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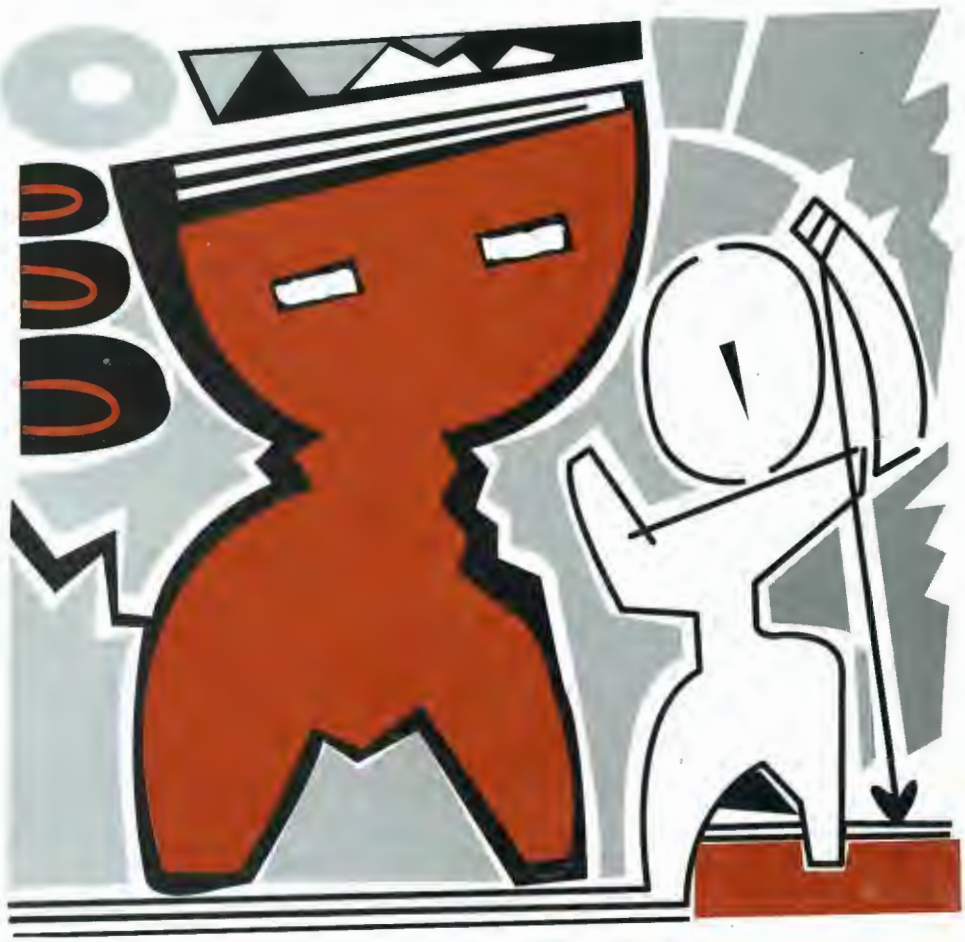

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Public Sphere, Linguistic Sphericules and Discourse Communities in Africa

Théophile Ambadiang*

Abstract

Discourse, as seen in Habermas's definition of the public sphere, is an essential aspect of the participation of the citizenry in the public debate which, crucially, is supposed to take place in a linguistically homogeneous society. The aim of this paper is to discuss the centrality of discourse in Habermas's theory in a genuinely multilingual context as is sub-Saharan Africa. We intend to show that the discursive practices and, more generally, the complex dynamics that characterize public debate in this context are determined by sociolinguistic factors such as 'elite closure', linguistic repertoire, as well as by social exclusion (Scotton 1993). Elite closure, considered as social exclusion based on linguistic competence, has had the effect of constructing a public sphere around a specific version of the European (official) language, as it excludes the majority of the citizenry who makes use of the popular versions of these languages. The correlation that exists between visibility (in the public sphere) and register repertoire accounts for the uniformity or homogeneity in the register that tends to characterize public debates, as even individuals who typically use the popular versions of the European languages adopt the register of the elite (often with undesired effects). Language, thus, divides the public sphere in smaller groups along the lines of register competence as well as of linguistic competence which excludes those who have no knowledge of the European official language. This study further suggests that those groups or sphericules (Gitlin 1998) constitute discourse communities in the sense of Watts (1999), that is, sets of individuals whose discourse practices reveal common interests, goals and beliefs. Lastly, we argue that the visibility of all such groups requires the openness of the public sphere to diverse discourses (Fairclough 1999, 2006), independently of the way they materialize. In this sense, the contribution of the individuals whose linguistic repertoires do no include European languages will not necessarily nor exclusively be framed in linguistic terms. One interesting consequence of the discussion is the disempowering/disempowerment of the (European) languages in the African public sphere.

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Résumé

Dans la définition de Habermas de la sphère publique, le discours est considéré comme un aspect essentiel de la participation des citoyens au débat public qui, fondamentalement, est censé se dérouler dans une société linguistiquement homogène. Le but de cet article est d'évaluer la centralité du discours dans la théorie d'Habermas dans un contexte multilingue comme l'Afrique subsaharienne. Nous nous proposons de montrer que les pratiques discursives, et plus généralement la dynamique qui caractérisent le débat public dans ce contexte, sont déterminées par des facteurs sociolinguistiques tels que la « fermeture de l'élite », le répertoire linguistique, ainsi que par l'exclusion sociale (Scotton, 1993). La fermeture de l'élite, considérée comme l'exclusion sociale basée sur la compétence linguistique, a eu pour effet de construire une sphère publique autour d'une version spécifique des langues européennes (officielles), car elle exclut la majorité des citoyens qui utilisent des versions populaires de ces langues. La corrélation entre la visibilité (dans la sphère publique) et le répertoire de registres rend compte de l'uniformité ou de l'homogénéité du registre qui caractérise généralement les débats publics, puisque même les personnes qui utilisent généralement les versions populaires des langues européennes adoptent le registre de l'élite (souvent avec des effets indésirables). La langue divise ainsi la sphère publique en petits groupes selon des critères de compétence relatifs au registre et à la langue qui excluent ceux qui ignorent les langues officielles européennes. L'étude suggère en outre que ces groupes ou sphéricules (Gitlin 1998) constituent des communautés discursives au sens de Watts (1999), c'est-à-dire des ensembles d'individus dont les pratiques discursives révèlent des intérêts, des croyances et des objectifs communs. Enfin, nous soutenons que la visibilité de tous ces groupes exige l'ouverture de la sphère publique à divers discours (Fairclough 1999, 2006), indépendamment de la façon dont ils se matérialisent. Ainsi, la contribution des personnes dont les répertoires linguistiques n'incluent pas les langues européennes ne sera ni nécessairement ni exclusivement rédigée dans des termes linguistiques. Une conséquence est une perte d'hégémonie de la part des langues européennes.

