in need of financial, psychological and emotional freedom. It was thus destined to be a powerful weapon in the battle that Anglophone Cameroonians were waging against uncertainty and lack.

I found three roles that mobile telephony was occupying in the lives of people in Buea: A functional role, an expressive role, and the role of a communication technology.

In its functional capacity, the phone showed itself to be several different household gadgets at the same time: A flashlight in dark streets or during power outages, an alarm clock, a watch, a calculator, a portable money-exchange bureau, and a multimedia resource.

In its expressive role, I observed it to serve not as a technology through which feelings, thoughts, ideas, hopes or aspirations could be conveyed, but as the expression itself, i.e. a means by which unsaid messages could be dispatched – say, for example, a person taking a call from a particular caller and then deliberately switching off the phone without answering, thereby expressing a form of coded sentiment to the caller. Another way in which the phone translated into 'the expression itself' was in its ability to communicate to observers the state of people's interpersonal relationships through the way they handled, answered, stowed away or behaved with the device with regards to each other or one another.

It was in the phone's role as a communication medium, however, that I traced the deep connection between usage pattern, needs and local historical processes.

[4] The definition of vulnerability here is based on Omar Cardona's conceptualization of the word. He states that 'Vulnerability represents the physical, economic, political or social susceptibility or predisposition of a community to damage in the case of a destabilizing phenomenon of natural or anthropogenic origin' (Cardona 2004).)

The mobile phone as a communication device: Deeper reasons for uptake and use.

As a communication device, mobile-phone usage in Buea showed itself to be like everywhere else in the world: Person/s to person/s, and through calls (synchronous voice-to-voice contact), texts (asynchronous person-to-person contact or written messages from one mobile-phone screen to the other) or beeping (calling and hanging up before the call could be answered).

Ordinarily, calling is the most expensive of these three mobile-phone communication methods in Buea as elsewhere, followed by text messaging and lastly by beeping. One would therefore expect that in an environment of economic hardship, people would make calls selectively and rely more on texts and beeping. This is not what I observed in Buea. I noticed that rather than use the cheaper text method to contact people abroad, no fewer than 90% of study respondents instead made calls to overseas contacts. To my question about why this was so I was told that texts were the preserve of local contacts (specifically close relations such as friends and family), while calls were reserved for all other types of contacts, especially contacts abroad. The problem with my confusion about this seemingly upside-down logic was that I was still operating from the school of thought where communication and contact were seen as the driving forces behind the uptake and use of mobile telephony. Not until the correlation between desire for access to opportunities (or access to the opportunity to meet established needs) and uptake and usage patterns dawned on me did it make sense that modes of mobile-phone communication were being determined in Buea not by the availability of a person's phone credit but by the expected result of the contact. I gathered from respondents that, on a scale from one to ten in importance, calls abroad were often in the range of nine. The reason being that the grounds for communication varied from urgent family requirements to maintaining vital connections as in the link-up activities in Jamaica (Miller & Horst 2006), or soliciting direct help in kind or cash for other mutually beneficial purposes. I was told that such long-distance exchanges had to be devoid of mistakes, misquotes or miscommunication of any kind. Text messages, with their predisposition to mistakes undetected in real time, were therefore a precarious means of contacting people abroad. The immediacy of calls tended to make it less likely that mistakes would go undetected.

Where the value of text correspondence seemed most obvious was in its ability to allow for mutual psychological assistance. An overwhelming number of participants said they generally sent text messages to encourage one another, swap vital information, micro-coordinate, and exchange Bible passages. Implicit in these explanations was the intimation that text messaging was a binding device, a breeding ground of solidarity amongst people locked in the same condi-

tions. Ultimately therefore, mobile-phone calls and texts were not about communicating for the sake of making contact but about reaching a desired end – be it financial help from abroad or release from stress from within.

Picture 8.1 Building (left) of one of MTN's offices in Buea. Note the call box beside it.
[© Barbara Tah Gwanmesia]

Another observation I made about the use of mobile telephony in its role as a medium of communication was not how it was being used but who it was being used to contact. I noticed that young people tended to call friends and families most, while older persons, such as the professionals in the study, called family and then business and work acquaintances. I would rapidly understand why.

Several young people in Buea told me that their friends were a lifeline of hope, providing opportunities and jobs for them, a font of assistance when things got tough and a source of promises that could not be expected from the govern-

ment or, for some, from family members. For students and young people still hoping to find a career, therefore, getting up in the morning and calling or texting key contacts or staying on the phone for long hours (for instance during the provider MTN's night-time promotional offer) discussing new information and possibilities was not a luxury (or seen as such).

As for the professionals in the study, monitoring the well-being of family members – as much out of love as out of duty – helped release stress. I first observed this connection between family and stress release in uptake patterns. I found that the persistent anxiety concerning the health and circumstances of loved ones in the 'geography of crisis' (Mbembe & Roitman 1995), which the socio-economic and socio-political dynamics of Cameroon had produced, had resulted in parents and established persons buying phones for their loved ones. Almost all the students I spoke to said their phones had been bought for them by parents, sisters, aunts, brothers and/or cousins who were keen on keeping tabs on their health, movements or living conditions. Many of the professionals I spoke to, specifically the teachers, said they had given phones to their children and other relations or had been given phones themselves by, say, their husbands or others, for security reasons, for peace of mind or to facilitate micro-coordination. This purchasing of mobile telephony for others is referred to, in the literature, as 'gifting', but in Buea I observed that the act transcended gifting. It represented the givers' peace of mind as much as anything else. Here again, the mobile phone's worth proved to reside not in its function as a technology through which people communicated but in the opportunity it gave people to deal with stress, fear and the uncertainties engendered by Cameroon's own specific circumstances.

However much these observations reflect data gathered in Buea, they do not illustrate the connecting thread linking one participating group's motivation for uptake and use of mobile telephony to the others, and vice versa. For it is this link that suggests or shows a commonality of motivation for use within the town – without which there can be no talk of a generality of usage pattern or reason for use of the mobile phone in the town based on the region's unique circumstances and people's individual needs and aspirations (or rather the needs and aspirations generated by those circumstances). Such a conclusion would only negate assertions in this chapter about the influence of mobile telephony on society in Buea. The following section picks up on this theme of a harmony of motivation amongst the four groups in the study (the blind, students, professionals and members of family households), beginning with the findings amongst students.