Introduction

In his much commented upon book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Habermas describes the public sphere (PS) as an open domain of free conversation directed toward pragmatic agreement, and he characterizes it on the basis of two variables: the state, and the private community of citizens engaged in public deliberation with the aim of influencing the action of the state. Discourse is considered as essential for the participation of the citizenry in the public debate which, crucially, is supposed to take place in a society that happens to be homogeneous from the point of view of language. Agreement obtains exclusively through

argumentation and may be reached not only on (what may be) matters of common or public concern but also on the way to deal with them. The main aim of this paper is to discuss the relevance of language and discourse in a genuinely multilingual context as is sub-Saharan Africa (henceforth Africa), and to assess the impact that language diversity may have on the dynamics of the public space, as well as the degree to which it may impinge on its relation with the African state.

We intend to show that whereas linguistic practices reveal evidences of abundant and multifarious cases of code-switching and code-mixing, the discursive practices and, more generally, the complex dynamics that characterize the public debate in this context are determined by sociolinguistic factors such as 'elite closure' and strategic language or register choice. Language diversity thus breaks up the public space into multiple small fragments which correspond to different groups, the two most important of which are distributed along the divide between the African languages and the exogenous (generally European) languages spoken in each country. The latter (or sphericules in the sense of Gitling 1998) are constructed around the European language spoken in the country and, as such, exclude those individuals who supposedly lack competence in that language or the register typically associated with it (or claimed as such) and, moreover, constitute a discourse community, i.e., a set of individuals whose discursive practices reveal interests, goals, beliefs, and, above all, rhetorical strategies that are common and exclusive to its members. The other sphericule, associated with African languages, has to do primarily with linguistic practice as well as discursive and rhetorical strategies which are typical of the traditional realm.

However, because of the prominence of the sphericules associated with the European languages, two groups of speakers are kept invisible in the public space: the individuals whose linguistic code is a mixture of some of the languages which coexist in a country and, to a lesser extent, those whose repertoires are limited to African languages. We argue in this respect that the visibility of such groups, necessary in any inclusive PS, requires the openness of the public space to diverse types of message, independent of the way and the linguistic code in which they materialize. One interesting consequence of the discussion has to do with the correlation which exists between the visibility of these speakers and the disempowering/disempowerment of the European languages which, to some extent, may favour 'linguistic convergence' in the context of public discussion.

Language diversity has thus the effect of adding a great deal of complexity and tension to the interaction of the PS and the state, besides accounting for linguistic and/or rhetorical strategies, commonly observed in public discussion

within our context, which tend to blur all that may be considered proper to argumentation as much as they lend authority and even power to the individuals who use them. From this point of view, language plays a complex and crucial role in relation to the African public space, in part because of its social bracketing effects. On the one hand, it is a matter of concern for all citizens as well as for the state. On the other hand, and more generally, it is one of the vectors of the socio-political dynamics subsumed in the PS, since it is difficult to imagine the argumentative interaction without language (Wright 2008; Ejobowah 2001). Furthermore, a linguistic PS may be seen as a metaphor for such dynamics: a site which reflects the tensions and contradictions which characterize the socio-political landscape typical of the African states and the African PS in general.

The paper is organized as follows: Firstly, we intend to contextualise the public sphere by discussing some important differences between the way it has evolved in Europe and the public space as it unfolds in the context of African states. We then focus on the linguistic dimension of the public sphere and the internal organization and dynamics that characterize it in the African context. The last section deals with the discourse communities and their communicative practices, as well as the impact they have on the socio-political processes characteristically observed in Africa. We conclude by underlining the relevance of the communicative strategies adopted by the masses for their own empowerment as well as for the emergence of a PS in the African context in general before we briefly discuss the role of the state with respect to the effects of such strategies on both public discourse and argumentation.

Contextualising the Public Sphere

As described by Habermas, the PS was originally associated with the emergence of a new social class whose existence would suppose radical changes in the structure of the society and its relations with the state in the European context. In general, what characterises such a social group are context-specific features relating to its internal composition, its aims and activities and the way it carries them out, as well as its relationship with the state and society in general. Accordingly, the topography of the PS results from the complex (and often inconsistent) way in which these features are articulated in the context considered in each case. In this section, we will discuss some of such features with reference to the European and the African contexts.

The Relevance of Affluence and Literacy in the Constitution of the PS

The PS was originally constituted as a discussion group in which dialogue and argumentation prevailed. Habermas (1989:36) describes it as a space

within which status was disregarded altogether, areas that until then had not been questioned were problematized, and 'the issues discussed became "general" not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to be able to participate'. The relevance of argument, dialogue and agreement for the functioning of the PS suggests that it was an open space in whose activities any human endowed with reason could participate. In practice, however, only individuals pertaining to two apparently different social strata composed the original PS. In effect, many types of requisites, including affluence and literacy, constrained such a space, as they determined who could be a member of this group. According to Habermas:

> […] education was the one criterion for admission – property ownership the other. *De facto* both criteria demarcated largely the same circle of persons; for formal education at that time was more a consequence than a precondition of social status, which in turn was primarily determined by one's title to property. The educated strata were also the property owning ones (1989:85).

Thus, although the PS was accessible in principle to every citizen, given the centrality of reason and the irrelevance of (social) status, in practice it was a very exclusive community. Moreover, as underlined by Habermas, the sets of individuals that were part of that community were largely coincident, at least at the time of the emergence of the PS, when 'the educated strata were also the property owning ones'. Social status had not lost all of its relevance, but affluence and education appeared to be more intimately related to the new social class. In this sense, the original European PS was largely constituted by literates, bourgeois traders – literate or not – and only marginally by nobles.

The complexities of the socio-political dynamics that are typical of the African countries make the PS much more difficult to characterise in this context. The emergence of the modern African states supposed the superposition of a traditional and a modern realm associated, respectively, with ethnic groups and the state. In this sense, Africa – as described by Ekeh (1975, quoted in Joseph 1999) – presents two publics: 'one derived from the colonial superstructure and the other from a "deeper" African communal structure'. With respect to the latter, Joseph (1999:241) underlines that 'the participatory and communal elements that were central features of Athenian democracy are also constitutive elements of many African societies'. The markedly deliberative tendency of the PS in the traditional African realm is reflected still more clearly in Nyerere's notion that African democracy rests on individuals 'talking until they agree'.[1] What does not seem so clear is the way agreement may be reached in the context of a PS accessible to all, whether by means of argument, authority or power, particularly in cases in

which a mechanical majority and representation are deemed irrelevant. As for the colonial superstructure and the state that has resulted from it, they are intimately related to the emergence of new social strata which, also, has to do with education and affluence, and whose existence has supposed radical changes in society. The topological differences discussed below explain some of the disparities observed between these two public spaces.

The first of such differences has to do with the bourgeoisie as a social class. Whereas the changes related to the African modern state owe nothing to an African bourgeoisie, non-existent at the time of the state's emergence, the existence of the PS is difficult and even impossible to imagine in absence of the bourgeoisie in Europe.[2] This fact accounts for the relevance of literacy in modern Africa where, clearly, it has been a precondition of social status and affluence. We thus observe a radical transformation of the society, as individuals are differentiated on the basis of an exogenous language and, more specifically, the knowledge of that language. The second difference is relative to the linguistic complexity of the public space. In effect, the linguistic diversity which characterizes African states eludes the idealized communicative community on which Habermas's reflections are based, and adds a great lot of complexity to the interaction of the PS and the state. In each country, many endogenous languages compete with different varieties of exogenous languages and with codes that result from the mixture of the former. In this sense, language may hinder access to the PS, in addition to barriers such as literacy, sex and affluence that also prevailed in Europe (Fraser 1992). Because of its very specific relevance in the African context, language appears to be, along with literacy as we will see, a crucial variable in the emergence of the PS. Other factors, centred on the relation of the PS with the state and with society in general, are the focus of the next sub-section.