The symbolism of mobile telephony

My research amongst students began with assumptions. False assumptions. Chief amongst these was the assumption that, to students, the mobile phone was above and beyond all else a status symbol. This was a belief born of my own preconceptions about youth behaviour and what appeared from observation and discussions to be students' attitudes towards mobile telephony. Early in the study I had taken time to exclusively observe students. For an hour a day and at different times of the day and on different days of the week for two weeks, I sat on the grass at the UB junction (the entrance to the University of Buea) – out of the sun and away from the stream of call-box operators, hawkers and traders - and watched the students (or the young people who I assumed were students at the University of Buea). I watched girls giggle, boys give the bump and young people stop and then take calls. I observed young men and women walk along with their phones to their ears, or sit in solitary spots engaging their phones. Every so often, two or more young people would guffaw at something that seemed to appear on the screen of one of their mobile phones. These phone carryings-on were, of course, not an unremitting flow of activities. They were intermittent. Sometimes, barring the continuous visits of young people (phone in hand) to the different call boxes, I would have to wait for minutes before observing one or more phone-related activities.

Nothing much about these activities or the way students handled or acted with their phones spelt drama, but my preconceptions about students' relationships with their phones still held. Even though thirty of the thirty-four students in the study said the phone had no other value to them than its ability to help them get class and other information, expand their social network, give them access to spiritual counselling, emergency aid, and instant access to relevant others or act as safety net, my view scarcely shifted. The sophisticated looks of some of the phones and what seemed like students' tendency to admire each other's phones hardly discouraged this perspective. Neither did complaints by a minority of student participants in the study about the predisposition of other students to parade their phones, talk obnoxiously loudly on the devices or let their phones ring in inappropriate places change my way of thinking. In this mode of thinking, I could not see the true symbolism of the phone to the students. I could not, or did not, see that the phone's real symbolism for them lay deep in the recesses of the socio-economic/socio-political state of Cameroon and its impact on their aspirations and hopes. I would eventually discover this, in part, as a result of three sets of views I discerned among students in the study.

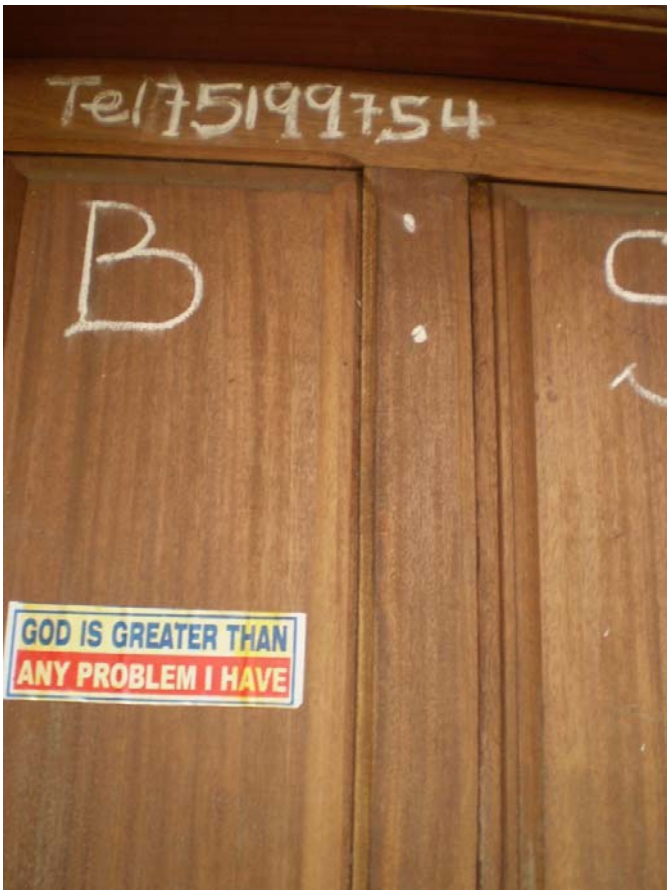
The first view, held by about 30% of the students, suggested that mobile telephony is a technology that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer since rich people use their sophisticated phones to get to more information and oppor-

tunities, while poor people, devoid of such advanced phones, have no such access to opportunity-creating possibilities. Not owning a top-of-the-range phone, in this view, was considered a disadvantage, and not owning one at all meant re-signing oneself to the economic stagnation facing the Cameroonian masses. A second view of the phone, held by another 30% of the students, was that the phone had brought a levelling of the playing field with its potential to offer poor people what had before been the exclusive preserve of the wealthy: Useful contacts, results-creating information and commercial offers. According to this view, possessing a phone could give poor people the means to access information remotely, make valuable contacts at any given time, and organize themselves for life-impacting opportunities. As in the first belief system, advocates of this view felt that not owning a mobile phone was tantamount to relegating oneself to the mediocrity that ownership generally terminated. In the third and final view, advocates proposed that simply owning a phone qualified a person for world citizenship. The view was that although the phone does not immediately make such world citizenship possible, it does offer the owner a route to active participation in the global village. As with the first two views, in this standpoint too, not owning a phone suggested a person's entombment in the hopelessness of a stagnant socio-political environment.

In all three views, I traced two themes: (i) not owning a phone relegates a person to mediocrity due to a lack of access to information, and (ii) owning a phone offers a window of hope. The symbolic value of the phone, according to these views, rests in its representation of (or promise for) the future, and in what it suggests about the owner's personal prospects. As appeared to be the case with the students' sentiments about the Internet, the phone to them was a light in the darkness of hopelessness and lack of promise. The correlation I later found between the students' relationship with the Internet and their relationship with the phone only served to testify to the students' apparent belief in the phone as hope. During my months in Buea, I observed that the majority of visitors to Internet cafes were youths (mostly students), and that these young people tended to visit sites on higher education, with chat facilities, distant friends, games and football matches, celebrity images and other exotic images. I noticed that they visited social communities, Craig lists, match-making sites, porn sites, sites with tourist information and others promising opportunities for travel abroad.

On closer reflection, I realized that all of these sites had one thing in common: They consistently offered promises or images that blotted out the reality of the present. They displayed mental, psychological and emotional highways to other realities, to better possibilities, and to hope. Nyamnjoh (2005), Jua (2003) and Akoko (2007) have all argued that the Internet is a magnate for young Anglophone Cameroonians who, in that vast universe, are finding and asserting their

voice. The Internet, thus, is a place where one can beat the odds, and find and create possibilities. In a Cameroon where there is little hope of finding employment after university, nothing, I realized, compared to the implications of the images presented on Internet sites. The mobile phone, I now saw, with its portability, design and facilities, and with its access to worlds beyond the present, presented the same glimpse of possibilities and hope that images on the Internet gave. Students' attachment to the Internet and their extensive use of the mobile phone therefore confirmed their need to look beyond the boundaries of their present and to look to the future.