The PS and Socio-political Power

Literate individuals in Africa, like bourgeois and educated people in Europe, considered they had a particular status that positioned them above all other citizens. In the European context, such people formed a very specific imagined community in the sense of Anderson (1991). In Habermas's (1989:37) terms, this community 'did not equate itself with the public but at most claimed to act as its mouthpiece, in its name, perhaps as its educator'. This allowed them to claim a privileged social status from which they could think and speak in the name of the masses and, by way of consequence, identify their own interests and concerns with those of the citizenry, or ignore the latter altogether, as many discussions of Habermas's work have shown (Habermas 1989:87-88; Fraser 1992 and, for recent discussion, Goode 2005). It is in this sense that one may characterise the members of both groups as 'educated

and powerful citizens [who] were supposed to form an elite public [...] whose critical debate determined public opinion' (Habermas 1989:137). This exhausts the commonalities that exist between these two groups, in contrast to the multiple differences observed in their relation with the state and with society in general.

As observed before, the main aim of the political activity of the original PS in Europe was to influence the interaction of the state and civil society. To this end, it had recourse to reason and to argument, that is, to rational-critical public debate, an art which 'the bourgeois avant-garde of educated middle class learned [...] through its contact with the "elegant world" generally associated with the courts of nobles' (Habermas 1989:29). Such an art consisted not only of discursive strategies related to argumentation, even though, supposedly, the outcome of the debate depended exclusively on argument, and agreement was reached through persuasion. It also implied certain specific attitudes on the part of the discussants whose status as members of the PS made them equals. In this way, another important feature of the European PS, namely the idea that human beings share a common quality, *qua* humans, made its way first in the private debates on literary and then on political matters.[3] The combined effects of the discursive interaction of the members of the PS and the way the citizens were conceived account to a large extent for the many transformations undergone by the PS. One such transformation has to do with representation, and the other with agreement. With reference to the latter, Goode (2005) stresses that 'unforced consensus [...] associated with the rational-critical debate' has the virtue of transforming the PS into a 'site for the organisation of resistance and renewal as much as it is an arena for the mobilisation of domination and legitimation'.[4]

On the other hand, the so-called native language was an object of major preoccupation for all those who were part of the European PS, not only for its centrality in the debate but also because, to a large extent, it mediated the universality of the human condition. This was the case, for instance, with German societies (orders, chambers and academies, among others) which interpreted the native tongue as 'the medium of communication and understanding between people in their common quality as human beings and nothing more than human beings' (Habermas 1989:34).

Summing up, then, in their attempt to achieve consensus on the basis of persuasion, the members of the original European PS trusted reason, argument and the universality of the human condition or the equality of the citizens, not authority nor coercion. Despite the bias inherent in the claims of the elites, this ultimately had the effect of bringing them nearer to a (more) universal focus in their demands to the state.

As already observed, the African context consists of two very dissimilar realms: traditional and modern. Due to the disparities between them, the access of individuals to modern education implied that on the one hand they acquired competence in a European language whereas, on the other hand, they distanced themselves progressively from the endogenous linguistic codes known or available to them. Seen in this light, literacy not only brought power and privilege, it also supposed – to some extent – estrangement from one's own (cultural and linguistic) community, an inconvenience unknown in the European context. An interesting consequence is that, although educated Africans claimed to be the voice of 'those who are not listened to', they could not represent (at least not as fully as the members of the European PS could do) the masses, in part because they were not familiarised with their concerns or simply ignored them. Likewise, the fact that the elites had a vested interest in protecting their status and privileges made it rather difficult, in spite of their claims, for their concerns to coincide with those of the public in general. Moreover, inasmuch as in the African context representation was not so much associated with common concerns as with individual interests, it could only stand in contradiction to the ideal of equality of all citizens and to the discursive practices associated with the Habermasian PS. In a context in which the art of rational-critical debate is neither learned nor cultivated, and representation has nothing to do with peer scrutiny nor with the common interests of the citizenry, the question arises as to whether consensus may be achieved and, in the affirmative case, how agreement obtains.

Turning now more briefly to the relation of these groups with the state, the fact that they are imagined communities does not strip them of the power they may have in correlation with their independence. The crucial difference between both groups is that whereas African elites emerged within the apparatus of the modern African state and were primarily state employees, the bourgeois PS 'arose historically in conjunction with a society separate from the state' (Habermas 1989:127). Moreover, the separation presupposed by the bourgeoisie was such that the PS, 'made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state, was itself considered part of the private realm' (Habermas 1989:175-176). The power associated with this position of the European elites accounts for the fact that they claimed a PS regulated against the public authorities. As Goode (2005:5) observes:

> [...] struggles over economic production and trade saw an increasingly confident 'private sphere' starting to erode the omnipotence of the state. A nascent bourgeoisie was carving out its independence and building a 'civil society' based on private commerce.

Thus, far from depending on the state, European elites defied it, even though the confrontation did occur only when they explicitly and openly assumed a political role, that is, once the PS was consolidated. According to Habermas's (1989:35) narrative, such a 'coming together of private people into a public was [...] anticipated in secret, as a public sphere still existing largely behind the closed doors'.[5]

In contrast, all members of the African elite depended on the state, in the sense that they were necessarily part of its structure, either as politicians, employees of the administration or both (see Bayart 2008 [1981], among others). This, together with the considerable power of the state apparatus in Africa, accounts for its tendency to strongly permeate civil society.

The Changing Topography of the African Public Sphere(s)

The European and African language divide opposes two realms which show important differences in their internal topography and dynamics: the fragmented traditional groups which coexisted in a given place and the modern state formed by many such groups. Generally, traditional societies corresponded to small groups of people whose members knew each other and carried on their intense interaction through spoken language. In terms of political culture, they tended to adopt very specific strategies in the assessment and solution of conflicts, which consisted basically in the so-called *palabre*. According to Beti & Tobner:

> L'usage de la palabre suppose non seulement l'existence des conflits, assumés en tant que tels, mais l'aménagement millénaire de procédures visant à retarder la décision aussi longtemps que possible afin que le plus grand nombre possible de membres du groupe soient informés des données du débat et puissent y prendre part (1989:91).
>
> [Recourse to 'palabre' implies not only the existence of conflicts, taken as such, but also the millenary development of procedures aimed at delaying the decision to be taken as long as possible so that the largest possible number of members could be informed about the issues discussed and partake in decision-making.]