Picture 8.2 Door to someone's business place representing the juxtaposition between mobile telephony and religion: the number written in chalk and the religious expression in the form of a sticker. It is a theme that took me unawares in Buea, and proved to be a key framework of analysis.
[© Barbara Tah Gwanmesia]

The professionals

Amongst the professionals, I found attitudes towards the phone that at first seemed so divorced and completely out of sync with the attitude of students that the notion of a corresponding motive for usage seemed improbable. Teachers, for instance, tended to treat the phone as a necessary evil, a thing of decadence, lies, crime and financial drain, yet indispensable for coordinating responsibilities, managing their home affairs, and opening up avenues for career enhancement, residual income, and micro-coordination. For the nurses and the other professionals in the group, the phone tended to be seen as a career vaccine – a technology that was valuable for its ability to boost job and business opportunities, enhance their social and family lives, and help organize daily affairs. Neither the nurses nor the teachers nor the mix of other professionals in the study saw the phone, therefore, as anything other than a useful gizmo necessary to make prevailing circumstances more manageable. The functionality of their relationship with the phone ostensibly showed them as realists – men and women who used the phone to make the best of life as it was, rather than as it ought to be. The students' symbolic use of the phone, on the other hand, seemingly made them idealists, people whose attention was directed outwards. So, ostensibly, students used the phone to look outwards while professionals used it to look inwards – at the here and now. The dichotomy that this suggested between the two could not seem more real; yet what apparently was real was the fact that the aforementioned differences and dissimilarities between the two usage patterns were what made their respective motivation for uptake and use so alike and so very connected.

It would take appreciation of the circumstances of each group against the backdrop of their mutual history and collective living conditions to clarify this fact for me. I saw, for instance, that regardless of their separate group micro-circumstances, both the professionals and the students lived in an environment defined by a historical precedence that, for the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians, had been destabilizing. Berner & Trulsson (2000: 277-309) noted that some sociologists argue that 'the reduction of uncertainty is one of the major preoccupations of social life; the fight against continually produced disorder is imperative'. For the professionals and students in the study therefore, the overriding preoccupation has been their struggle to reduce uncertainty and negate all sense of vulnerability. Given their socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, this battle has been different for each group, yet the goal has remained the same. For example, on the one hand, the professionals have jobs in an environment where jobs are scarce, while for the students it is a possibility that seems farther and farther away given existing realities. What each then has

wanted the phone to do for them has been different, but the goal similar. History clarifies this point.

As the history of Cameroon indicates, unemployment – especially amongst Anglophone Cameroonians – was the most immediate consequence of the economic meltdown in the 1980s. By 2001, unemployment amongst Cameroon's youth had grown to 49.9% (*The Post Online Cameroon* 14/2/2006), while a 2008 report showed Cameroon's national unemployment rate to have risen to 20% prior to 2007.[5] In such conditions, having a (permanent) job meant possessing a gem. For the professionals, that gem was already at hand, so all they required of the mobile phone was for it to enhance whatever opportunity was there to augment the salaries they were earning and as such cushion the many eventualities that had become the feature of Cameroon's 'geography of crisis', and, if possible, maintain the status quo in which they were salaried men and women. Making the here and now better as it was, was their concern. For the students however, the here and now was their problem. In the economic environment in which they were living (where at least 49% expected to be unemployed after graduating), there was little prospect of a job or a career after school. And so, like the Internet, which had thrown open a window onto a world of opportunities and possibilities with scholarships, jobs, new ideas and new playing fields, the phone was representative of a promise: To flee the mediocrity of the present and to network and find valuable coaching into the paradise of hope. Akoko (2007: 12) has contended that 'with the added advantage of the internet and cellular phones, Cameroonians in the Diaspora daily liaise with relatives and friends at home, coaching them how to avoid the ever-sophisticated immigration hurdles mounted by Western governments'.

It is clear, therefore, that though the ways in which the students and professionals use the phone show marked differences, the motivation driving the different patterns of usage is the same. Just like the professionals, the students want to better their lives but, unlike the professionals, their peace of mind does not hinge on the status quo. Looking outwards through the phone is what promises to help them reach their goal. And this 'looking outwards' scarcely makes the students' motivation for uptake and use any different from that of the professionals who are 'looking inwards'. It only indicates that the manner in which the phone is translated to reduce uncertainties or lower any sense of vulnerability is different for the two, while the intention of use is the same. The two groups have little or no trust in the system's ability to better their circumstances. Just as the one group has felt trapped within existing conditions, so has the other; and just as the one has been in hot pursuit of that which would reduce feelings of helplessness, mistrust and historically sewn anxiety, so has the

[5] http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/487ca1fa420.html.

other. Each group has sought to use the phone to make things happen for them, and has done so along routes reflective of their position in society. The same conclusion could not be avoided concerning the blind persons in the study, in spite of the improbability of any correlation between the blind and the two above-mentioned groups.

The blind

After studying the life stories of six blind people and interacting with thirty-one trainees in a rehabilitation centre for the blind, one thing became clear: For the majority of blind people, if not all, life amongst sighted people is informed by misunderstandings, prejudice, imposed dependence, disrespect and a lack of freedom. In his article 'Sighted Don't Want Blind', Robert Feinstein writes:

> Sighted people condescend to us. They treat us like children or as if we are mentally impaired. They talk louder to us because they think we are deaf as well as sightless (…) Socially, blind are stuck in a corner. As a blind guy once put it, 'Where you sit is where you stay! Sighted don't want blind to mingle – you're too awkward, you might ruin the party (…).' (Feinstein 2003)

Michael Simpson, the President of Blind Citizens Australia, adds:

> I genuinely believe that Blind Citizens Australia is making a difference and changing what it means to be blind, but sometimes I despair at the task before us. We continue to receive too many calls from people who have been discriminated against because of blindness, too many calls from people who can't find employment suited to them as a blind person, and too many calls from blind people who are concerned about the lack of specialist services. What is particularly frustrating is when organisations which are publicly funded and have a charter to provide services to blind people treat us with disregard and abuse. (*Blind Citizens News*, February 1999)

From these two comments, we get the sense that one of the most overriding concerns of the blind person is the ability to live a life of dignity, freedom and independence. In fact, this proposition becomes fact when the works of such prominent blind people as mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer, novelists Sally Hobart Alexander and Frances Lief Neer, along with the writings of contributors to various publications for the blind and occasionally the sighted across the world are compared. From these works, we see that what the blind person seeks most is independence, equity, respect, equality, empowerment and, above all, freedom – the freedom to be, to act and to go about his/her own business just like the next person.