Supposing that the debate was open to the extent of what Beti & Tobner call 'libre parole collective', one may consider participation and deliberation as the most relevant aspects in the internal dynamics of these groups. However, this does not answer the question about the way in which consensus was reached, since it cannot be inferred on the basis of the dynamics typical of the palabre alone. The fact that agreement was the outcome of deliberation more than open discussion suggests that decision-making tended to result from accommodation. The latter is considered by Appiah (1992:129 ff.) as

an essential feature of traditional societies. It is a 'general process [...] necessary for those who are bound to each other as neighbours for life', and its main effect in conversation is the avoidance of a style that is generally considered aggressive in this context. Convivial strategies tend to prevail in traditional societies, which are typically non-literate, and accommodate well to orality and figurative language, a language which is heavily indexical, metaphorical and, above all, context-dependent. Crucially, the style avoided in this context involves precisely the strategies that define the internal dynamics of the European PS, viz., to disagree and to argue.

The modern realm sets the state against civil society and includes much more of the imagined communities described by Anderson (1991). The members of civil society divide into two main groups: educated and non-literate individuals. The former demonstrate characteristically spoken and written competence in the official language of their country, generally a European language and, also, a variable degree of estrangement with respect to the African languages. The reverse occurs with non-literate citizens, although an increasing number of them, generally young urban dwellers, tend to use codes that mix European and African languages, or a popular variety of the official European language. This fact does not seem, however, to make any difference between these two groups as far as the deliberative aspects of the PS are concerned; for educated as well as non-literate individuals coincide in avoiding the adversarial style which is so characteristic of the European PS, as they consider it aggressive to disagree and even to argue.[6] This does not mean that critical debate is absent from the African context. What we wish to underline is that it proceeds in a different fashion and with different effects, as discussions tend to adopt different profiles depending on the context, the matter debated, and/or the other discussant(s). In contrast, the rational dimension has scarce prominence in all types of space but the intellectual milieu, in which recourse is had in principle to reason when dealing with so-called scientific matters.[7] In any case, the binding effect of the debate is not as strong as in Europe, either on the discussants or at the public level in general. It may thus be said that the debate culture delimitates one single space, in contradistinction to the space associated with social status, and to the language divide discussed above.

Leaving aside factors such as sex, class or ethnic group, we thus have different spaces which overlap partially and not always in a consistent fashion. The asymmetry between the discursive sphere and the other kinds of space raises once more the interesting question as to how agreement obtains in African societies. This question comes in two parts, the first of which has been answered briefly above. Agreement is reached in part through

accommodation, that is, the fact that one of the interlocutors does neither argue nor disagree. However, and this is the second part of the answer, this effect can be obtained only by means of very specific discursive strategies which characteristically are not based on arguments nor, more generally, on reason. Thus, whereas in the European PS public debate may be seen metaphorically as a fight in which reason and arguments are the only weapons allowed, in the African context what prevails are strategies which make possible the 'defeat of the opponent(s)' without the necessity of a better or stronger argument. An art that enables to 'vaincre sans avoir raison', as one of the characters of the novel of Hamidou Kane, *L'Aventure ambigüe*, puts it so emphatically with respect to (the 'school of) the White Man'. In so far as, for agreement to be reached people do not have to concede to reason, they have to bow to something else. We intend to show in the next section that the strategies that are more recurrent in this respect have much to do with language diversity and that, as one of their most significant effects, they tend to make it disproportionately relevant, in view of the sociolinguistic dynamics typical of this context.

The Linguistic Public Sphere

Language and Socio-political Dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa

The diversity that is characteristic of Africa from the linguistic point of view owes much to the history of the continent, considered by many as the multilingual space par excellence. The socio-political dynamics typical of the pre-colonial period explain the large amount of indigenous languages which exist in any African country, whereas the process of colonization has meant, besides the imposition of an exogenous language, the intense interaction of multifarious language communities whose members have had to elaborate multiple and complex strategies in order to intercommunicate with, as a result, the enormous capacity of sub-Saharan Africans to flexibly adapt to disparate and variable sociolinguistic environments (Fardon and Furniss 1994). The most pervasive manifestations of this capacity are code mixing and code switching (Blommaert 2007). However, the fundamental divide from the sociolinguistic point of view opposes the citizens of a country on the basis of their linguistic repertoires and, most specifically, of their competence in the European language. Besides being the official language in the country in which it is spoken, the European language is generally associated with rational modernity, as well as with symbolic and economic power, in contrast to African languages which not only are marginal from the political, symbolic and economic point of view, but are also associated with tradition, conceived in opposition to development (Ambadiang 2005; Chumbow 2005).

The codes resulting from mixing processes in which these two types of languages are involved tend to be overlooked in scientific reports on the sociolinguistic situation of the African countries and are largely ignored in the political agendas of the African governments. This occurs contrary to facts, since all citizens in these countries concur to a greater or lesser extent in code mixing, and given the increasingly generalized use of some of the codes that have resulted from mixing processes, specifically those based on European languages. Both tendencies are so widespread that sociolinguists tend to characterize African multilingualism as typically associated with mixing, in contrast to the idea of language segregation subsumed in the European conception of multilingualism (Makoni & Meinhof 2003; Mugane 2006 and Blommaert 2007, among others).[8]

The invisibility of the mixed codes is of great interest for different reasons. Their absence from the scientific agenda is due to the fact that linguists tend to prefer so-called institutionalized languages as their objects of study. Their occultation in the political agendas is strategically related to what Myers-Scotton, following Max Weber, has dubbed 'social closure'. In effect, by stating that the popular (or mixed) variety of the European language used in a chosen country bears no identity relationship to that language, the (political or cultural) elite of that country strategically close off the access to their social class, thus hindering the social promotion generally associated with the European languages in this context, in order to maintain their privileges. We are thus told that a very small part of the citizenry, generally only the elite, display spoken and written competence in the corresponding European language. Lastly, from the social point of view, mixed codes tend to be associated with urban environments and more specifically with urban youth (cf. Ewota 1986; Herbert 1992, among many others). Their speakers, typically, lack both the power that characterizes the speakers of the European language, and the seal of authenticity which results from the association of the African language with tradition. In the light of the above, the relevance of these codes can be stated only in the case where their increasing expansion and the number of their speakers are taken as the crucial factors, which gives cause for the inclusion of these codes in the scientific, political and social agendas. If, as Mazrui (1996) and Makoni et al. (2003) emphasize, African languages should be privileged in the political and social realms because of the correlation that exists between their institutional use, democracy and development, it seems necessary to extend these privileges to the codes that result from mixing processes.[9] Moreover, the inclusion of these varieties in the socio-political agenda has very interesting implications for both the topography and the internal dynamics of the African PS, as discussed below.

Communicative Practices and Agency

Whereas communication has to do in general with linguistic and cultural competence, communicative practices are of special relevance in a context in which, as is the case with sub-Saharan Africa, social categorization is based essentially on linguistic and/or cultural behaviour (Makoni & Meinhof 2003). There is a strong correlation in this context between the asymmetries which are apparent among members of a given group (ethnic or otherwise), from the linguistic and cultural point of view, and their tendency to linguistic and cultural accommodation. Speakers' linguistic repertoires vary largely as to the number and types of languages included in them, whereas language use oscillates between codes that exist separately from others in linguistic atlases, i.e., institutionalized codes, and mixed codes (Blommaert 2007). The results of the possible combinations of the languages available are enormously varied, even though only a few of them solidify into specific codes. However, in so far as such variation is not made use of without purpose, one may associate it with choice and, more generally, with agency. In this sense, it may be said that language learning and language use do not only suppose a cognitive burden but also the capacity of agency, as evidenced in the attitudes of speakers such as, for instance, those observed by Moreau (1994) and Canut (1996) in Senegal and Mali in relation to Wolof and Bambara respectively:

(a) 'Je parle leur langue pour faire des affaires avec eux, pas parce que ça m'intéresse' (Moreau 1994:86).
[I speak their language only out of the need for doing business with them, not because I have any interest in it.]