The lives of the blind participants in the study revealed that the blind of Buea are as restricted by the same sighted prejudices and ignorance that hound blind persons in other parts of the world; but that unlike the blind in rich countries,

Picture 8.3 Blind, or visually impaired boy. If he can see anything, it is just spots in darkness. With his phone he takes pictures and sends and receives text messages. [© Barbara Tah Gwanmesia]

blind people in Buea do not have access to the types of technological and institutional assistance that make independence and freedom easier for richer blind people to fathom. I found that the life of the average blind person in Cameroon is circumscribed by the same local conditions that have been stifling the aspirations of the students and professionals in this study.

While Robert Feinstein can write that 'we (the blind) are a thorn in their flesh (of the sighted), an irritation that they cannot rid themselves of because new legislation gives us minimal protection' (Feinstein 2003) and Blind Citizens Australia's President**,** Michael Simpson, confidently declared that 'what is parti-

cularly frustrating is when organisations which are publicly funded and have a charter to provide services to blind people treat us with disregard and abuse' (*Blind Citizens News*, 02/1999). The blind people I met in Buea would be hard pressed to find any grounds on which to stand regarding dependence on a publicly funded organization to advocate for or protect their rights. They, unlike their counterparts in the West, have to do all they can to better their own situation without relying on the state. Like the students and professionals in the study, they have an enduring desire to reduce their collective stress and uncertainties, and must fight to achieve this on their own. As a result, I came to glean three premises upon which the blind in the study use the mobile phone.

Ordinarily, the blind use the phone to text (*yes, text!*), beep and call. They use it to take photographs (*indeed!)* and to entertain themselves through listening to ring tones or to the radio, or through *playing* with or on it. They also use the phone to send and receive money, organize their home and work lives and business affairs remotely, as well as to keep in contact with family and relevant others. Additionally, they use it to search remotely for jobs, promote various activities and participate in diverse engagements. The operative word here, however, is 'ordinarily' because what I discovered to be the reality was that these usage patterns were no more than the front-office façade of what was actually taking place between the phone and the blind. I found that the phone had become three things to the blind people in the study, namely (i) an opportunity for pro-activity, (ii) a level playing field, and (iii) a window onto the world beyond. Let us consider these points in more detail.

Rather than sitting back and waiting for the sighted to take initiatives, the blind were taking the upper hand and making calls to whomever, whenever and for whatever reason they chose. Fourteen-year-old Felicite, one of the visually-impaired girls at the Bulu Blind Centre where I carried out much of my research amongst the blind set the tone for this conclusion. The Felicite I thought I knew was a timid and seemingly withdrawn girl, in any event she was withdrawn as far as I, a sighted stranger, was concerned. Yet Felicite not only mustered the courage to call me by phone once, but multiple times, to say she wanted to talk to me. For Felicite to have picked up the phone and taken to calling a seeming stranger simply to express a certain sentiment, was pro-activity incarnate.

On two occasions, blind people told me that 'the sighted judge by sight' and 'the sighted see but do not perceive'. If that were the case, then where the sighted could not judge a person by the sound of that person's voice, the blind generally could. Or if a blind person could not attain such a feat, s/he would be in a position to deal with the sighted person on the same wavelength, i.e. by sound rather than by sight. Additionally, with the advantage of sight taken away, a

sighted employer, in the case of a job interview, would be hard pressed to judge a person's physical status via a phone conversation.

I came to realize that the phone had given blind people access to the world. No longer was it necessary for a blind person to leave the safety of his/her home for every engagement that involved distance. The blind person could now simply sit at home and be a world citizen, participating in phone conferences with other people without the danger of ever getting lost. Even when lost, as I discovered, the phone is now a trusted companion: where a lost blind person would previously have needed to request help from strangers, s/he now has the option of calling a friend or loved one for help. Borrowing from the sentiment of one of the blind participants in the study, the phone is now a sort of life line for many of those with the good fortune to own one. For them, its use as a means of communicating has become secondary to its ability to offer independence, freedom and a means to negotiate the stresses and uncertainties of life in Cameroon's 'geography of crisis'.

Family households

Regarding the diverse family households in the study, I was able to draw five conclusions, though for this article it is the last two that are of immediate analytical relevance. The first conclusion I drew was that mobile telephony highlights the state of the relationship between household members by feeding into the existing patterns of interaction in the household. Secondly, by highlighting the state of a household, mobile telephony exacerbates any prevailing conditions in that home. Thirdly, by highlighting and exacerbating the conditions of a household, mobile telephony reveals what members of a household most need to fix amongst themselves or, rather, what is precious enough to be maintained. Fourthly, the way people use the phone in the home in relation to each other reveals attempts by household members to either distance themselves from others or become closer. And lastly, individuals use the phone within homes according to their personal aspirations and needs – be these geared towards the good of the entire household or the individual's private agenda.

As noted above, only the last two reflections are of relevance for this chapter. As for the fourth point, I noticed that in homes where rancour, tension and frustration prevailed, people's relationships with and their handling of the phone were shrouded in secrecy. In addition, they tended to exhibit a marked resistance to sharing phone credit or phone-related devices. In homes where love and camaraderie reigned, the opposite held true. Turning to point five above, I found that individual aspirations tended to determine patterns of mobile phone use within households, resulting in diverse patterns of phone use within a single household. In some households, for instance, younger persons would spend time

calling or interacting with friends and other outside acquaintances by phone, while household heads, especially female household heads, would limit phone credit to managing domestic affairs, business or work-related matters and checking on the well-being or activities of family members. These divorced phone usage patterns clearly exposed and reflected the concerns and aspirations of each user. Thus, just as for the students, the professionals and the blind in the study, the motivations for using mobile phones in family households exposed not only the desire to communicate, but also the relentless impulse to fulfil needs engendered by circumstance – be they perceived or real.

Conclusion

It becomes clear from the above that the motivation for mobile-phone uptake and use is not driven merely by a desire for communication or contact, but also by the wish to gain access to opportunities and meet needs. That data from members of such diverse groups as students, professionals, the blind, and household members would not only confirm general observations made in Buea about needs and uptake patterns but link the motivation for mobile-phone uptake and use by these groups to their collective difficulties and historical deficiencies gives licence to the argument that rational, needs-based calculations motivate uptake and use of mobile telephony, and that this has been the case in Buea. For the students in this study, we see how their stifling living conditions, both perceived and real, geared their symbolic use of the phone towards edging away from the here and now. For the professionals, the need to lower existing uncertainties, to cushion the dearth of opportunities and bring order and organization to their lives has guarded their use of the mobile phone. For the blind, the desire for freedom and independence has driven motivation, while in family households, members' individual needs have influenced uptake and usage patterns. In all these cases, communication itself becomes the motivating factor only when it is an end that is unequivocally filling a need.