(b) 'Je garde mon accent, comme ça on sait que je suis peul' (cf. Canut 1996:73).
[I keep my accent, in this way everybody knows I am Fula.]

(c) 'Je ne connais que le nom des condiments pour faire mon marché' (ibid).
[I know nothing but the names of the condiments in order to do the shopping.]

(d) 'Je n'ai jamais appris cette langue, je n'en ai pas besoin' (ibid).
[I have never learnt this language, I do not need it.]

We suggest that attitudes such as those just mentioned, ranging from the ambivalence of (a-c) to the distance subsumed in (d), do not concern languages of wider communication only. Rather, they may be observed with any linguistic code, depending on the way a given speaker conceives his relationship with that code.

As for accommodation, we owe a very interesting illustration to Finlayson & Slabbert (1997), who depict communicative interactions typical of the African context by means of the metaphor of a bridge that the interlocutors cross in such a fashion as to 'meet halfway'. This means that in this context, communicative processes are heavily influenced by the speakers' disposition to cooperate, through negotiation and adaptation, from the linguistic and communicative point of view. Once interlocutors negotiate, on the basis of their linguistic repertoires, the languages that are most useful for intercommunication, boundaries between the latter tend to collapse and multiple mixed codes arise.

There thus seems to be a strong correlation between agency and accommodation: people tend to feel free in the way they learn and use any language because (they know) that their interlocutors, whether they are native speakers or not, are disposed and willing to make up for their flaws. Because the speakers' disposition to cooperate makes intercommunication possible, language diversity may not impede the constitution of a public sphere. However, the contrast observed between the communicative adaptability that uniformly characterizes the linguistic PS and, on the other hand, the internal fragmentation of society suggests that intercommunication (or the ability to communicate) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the constitution of a socio-political PS, for reasons to be discussed in the next section (cf. Antonsich 2008; Ipperciel 2008).

Discourse Communities and Rhetorical Strategies

Although discourse communities may be described in terms of individuals whose discourse practices reveal common interests, goals and beliefs with respect to a specific concern or object of study (Watts 1999)), some communities may share any of these features but discourse. In our context, the problems related to language diversity concern both the elite and the masses which, from the point of view of their discursive practices, constitute different types of discourse communities. Furthermore, the messages subsumed or implicit in the communicative interactions of the latter may be linguistic or not (Carrithers 2005). Whereas the masses consider both the mixed codes and the individual (European and African) languages involved in their structure relevant for communicative and, more generally, for social purposes, the discussion among the elites is crucially based on the opposition of (European and African) languages. Thus, the two types of discourse which tend to prevail among modern elites are elaborated by so-called nationalists and pragmatists. The former consider the promotion of the African languages as a *sine qua non* of a genuine independence of African countries, supposing that it, moreover, favours the decolonisation of the mind and the

integral development of the African masses. In contrast, pragmatists tend to see the European languages as more efficient instruments for the development of the African countries.[10]

These discourse communities are consistent with the (partial) linguistic spheres, or sphericules, described above as spaces of exclusion, particularly for the members of the subaltern sphere(s) associated with all but European languages. However, as already suggested, the exclusion can also be based on other factors which convert themselves into crucial rhetorical assets which may allow one to win without the necessity of adducing arguments. The power of exclusion or social bracketing of language accounts for the tendency to associate such rhetorical strategies with language use, as well as for the relevance of such strategies for the outcome of debates and discussions. The rhetorical strategies of interest for our discussion will thus have to do with language and register choice. Language choice is relevant mostly in cases in which different languages are involved because discussants (claim to) have divergent linguistic repertoires, whereas register (and sociolect) choice occurs when the discussants share the language in which the debate unfolds. Many scenarios may be envisaged here, depending on the language to be chosen, the status of the discussants who choose it and that of their interlocutor(s). We can only broadly sketch some of them here, focusing on the dynamics of public debate and the strategic uses of the languages available to each discussant. In the Table below, only such uses are indicated explicitly.

Strategic Uses of Languages in Public Debate

	European language	African language	Mixed language
Elites > Elites			
Elites > Masses	A	B	
Masses > Masses			
Masses > Elites	B	A	

Any debate opposes two discussants, one of which intends to cause a change in the other in terms of opinion, belief or behaviour (Carrithers 2005). The equal status of interlocutors in discussions based on reason and argument makes their roles interchangeable: any one of them may play the role of either the persuading agent or the persuaded. In a context in which debate is not exclusively, nor even mainly, based on reason and argument, language choice is crucial, for different reasons. Two types of context serve to illustrate the relevance of language choice for the dynamics of the debate.

In the first context, corresponding to the A boxes in the table, an individual has recourse to a language other than the one used by the other discussants. In general, such a choice is exclusive to those who feel they are in a position of power: the irruption of such a code is as much advantageous to the individual who imposes it in a discussion as it is disempowering for the interlocutors due, mainly, to their scarce knowledge of that code. Thus, language choice appears to be doubly strategic: it is a manifestation of the power of the discussant which it also serves to confirm and reinforce. The outcome of the debate is thus decided on the basis of the status of the language used and, more specifically, on its association with the position of power of the speaker. This is what occurs when a member of the elite makes use of a European language with non-literate or semi-literate interlocutors, or when an (illiterate) elder has recourse to an African language among young men or modern elites who are less competent in that language. The fact that everybody acknowledges the association of such practices with authority and power, particularly in the case of the dominant languages, explains the register uniformity or homogeneity that tends to characterize public debates, as even individuals who typically use the popular versions of the European languages adopt the register of the elite (often with undesired and comical effects illustrated in many African novels and parodies of political speeches).

In the second context, corresponding to B boxes in the table, an individual who is not supposed to have much competence in a given code has recourse to it however. The effect has to do in this case with an attempt to avoid exclusion, since what is intended in such uses is to break down the language barrier erected by interlocutors who, incidentally, happen to be in a position of power.

Therefore, the discussants may have strategic recourse to a given language with the aim of gaining discursive authority or avoiding exclusion, though with different effects, given the asymmetrical power relationship which exists between the European and the African languages. From this point of view, one of the most interesting features of the Table has to do with the irrelevance of the so-called mixed codes. The fact that they cannot be put to strategic uses is consistent with their invisibility from the scientific and political point of view. The European languages are necessarily visible, whereas the African languages may be visible or not, depending on the speaker. As observed above, a significant consequence is the social irrelevance of the speakers of mixed codes, in spite of the fact that an increasing number of individuals use mixed varieties such as Pidgin English, 'français populaire', 'franglais', 'Frenglish', 'Sheng' or 'camfranglais' in urban settings, as replacement of indigenous languages or as a first language.

This kind of exclusion has much more to do with power than with the sociolinguistic dynamics observed in the African context since, as underlined in the preceding sections, the use of code-mixing is generalized in the continent, though some speakers have recourse to this strategy more liberally than others. In so far as all languages present in this context share many of the features that are considered typical of mixed codes, particularly in informal communicative contexts, the linguistic landscape may be seen as a complex continuum with many different languages at its multiple poles and multifariously mixed varieties emerging between them. On the other hand, the ensuing difficulty to separate the codes makes it difficult to establish stable and consistent associations between any code and a given (social or discursive) function. Seen in this light, any strategic use of a European or an African language subsumes necessarily an intent to impose a particular variety of that language and, with it, a social order which is adequate to the interests of those who have such an intent. The above observations, together with the limitations of oral communication and the effects of accommodation, may help us get an idea of the complexity inherent in communicative processes of any kind, particularly those involving some form of discussion.

The Linguistic Public Sphere(s) and the State

From the observations adduced in the preceding sections, one might infer that two types of factor are mostly relevant for the constitution of a PS in our context. The first type is linguistic in nature, whereas the other has to do with the debate itself. As shown above, dynamics that are typical of the linguistic sphere may interfere with socio-political interactions, making it very difficult to learn and cultivate the art of public debate. The aim of the present section is thus to discuss the effects of sociolinguistic fragmentation in relation to the state and democratic representation.

Communicative Practices, Consensus and Democratic Representation

Considered in relation to public debate, communicative practices have a procedural and a linguistic dimension. We have seen that from a linguistic point of view the predominant characteristic of the African context is linguistic accommodation, evidenced in code mixing as well as in the so-called 'convergence languages', i.e., languages whose expansion has implied more or less profound changes in their structure and their demography due to their non-native speakers (Mugane 2006). The democratic practices associated with these fragments of the linguistic sphere are thus in sharp contrast with what we observe in the contexts in which what we have dubbed strategic language use prevails. In opposition to language users who do not disrupt the tendency to inclusive participation in the linguistic PS, the individuals

who make strategic use of language may be considered 'linguistic brokers', the effect of whose practices is to disempower their interlocutors by excluding them from the discussion, and even by cancelling it. This obtains mainly through processes of what may be called rhetorical bracketing and crossing (Rampton 1995). In the first case, an individual makes use of a dominant language or register with the aim of setting a difference that undermines the status of the interlocutors as discussants, given their rather scarce competence in that language or register. In the second, a speaker adopts the dominant language or register in order to '[...] appropriate, explore, reproduce or challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups that they don't themselves [...] belong to' (Rampton 1999:421). Accommodation also occurs when the communicative practices are considered from a procedural vantage point, given the tendency of interlocutors to avoid the adversarial style typical of the Western PS. Consensus is reached on the basis of conviviality, not argument, with interesting consequences which have to do with what Mbembe (2001:11) calls *simulacre*, a relationship based on falseness and illusion. The inconsistency and fragility of such a relationship is emphasized by Sennett (1998, quoted in Johnson 2006:3) when he underlines that agreements forged through argument and debate are inevitably stronger and more enduring than ties shaped by mere convention or convenience. Besides the social effects just mentioned, agreement reached through argument has the property of empowering all the individuals involved in the discussion. Likewise, it induces each of them to reflect on the shared value commitments that can make their points of view and claims intelligible to the others (Johnson 2006:5). The consequences of concession based on convenience are much more difficult to assess, apart from its illusory effects. In this respect, Mbembe's (2001:111) observation concerning political authority fits the description of any kind of power relation in our context. The dynamics associated with power converge on an effect of simulacre which, according to Mbembe:

> [...] does not increase either the depth of subordination or the level of resistance; it simply produces a situation of disempowerment for both ruled and rulers [...] although it may demystify the *commandement*, even erode its supposed legitimacy, it does not do violence to the *commandement's* material base. At best it creates potholes of indiscipline on which the *commandement* may stub its toe.

However, disempowerment is not the only negative effect of concession-based agreement. In social terms, this kind of agreement cannot cast aside distrust and, by way of consequence, is more apparent than real and, above all, strategic.[11] One of the purposes of simulacre is precisely the illusion of a

total absence of conflict. This is what occurs with unstructured and seemingly deliberative formats which, though 'intended to foster enfranchisement, can in fact generate "false unity" or exaggerated impressions of harmony' (cf. Phillips 1991, quoted in Wayne 2000:180).

The illusory condition of this relationship is particularly evident in the fact that it is subject to constant, though tacit, contestation from below, and to a negotiation process that, besides being continuous, cannot avoid mistrust on both parts. This is why once applauding subjects may 'become a cursing, abusive mob' (Mbembe 2001:111). The ultimate consequence of convenience-based agreement, however, is the de-humanisation of both poles of the relationship. Powerful members identify the interests and concerns of the group with their own, with the (apparent) effect of depriving the disempowered members of their liberty and subjectivity, whereas the latter comply only apparently with the dictates of the former. The group is thus fragmented along the line of power relations, and representation along such a divide can only be undemocratic, unless provision is made for making subjects' own voices heard.

Therefore, as was the case with language before, participation is not a sufficient condition for debate-based agreement. As underlined by Wayne (2000:187), 'it is too simplistic to assume that more participation would lead to greater democracy'. The focus of the next sub-section will be on the implications of the above observations for the participation of individual citizens in the political sphere.

Linguistic Spher(icul)es and the Political Sphere

African countries coincide grossly in their linguistic and political patterns. Although the territory that corresponds to each of them is enormously fragmented from the linguistic point of view, it is a markedly homogeneous arena in communicative terms. Moreover, the languages included in the linguistic space of each country, together with their corresponding sphericules, do not exhaust the communicative sphere. What the observations above suggest, thus, is that many of the problems which arise with respect to the participation of civil society in the political sphere in this context correlate with what we may call the 'language bias'. In effect, the political sphere is structured according to linguistic, not communicative, factors, as the marginality of the codes most heavily involved in communication, viz. mixed codes, makes it clear. From the political point of view, it has been argued that participation is not a sufficient condition for democracy as, by itself, it does not imply critical discussion or rational debate. Both factors, linguistic segregation and conviviality, may thus be considered as some of the most important barriers to the constitution of a PS of the type described by Habermas

in Africa and, as suggested above, their effects can in no way be helpful for the participation of the masses in the political sphere. Because political participation favours the effective empowerment of the masses, it requires radical changes in the way both the communicative and procedural dimensions of public discussion are negotiated or even conceived. The following brief discussion of such changes will take the evolution of the Western PS as its starting point.

In his narrative on the European PS, Habermas considers its emergence as crucially dependent on affluence, literacy and power (related to the capacity of determining the actions of the state). Although he does not discuss the relative importance of each of these variables, one might consider literacy and freedom as the factors which affect most profoundly the dynamics of the PS, and affluence as a mere characteristic, though a most favourable one, of the context in which the PS happened to emerge. This is the case, besides its direct association with power. In comparison, the African PS cannot be related to affluence mostly because, due to their socio-political status, affluent people (who are in general also literate) seldom engage in public debates whose purpose is to control the state and whose effects have to do with the empowerment of the masses. The interesting implication here is that the unique locus of the public space in which the PS may emerge is among the masses. In this respect, sight should not be lost of the fact that the masses are the social strata typically associated with the codes of wider communication, the mixed languages, which happen to be marginal. Note also that the features that are characteristic of the Western PS in relation to its internal dynamics, its purposes, its discursive basis, etc., may be observed in this locus, though in a rather inconsistent way. The question thus arises as to the conditions in which these small fragments of socio-political space may evolve into the democratic arena that would correspond to the PS in African countries. The observation of the sociolinguistic and political dynamics that characterize some of these countries is highly illustrative in this regard.