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9

Challenges for ethnographic research in fragile situations: Research among youth in post-war Burundi

Lidewyde H. Berckmoes

Post-war Burundi provides a research context that requires both the researcher and the researched to constantly assess and balance security and the research objective. This chapter discusses the methodological challenges in conducting ethnographic research, their implications for security and the data obtained; and the way this researcher approached the challenges. It reflects on the choice of research site, the social spaces available for research, openness, trust and inconsistencies in interviews. It is argued that an important way of dealing with the methodological challenges posed by post-war contexts is to pay specific attention to the situatedness of data, exploring both 'information' and 'context' in a dialectical manner.

Introduction

Discussions about war in Africa tend to prompt images of angry young men with machetes, brutal attacks on women and girls, and endless streams of refugees. These images have been circulating for decades in news broadcasts, newspaper reports and documentaries about Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the DRC. They depict what in academic and policy circles are known as the 'new wars', which can be differentiated from the 'old wars' in that they constitute interzonal events rather than conflicts between states (Richards 2005). These wars are often characterized as involving irregular militias of youth in primitive violence with no clear ideological basis. They are seen in the first place as expressions of ancient hatred, in which ethnicity and culture have become 'ineradicable things-in-

themselves' (Richards 2005: 8; Vigh 2006). The 1993-2005 civil war in Burundi, which forms the backdrop for this chapter, has also been depicted in this way.

Yet the representation of civil war as primitive violence provides an over-simplified image of what actually happens. It restricts our understanding of the complex causes and different manifestations of civil war. Richards (2005: 12) argues in this respect that by analyzing war as 'a disorderly bad' it is unjustly taken out of its social context. Instead, war needs to be seen as a social possibility, something made through social action and something that can be moderated by social action. This allows one to look at people as agents acting during times of war and peace. It enables an exploration of not only questions about why or what war is but also how war comes about. Space is thus created to explore questions about peace-building processes and how to strengthen them, which seems especially relevant in Burundi where 'peace' continues to be very fragile.

To research the practices of war and peace, an ethnographic approach is particularly useful (Ibid). 'Ethnographic research allows one to slip beneath the obvious or speculative. It enables us to go behind the thin, shiny surfaces of politicized discourse and analyse everyday political praxis instead' (Vigh 2006: 22). I adopted an ethnographic approach in my research on Burundian youth but during fieldwork, which began in the summer of 2007, I was confronted with several methodological challenges. This chapter focuses on these challenges: Their implications for security and the data obtained; and the way I dealt with the challenges.

The Burundian 'terrain'

Burundi's background, its turbulent history and its continued instability are important to an understanding of the methodological challenges I encountered during fieldwork. Burundi is a small landlocked country in the Great Lakes Region and for decades it has endured cycles of violence, refugee movements and waves of returnees. Since a new president was democratically elected in 2005, Burundi has been officially recognized as a democracy at peace, but political struggles, economic challenges and the impact of war on the social fabric are posing recurrent threats to this peace. Updates on the political situation, security and development show fluctuating prospects from optimistic to negative and back again. Vigh (2006: 12), who conducted research in post-war Guinea-Bissau, uses the concept 'terrain' to refer to such instability, arguing that 'terrain' takes on the quality of the different elements underlying the predicament of living in an unstable context 'where one has to constantly assess and reinterpret the character, dangers and possibilities of the shifting social matter – having certainty only of the frailty of socio-political orders'.

Box 9.1 War and post-war in Burundi

It will take too long to tell you [the history of this country] now, but if you know that everyone has a different version, you already know a lot. (Interviewee, Bujumbura, June 2007)

The conflict in Burundi ran predominantly along ethnic lines – although different lines of division played an important role as well (Kadende-Kaiser & Kaiser 1997).[1] Ethnic stratification in Burundi, as in neighbouring Rwanda, can be traced back to pre-colonial times but hardened during German and Belgian colonial rule (Lemarchand in Waters 2003; Christensen 1985). Rigid opposition was encouraged in this period, with the Tutsi minority being elevated to a higher level at the expense of the Hutu majority. Tension between the different groups rose after independence when ethnic violence flared up time and again, resulting in the infamous massacres of 1965, 1969, 1972 and 1988. In its initial three republics, the Burundian government was dominated by Tutsi from the southern province of Bururi until democratic elections were held in June 1993. The first elected (Hutu) president was assassinated just a hundred days later in October 1993 and his assassination is often considered to mark the beginning of the most recent civil war, which ravaged the country for the following decade.

The first major step in peace negotiations resulted from international pressure. Overseen by South Africa, the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement was signed on 28 August 2000. 'This Agreement and its protocols marked the beginning of the transition out of war towards the development of new institutions designed to support and maintain peace, integrate the army, adopt a new constitution, organise elections, and kick-start development' (Uvin 2007: 39). However, its signing did not lead to a halt in the fighting and it was only after the largest rebel group, the CNDD-FDD, and the Burundian army signed a protocol on political, defence and security power sharing that fighting calmed down. Another rebel group, the FNL, did not lay down its weapons until April 2009 when it was transformed into a political party.

Poor economic conditions, competing land claims by returning refugees and people who remained in Burundi during the war, human-rights abuses and a failing justice system continue to threaten hopes for a sustainable peace. The country's social fabric and relations between people at all levels of society have been devastated by the war, exacerbating not only ethnic divisions but damaging personal relations between community members, neighbours and families (Tol *et al*. 2007). Establishing lasting peace still requires a lot of work.

Instability has unavoidable consequences for ethnographic research as research always carries with it the need to negotiate fieldwork practice. Yet this need is exacerbated in war and post-war contexts like in Burundi. Instability impacts on the reality studied as well as on the researcher's own position. Both the researched and the researcher constantly need to assess and find a balance between the objective of the research and security. Furthermore, the constantly

[1] In addition to the ethnic dimension, at least two other issues have been important in shaping the balance of power in post-colonial Burundi: regionalism, which refers tot the geopolitics that divide the country into three key regions where military control, the intelligentsia and an underprivileged 'rest' characterize the regions, and a 'politicized military'. The military has dominated politics since the *coup* in 1966, resulting in a strong segregation between civilians and the military (Daley 2007; Kadende-Kaiser & Kaiser 1997).

changing socio-political context and the uncertain living circumstances of the researched make information hard to 'read'. Methodologically, this affects the informants who are approachable, matters of continuity, issues of trust and the reliability of data. Based on my experiences in Burundi, this chapter discusses these issues by looking into the choice of research site, the social spaces available for research, openness, trust and inconsistencies in interviews. First let us turn to the choice of the fieldwork research site.