As suggested above, part of these conditions relates to the medium of communication. The main change in this respect consists in the adoption of the 'communication bias' according to which the solutions adopted by the masses should be given primacy in public communication. Not only are the codes involved in such solutions widely used, as is the case with Swanglish and Sheng in Kenya (Mugane 2006), Wolof in Senegal (Ngom 2004), Portuguese in Mozambique (Stroud 2007), or with popular varieties of French and English in different countries, they may be also politically relevant. For instance, Stroud (2007:43) stresses in his study of the sociolinguistic dynamics

typical of Mozambique, that 'The use of African languages also contributes more widely to the vernacularization and popularization, that is, democratization of Mozambican politics'.

The democratization of politics ultimately implies the empowerment of the citizenry. A multilevel linguistic sphere, inspired in the notion of 'segmented levels of public discourse' (cf. Beierwaltes 1998, quoted in Breidbach 2003:86), would be apt here, though we will consider only two such fragments: the level of public discussion and the level of scientific debate. The former would cover the space corresponding to the PS, in which matters of common concern may be openly discussed, the latter being circumscribed to circles of specialists and professionals. Likewise, the codes of wider communication, and more generally linguistic accommodation, would help to solve the problems that arise around the commonality of the debate language.

Other conditions, related to the debate procedure itself, have to do with the attitudes as well as the cognitive and psychological capacities of the discussants. Johnson (2006:5), for instance, alludes to the hermeneutical effort required of all members of the PS, whereas Wayne (2000:187) associates the political culture based on public debate with the necessity for the citizens to 'consciously adopt the discursive attitudes of responsibility, self-discipline, respect, cooperation [...] necessary to produce consensual agreement' (cf. also Newman 2005a, b; Roberts & Crossley 2004). Assuming consensus results from discussion and argument, such attitudes and aptitudes are mostly the result of a learning process, as stressed by Habermas in his account of the emergence of European PS. Interaction with other members of the community is crucial in the learning process, though the most relevant factor is literacy, as evidenced in the following statement:

> In the sphere of civil society, vernacular literacy programmes have been used actively by rural women to create a private and gendered space for themselves as they no longer have to rely on male literacy brokers for help with their written communication [...] and are free to broach topics that were previously taboo (Stroud 2007:44).

These circumstances, which may be applied to other subaltern groups such as semi-literate urban youth, remind us of the tendency of the emergent European PS to reflect upon topics previously exclusive to the church or the state.[12] Reading (and thus literacy) has, besides informing, the effect of making one part of an imagined community, which is very helpful for the adoption of the adversarial style that characterizes rational debate. In this sense Appiah (1992:131, 133) stresses that 'literacy moves you toward universality in your language', whereas printing breeds 'the independence of minds'.

Conclusion

The public sphere is a virtual space composed by smaller fragments differentiated on the basis of variables as disparate as the medium of communication, the social status or gender of its members, or its purpose(s), but whose internal dynamics are strictly coincident. The discussion above has shown that language is very important for the constitution and internal dynamics of any PS, particularly so in a context of considerable language diversity as is Africa. The linguistic PS is, by way of consequence, a crucial component of the (political) PS and, correlatively, a space in which the battle for the empowerment of the citizenry is fought. The fight is fundamentally between the groups of privileged and disempowered citizens. The former may be characterized as linguistic brokers who have developed social skills which allow them to make a strategic use of their linguistic competence. Though they have recourse to code mixing, as everybody does in this context, their claims are related to languages as traditionally conceived, that is, to institutionalized languages, typically associated each to a specific community of speakers and showing (supposedly) a very limited degree of loan structures, in contrast to mixed codes. From the communicative point of view, the status of these brokers is based on the competence they claim to have in one or more languages, that is, on symbolic (socio-cultural) capital which generally correlates with economic and even with political power. In accordance with their linguistic ideology, they conceive language use as a migration process across different languages separated by neat and clear frontiers. Moreover, their power position allows them to strategically impose on their interlocutors any of the dominant languages included in their repertoire. In contrast, the interactions in which the masses are involved tend to be associated with marginalized codes. In this sense, the masses are generally identified with trans-linguistic spaces, in which migration can only be partial, as though any speaker had (temporarily) a foot in each of the languages involved in a given interaction.

Although language diversity is a matter of concern for all, there is no debate between the two most important fragments of the public space – the powerful elites and the masses – which may be identified with two different linguistic subcultures, code-based and communication-based, respectively, the former of which is imposed on the masses. Moreover, as stressed above, any debate or discussion between individuals belonging to both fragments of the public space has something of a masquerade in the sense that, very often, the form of their messages does not adjust to their linguistic culture or to their claims in this respect. In this way, strategic language use reinforces the code-based culture which, in turn, explains the attention, frequently bordering on obsession, with which the form of the messages is dealt with in our context. As a result, form rather than content or arguments tends to

be the focus of the interaction, since it is the factor which determines the outcome of any discussion. This has the effect of disempowering the masses: it deprives them of the linguistic code(s) they normally use and, as a consequence, it hinders and even impedes their participation in any form of debate. Therefore, a first step towards the diffusion of the art of open debate in the public space supposes that, on the one hand, primacy is given to the communication-based culture and, on the other, the linguistic brokers are disempowered by stripping strategic language use of the power associated to it and, hopefully, getting rid of it altogether. Once there is no space left for strategic language use, attention may (progressively) be focused on contents and arguments. Seen in this light, language, or more precisely communication itself, is an essential factor for the constitution of the PS.

However, communication is not a sufficient condition for the emergence of a PS. As discussed above, neither a common language, nor a communicative chain may make a PS emerge. For this to happen, specific attitudes and aptitudes are deemed crucial and moreover, as suggested before, many of them have to be learned. The most relevant of the former is the adversarial style, whereas literacy, undoubtedly the best start in learning such a style, is the crucial factor among the latter.

Finally, the discussion above shows that in spite of the diversity of historical and social conditions in which public spheres emerge in different contexts, they share a set of characteristics which have to do with communication (the capacity of their members to reach each other in communicative terms) and with debate. In so far as these characteristics are also essential features of any democratic space, we suggest that attention be paid to the masses and the solutions they elaborate in their way to the construction of (an) African PS. The master words here are empowerment and equality, though the reality to which they refer is heavily dependent on the state.