The fieldwork site: *Centre Jeunes Kamenge*

> After a day of project supervision in the rural province of Cibitoke, we returned to Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi. We made a short detour to one of the northern city quarters to drop off a girl we had taken along from Cibitoke; one of the clients of my host organization. It was my first time in these northern quarters – impoverished and overly crowded. The driver lurched from left to right not only to avoid the usual holes in the road which haven't had any maintenance since before the war but also to avoid all the busses to and from town, bicycles carrying packs of bananas, market women and girls, idle boys, young men white from grinding maize, men on their way to the bars and, many goats – all manoeuvring for a place on the road. In the quarters, new houses were being built everywhere. Everything was in motion. Some buildings along the road, however, were desperately still, with bullet holes or blackened remnants as a reminder of more hostile times. The project coordinator pointed to the left and said to me: 'Here, you see the flags? That's where the Kamenge Youth Centre is. That's where you should go to find out about the young people in Bujumbura.'
> [Diary, 8 June 2007]

Central in my research were the narratives on war and peace by male and female youth in Burundi's capital, Bujumbura. The main research question focused on the perceptions of youth regarding the meaning of war and peace. Most of the empirical data gathering took place in Bujumbura's northern quarters; Kamenge and Cibitoke. The northern areas are amongst the poorest quarters of the capital. During the war, the area served as a primary battleground for rebel groups fighting the army and this resulted in almost all residents becoming refugees or IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) for a period of time. Relocating was important for security and, with continuing insecurity and poverty, this has remained a viable strategy to access new opportunities. During my research period, young people 'moved' or talked about moving to live with other family members who could take better care of them, going to boarding school or even fighting with rebel groups in the DRC (see Box 9.2) or in other parts of the country.

A background of relocation, as a strategy for security and livelihood opportunities, suggested that the most interesting approach to understanding the ideas

Box 9.2 Interview with Ali, Bujumbura, July 2007

'They (youth) want to live in a way, I think it cannot be explained (…) it is because of the crisis the youth have known. They take the trouble to see how – they may even go to different countries, for example to the Democratic Republic of Congo – to attack others, to earn money (…) it is because of the jealousy they have. He has three of four nice pairs of shoes, he has three pairs of jeans, he lives at home. Maybe they have means? So he also will try to take the trouble and see how he can arrive at the level of the other (…) maybe even buy guns to kill people.'

and strategies of youth would be to let them and their networks, rather than locations as such, define the ethnographic research site. To understand young people's views and different strategies or tactics, it was useful to follow several youth through time and space rather than to do research in one particular period and in one location only. As opinions and strategies should be understood as being embedded in particular situations, following youth would help gain a better understanding of this situatedness (Cf. Vigh 2006).

Nevertheless, the limited time span for the research and security difficulties in particular did not permit this approach. Some of the reasons related to security that made youth move made me, as a researcher, stay – or at least limited my physical mobility. Several provinces were considered too dangerous for field-work by both local people and (inter)national development organizations, while the mode of travel of most of the youth – local transport or walking – was highly discouraged for me too. Following youth to boarding schools or to their aunts' or uncles' homes in the *collines* (hills) in rural areas, let alone to rebel groups, was simply too risky.

The large youth centre at the Kamenge-Cibitoke crossroads served as an alternative fieldwork site and became my base. The *Centre Jeunes Kamenge* (CJK) had been operating for fifteen years and was set up just before the last war to encourage better mutual understanding between youth of different (ethnic) groups. The CJK had succeeded in establishing a relatively safe and stable position in the area even throughout the war. It was an attractive site for a researcher because personnel working at the centre were a valuable source of information regarding the situation before and during the 1993-2005 war. In addition, the CJK was a place where I could meet many different youth and try to grasp some of the initiatives introduced to ensure lasting peace in the country.

The youth centre, apart from constituting a clear geographical place, signified a particular social space too. Firstly, it was open to the general public. Secondly, by focussing on peace and reconciliation, the centre aimed to be 'neutral', at least there was no tolerance of overt displays of politically based or ethnic conflict. Both Hutu and Tutsi youth used to come there, sympathisers of the Palipehutu-

FNL (until April 2009 a rebel group), CNDD-FDD and Uprona, who adhered to Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam.[2] It was also a place/space for leisure (soccer, basketball, music, friends), study (there was a library) and debate and discussion. In addition, the CJK was to some extent seen as something from and connected to the 'outside': It was led by an Italian priest, received foreign funding, worked with themes like democratization and provided links to the global youth culture (which was visible in the foreign volunteers coming from Europe every summer).

The social space implied some limitations for the data however, as the centre willingly or unwillingly excluded certain youth and discourses. For example, I was warned occasionally that only youth who had some willingness to leave past conflicts behind and to interact with youth from other ethnic groups were likely to frequent the centre. Girls generally had less spare time to spend meeting friends, reading books or playing sports. They were often discouraged from leaving the house, especially for leisure purposes. Although some girls did go to the youth centre, talking to them more than once or twice was difficult.

Thirdly, youth working as bicycle taxi drivers or those selling oranges were too busy to hang out at the CJK. In addition, the poorest amongst them who had no decent clothing (or the possibility to borrow from friends or family) were unlikely to visit the youth centre. In a similar vein, discourses on acceptance and reconciliation were more likely to be heard than those arguing for renewed conflict and opposition. It was difficult to check whether this was because the more violent discourses were less prevalent amongst youth or because they were simply not approved of in the context of the CJK. While research at the centre opened up the possibility of doing research on a variety of topics with a range of youth, statements on Bujumbura youth in a more general (representative) way remained problematic.

Consequently, to gain insight into the views and strategies of a broader group of youth, it was important to take the youth centre as a starting point from which to explore other social spaces. The same security concerns that led me to do research at the youth centre were, however, still valid.

Social spaces and access

As mentioned above, a first security concern was related to geographical limitations. These were informed, amongst others, by the designation of safe versus unsafe areas depending on where rebels were known to be active or to reside. It was sometimes very difficult for me to assess where the border was between safe

[2] This is not to say that these categories were not significant but they were not stressed as opposites in this public and 'neutral' place.

and unsafe and I had to rely on information from international staff working at NGOs or UN agencies and local people. This was contradictory at times, leading to confusion and potentially dangerous situations, as the following anecdote illustrates:

To explore the northern quarters and meet youth that did not visit the youth centre, I decided to walk around the neighbourhood with youth I trusted. They showed me the market, schools and where they lived, and they introduced me to their friends. On one of these trips while chatting and walking along, I realized all of a sudden that we were quite a long way from the youth centre. The hustle and bustle of crowded markets and traffic on the damaged tarred roads had been replaced by the gentle sounds of children playing on the side of the sandy path and the soft thud of our footsteps. I asked my 20-year-old guide where we were. 'Almost in *Bujumbura Rurale'*. (This was the capital's neighbouring province that had received the 'unsafe' stamp by government and international NGOs.) I started feeling very uncomfortable when I saw some young men in rebel uniforms at the side of the road. Fortunately, they merely eyed me with some curiosity and continued their discussion about obviously more important matters. My guide seemed to feel at ease and was having a good time but it was not until we arrived back in more crowded parts by bicycle taxi (the fastest way of getting back) that I could relax a bit.

I had assumed that I could rely on my local guide to assess where it was safe for me to move around. Although, fortunately, nothing happened, I had not felt safe. My young guide lived in these quarters and had told me he wanted to show me 'his area'. It became clear, a bit too late, that he had taken advantage of my wish to see how and where people lived to be able to explore the places where he had previously not been able to go. Although he lived in the northern quarters, the area had been ethnically segregated during the war and for a long time going into areas 'of the other ethnic group' was very dangerous. It was almost as if I had functioned as his safeguard, instead of him being mine.

On a positive note, the experience provided me with insight into the current role of, and attitudes towards, the rebel group in the area. The ease with which my guide passed by the young 'rebels' and the normalcy with which they stood at the side of the road demonstrated how the rebel group was part and parcel of the northern quarters. They were no strangers who only came out at night, although testimonies and newspaper articles depicted this side of the story too.

Another concern regarding accessing different spaces was related to my ability to move around and conduct research alone. I was regularly warned by people from my host organization and various youth never go out alone, not even in the city centre. These warnings referred to the city's high crime rate. Muggings and – as I was told but never discovered at first hand – the 'groping of women' oc-

curred regularly. I took certain precautions and always went with my research assistant. She would come to the city regularly at weekends to go shopping as there was more choice and the products were of better quality there than in the suburban markets. She also taught me how to move in a way so that people would be less inclined to bother me. The drawback of this though was that I did not really have time to look around and make good observations but I compensated for this by going to the city centre more frequently. The following abstract from my diary illustrates this:

> Joslyne resolutely and adroitly edged her way through, while I could hardly keep up the pace. She was going to show me around the market: First the fruit, piled up in neat staples in front of squatting women and girls; then the section with women's clothing where big mama's tried on huge white bras over their colourful dresses. We hurried on, trying not to trip over the invalid young man and the begging elderly ladies with children on their laps squatted in the pathways. I completely lost my sense of direction. Past the men's clothing, skipping the meat section, and off to the colourful African fabrics. We rushed on to the comestible section. Joslyne wanted to buy spaghetti and NIDO milk powder for her sister who just had a baby. We went straight to the booth of a young man she knew from secondary school. She bought the spaghetti, but the young man had run out of NIDO – 'I don't want the one imported from Kenya, the one from the Netherlands is better' – and we had to go somewhere else (…) She moved through the food stands, all selling more or less the same, looking for the right kind of NIDO for an acceptable price. This was hard because Joslyne did not really take the time to look or inquire, afraid to reveal any uncertainty. We moved around as if we had to catch a bus. When we found the NIDO, she was clearly relieved that we could go.
>
> We concluded the afternoon in a café next to the market, where I could catch my breath too. Joslyne explained me why we had rushed through the market: 'If you seem not to know where you are going, people will bother you'.
>
> [Diary, 30 June 2007]

A third concern was that places and spaces for research were restricted during the hours of darkness as this was the most dangerous time of the day. When I was staying at a hostel, I could continue to collect data after darkness fell because some young people were living at the hostel, some were working there and the owner's children were there too. Going to the northern quarters and visiting the places where most youth hung out at night was not considered safe. Regrettably therefore, when informants invited me to go salsa dancing on Friday night at a local pub in their quarter, I had to decline the invitation. There was also a time dimension that profoundly impacted on the social spaces in which I could do research.

Picture 9.1 Football match in the northern quarters of Bujumbura, Burundi
[© Lidewyde Berckmoes]

Degrees of trust and levels of anxiety were affected by the political situation.[3] This resulted in a level of suspicion that may have influenced the reliability of some of the answers received and it affected my access to people's private spaces. Wagner (1996: 25) also described this problem in Burundi: People were discouraged from being her host and she was not invited to private ceremonies or cultural events as people were afraid that her presence would attract official attention. During my research too, some youth clearly felt more confident about meeting me in public places like the youth centre. Yet I believe this had less to do with a fear for 'official attention' than with a general fear of introducing strangers into their personal spaces. Political and personal reasons informed this fear. This difficulty in access posed an important obstacle in my research and made it much more difficult to situate youth within their families and communities.

Restricted access to different spaces limited the possibilities for participant observation as a method for data collection. I therefore asked several young people to keep a diary for a week so I could gain insight into their thoughts and actions in the spaces where I could not follow them. Unfortunately, only two

[3] Cf. Wagner (1996) who conducted research in Burundi between 1985 and 1987.

boys seemed to understand what I wanted, as the other youth simply wrote an 'essay about their life', which was informative too but in a different way.

Reticence and inconsistency

Interviews and informal conversations proved to be important research tools but they were not without difficulties either. The general political sensitivity in Burundi allowed for only limited openness on many topics, at least in public. Group discussions proved unproductive when discussing personal views on war as these discussions were often linked to ethnic and political opinions, grief and grievances. For this reason, I primarily used individual interviews that were characterized by non-directed questions and covered a wide range of topics. The focus in these was on young people's daily occupations, their personal histories of the war and post-war period, and their ideas about war and peace now and in the future.

Surprisingly, many young people seemed to feel fairly free to discuss politics and ethnicity during individual conversations and interviews but were more evasive on topics like their (often precarious) family situations. I would then not probe any further. Though ethnographic research rarely involves significant or damaging consequences as a result of the actual process of research (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 268), I felt it was necessary, particularly in this sensitive setting, to consider carefully any likely effects on the young people involved. I was especially cautious about causing emotional distress, as there were few structures in place to deal with this.[4] Another motivation for not probing was that I took the unwillingness of youth to discuss certain (private) topics as a sign that they did not deem it safe enough. After some weeks, I saw this to indeed be true. Nanette, a girl I was interviewing without my interpreter/research assistant, explained that she would not have been able to discuss her home circumstances and difficulties with me had my interpreter been around. She was afraid to show any vulnerability in the presence of fellow countrymen because it might lead people to take advantage of her. Hiding her problems was her way of protecting herself. Another reason for not talking about certain matters was related to attitude, and Nanette explained why her friend was not interested in talking to me:

> But you see, she for example, she is a good friend. But she, she has problems. But she does not like to talk about them with you. She 'stays alone' [without asking help from others]. She does not want anybody to know her problem. She does not want anybody to know. She talks with a lot of people, but not about her problems. She is cool. (June 2007)

[4] Fortunately, HealthNet TPO Burundi was my host organization – a psychosocial healthcare organization – and I could always fall back on their expertise.

When we continued our conversation on why people were not sharing their problems with others, she explained that it was often just deemed useless to share problems due to a lack of solutions:

> Me: 'A lot of people do not seem to like to talk about their problems, do they?'
> Nanette: 'It is because, you see, if you talk to someone about your problems, there is, there is, there is nothing that will help you. Because here we are all, we are poor. Everyone. You cannot, you cannot tell someone your problem. If you do tell them your problems, you will find that the other one, that she has more problems than you. What are you going to say? You can, you cannot, you have to say no, it is better that I leave it all. Because if I do tell her, she will have problems like me. There is nobody who can help you.' (June 2007)

A range of issues affect the openness of youth in interviews and conversations. Thus, it is crucial when doing research in hazardous places, like Burundi, to try and understand not only what is being said but also what is left unsaid and why it is being left unsaid. This brings us to a related problem that can be encountered when interviewing: Inconsistencies in the stories told.

I spoke to many of the young people several times. Usually I interviewed the youth once officially and the other times I talked to them were when I was just hanging out at the youth centre. But rather than getting a clearer picture of these youth, remaining in contact with them seemed to work the other way. The more often I spoke to them, the more I noticed irregularities in their stories, and the more confused I got. Answers even to simple questions, for example 'what do you do?', seemed to change on an almost weekly basis: From 'I go to school, I am a student' to 'I have nothing to do' or 'I am a working youth'.

Instead of viewing these inconsistencies as lies, it was useful to see them as ways of voicing hopes and fears and as expressions of tactics of representation. With the above example of their occupations, it seemed that the youth would often claim to be a student as long as they believed/hoped that they could come up with the necessary school fees at the end of the semester. It did not mean, however, that they were actually attending school regularly at the time. Freddy, for instance, introduced himself to me as a busy student. A mere two weeks later he told me he was like other youths who had nothing to do and he was feeling lazy, poor and bored. It appeared that he had not found a way to find the school fees needed and was frustrated with his lack of possibilities.

Some other youth seemed to present themselves as a 'student' for more tactical reasons. For instance, being a student was obviously considered more 'honourable' than being unemployed and perhaps I would be interested in having another research assistant. By stressing poverty and unemployment, pity would be more easily obtained or the youth could more convincingly demonstrate society's wrongs in their stories about life in Burundi. At other times, perceptions

Picture 9.2 Women and girls gathered at the water pump, north of Bujumbura
[© Lidewyde Berckmoes]

seemed to change because of political or personal sensitivities – first it was assessed who was asking the question and why, and then who could actually hear the answer.

Interpreting data requires a good sense of the context. For instance, even though politics was not a taboo subject as such, when discussing the subject it was often first determined, though not in so many words, which ethnic group my research assistant belonged to. I learned a lot from working with her. Joslyne's presence in different settings and with different youth helped me to unravel the relevance of particular characteristics of her identity in various contexts. Looking at the interaction between her and other youth during our interviews allowed me to gain insight into the importance of social divisions between youth. Joslyne was a relatively well-off Burundian Hutu university student from the same neighbourhood as the youth we were interviewing. Knowing this about her enabled me to compare different situations and 'play' with this knowledge during interviews. A systematic analysis of how other non-student Hutu girls or Tutsi youth reacted to her in relation to various topics (and vice versa) provided me with clues as to how answers were negotiated. I compared answers about views and experiences

given in her presence and when she was not around, which gave me more insight into the sensitivity of particular issues and the 'situatedness' of the answers. Aside from this, observing Joslyne's body language in a setting with bragging boys or a tough young woman was telling regarding gender relations. When I asked her about my observations, she would also reflect on them in order to help me.

'Situating' answers does not only help unravel the meaning of certain information given verbally but also helps to better understand the context. The changing answers of Burundian youth were in part related to the instability of the Burundian terrain. Views on war and peace, and assessments of the current circumstances or future possibilities were especially changeable because the situation could alter very quickly. Life might be fine one day but this could change overnight: A violent attack or losing one's job remained threats and such incidents were reported daily in the media. The sense of increasing security and movements towards peace can easily evaporate too. Utas's 2005 article entitled 'Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering' provides another good example of the way situating answers as a methodology helps to gain understanding of both people and the context in which people live. 'Victimcy' is explored as a form of self-representation that young women use tactically in wartime to deal with their circumstances. Trying, uncertain and disempowering circumstances demand such responses from actors in times of war: Presenting oneself as a victim tells us something both about the self and the context in which this self is being presented.

This implies, first, that in order to interpret data in fragile situations, a perceptual shift from interviewing and/or participant observation to the observation of participation and interviewing is needed (Cf. de Jongh & Steyn 1997: 34). Asking where and how an answer is given and where and how it changes in another context are crucial to understanding what is being said and what has been left unsaid. Secondly, through 'situated information' one can learn more about the context in which this information is formed and given. Interpreting data and context can therefore perhaps best be understood as a dialectal process in which the researcher has to continuously reflect on the information and the context in which the information is articulated and obtained.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed some of the methodological challenges that may be encountered when doing ethnographic research in hazardous situations. While the ethnographic method is useful in analyzing situations of 'no war no peace' (Richards 2005), such as in Burundi, there can be obstacles to the successful use of this method. In fragile contexts, these obstacles need to be confronted, nego-

tiated and reflected upon. Paying specific attention to the situatedness of data by exploring both 'information' and 'context' in a dialectical manner is one important way of doing this.

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