Notes

1. The description offered by Nyerere is consistent with the idea of a political system characterized by 'a commitment to the resolution of problems [...] through public reasoning'; see Cohen (1989) and Schmitter and Karl (1991), quoted in Joseph (1999) and, more recently Newman (2005a, b), Ejobowah (2001), Roberts & Crossley (2004) and Wright (2008).
2. According to Bayart (2008 [1981]), 'Parler de "bourgeoisie nationale" paraît [...] prématuré, voire déplacé'.
3. '[…] social equality was possible at first only as an equality outside the state' (Habermas (1989:35).
4. According to Goode, 'due to the interests of the social actors implied and their asymmetrical power relations, it is difficult to seek to conceive the public

sphere as homogenous, uniform, unidimensional and equitable or to treat it as the arena of unqualified "virtue" vis-à-vis authoritarian states or unrepresentative public authorities'.

5. 'The process in which the state-governed public sphere was appropriated by the public of private people making use of their reason and was established as a sphere of criticism of public authority was one of functionally converting the public sphere in the world of letters already equipped with institutions of the public and with forums for discussion', cf. Habermas (1989:51).
6. See Appiah (1992:130) for an interesting illustration and discussion.
7. Thus, one of the spaces·in which debates are most frequent is bars (so-called 'bistrots') and palm wine drinking joints. However, discussions tend to be chaotic from all points of view and may turn into passionate, even violent encounters.
8. In this sense, most studies on African languages and sociolinguistics do not seem to avoid a monolingual or 'purist' bias, due mainly to the fact that they do not take into account the mixing processes which are so characteristic of communication in Africa.
9. This, notwithstanding the problems which arise with respect to collective and individual identity. Such problems will not be discussed here however.
10. See, for instance, Mazrui (1996) and, for recent discussion, Makoni et al., (2003), Chumbow (2005) and Wa Thiong'o (2005). Modern elites may thus differ from those traditional elites who strategically abide by tradition and African languages.
11. This may have to do with the fact that 'power in Africa has long depended more on wealth in people than wealth in things, that is, more on the cultivation of social relations, and to attract and sustain subordinates through patronage and feeding of the social body', (cf. West, 2005; quoted in Stroud 2007:41).
12. Bayart (2008 [1981]), for instance, considers 'la catégorie des jeunes marginalisés par l'appareil de production capitaliste et vivant d'expédients' as 'la plus décidée à affronter le système de domination en place, parce qu'elle n'a rien à perdre, ni d'un point de vue "traditionnel" ni d'un point de vue "moderne"'.

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Rulers against Writers, Writers against Rulers: The Failed Promise of the Public Sphere in Postcolonial Nigerian Fiction

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Abstract

Various literary critics have dwelt on the nature, tenets and trends of commitment in Nigeria literature. However, there is paucity of scholarly studies on the representations of the failed promise to the public sphere in postcolonial Nigerian fiction. This paper, therefore, examines the strategies and technicalities of representing the castrated hope of the public sphere in postcolonial Nigerian fiction, using the templates provided by Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The methodology involves a close reading of the selected texts, using Jürgen Habermas's concept of the Public Sphere as the theoretical framework. The paper reveals that the context of the texts (Nigeria) lacks the public sphere, which is supposed to provide a liminal space between the private realm of civil society and the family, as well as the sphere of public authority. This is disclosed in the refusal of the characters to disregard 'status altogether' (Habermas 1991:36).

Résumé

Plusieurs critiques littéraires ont insisté sur la nature, les principes et les tendances de l'engagement dans la littérature nigériane. Cependant, il existe peu d'études scientifiques sur les représentations de la promesse manquée de la sphère publique dans la littérature postcoloniale nigériane. Ainsi, le présent article examine les stratégies et les techniques de représentation de l'espoir castré de la sphère publique dans la littérature postcoloniale nigériane, en utilisant les modèles fournis par *Anthills of the Savannah* de Chinua Achebe, *The Famished Road* de Ben Okri et *Purple Hibiscus* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. La méthodologie implique une lecture attentive des textes sélectionnés, en utilisant le

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concept de sphère publique de Jürgen Habermas comme cadre théorique. L'article révèle que le contexte des textes (le Nigeria) est dépourvu de sphère publique, qui est censée offrir un espace liminal entre le domaine privé de la société civile et de la famille, ainsi que la sphère de l'autorité publique. Ceci est indiqué dans le refus des personnages de méconnaitre « complètement le statut » (Habermas 1991:36).

Introduction

The term, 'Public Sphere', most especially from the perspective of literature, is notoriously a slippery concept, designating, as it does, a form of art, a spirit, a purpose and a tone. For many years, much thought on this topic has been influenced by Jürgen Habermas, who proposed that, in eighteenth-century England, middle-class citizens began to see themselves as effective members of a rational public. Communicating ever more volubly in café society, literary clubs and the press, more and more British subjects could see it as their proper role to debate and pass judgements on matters they deemed important to the collective life of the nation. This set of communicative institutions and behaviours Habermas designates 'the bourgeois public sphere'. Nancy Fraser (1992) argues that the public sphere is a 'conceptual resource designating a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction' (1992:110). Thus, the public sphere as a concept refers to an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters, a utopian space where interlocutors set aside characteristics such as difference in birth and fortune and speak to one another as if they were social and economic peers. However, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, social classes, and the like have always impeded the actualization of the public sphere. Therefore, this mode of communicative rationality was in subsequent centuries displaced by the logic of consumer capitalism (Habermas's real target), and it is indeed debatable whether any people at the time really imagined themselves taking part in the pure exchange of ideas.

The primary tenet of the ideal public sphere, as conceived by Habermas, is similar to the experience of Nigerian masses who were always involved, at least indirectly, during the pre-colonial era, in the gathering of public opinions on politics, commerce, entertainment, the arts, ecology and religion. For instance, among the Yoruba of Nigeria in the past, the calabash would be opened for a bad king whose rule was threatening the life of the community. This is an 'àrokò' (sign communication), telling him to vacate the throne through an act of suicide. At Onitsha, in Anambra State of Nigeria, a king

whose reign threatened the life of the community would be asked to vacate the throne and commit suicide by ritual death through the occupation of the throne by a royal masquerade. This signifies a condition of equality among speakers and listeners, not necessarily in wealth or social influence, but in the ability to speak and be heard. In the public sphere, people become important because other people find their actions or attributes worth talking about. A public figure can become so only by the rational affirmation of many citizens speaking to one another. According to Brian Glover (2004), 'to be public is to do something that the public will recognize and acclaim' (2004:10). This is also the case of fictional heroes in prose fiction whose virtues make them admirable.

However, Habermas himself points out, in a brief aside on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, that this idea of the public sphere does not always sit well with the people it supposedly benefits. Rather, most of them go for the Monarchs' 'Publicness' in which the latter are understood as superior beings and as allegorical figures representing something greater than their individual persons. They scarcely try to enter discussions or appeal to the judgement of the ruled. In fact, they reject the contest of ideas, thereby behaving like anti-heroes or antagonists in prose fiction.

It is against the foregoing background that this paper examines the troubles that Nigerian writers face in carrying out the task of exposing their rulers' efforts to alienate the governed from the public sphere. It also investigates and critiques three fictional case studies of how neo-colonial Nigerian rulers exclude some citizens from the utopian space of the public sphere in the country. It is argued that Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* yield singular insight and provocation to a theoretical understanding of the concept of the Public Sphere. It is also argued that Nigerian postcolonial fiction affords an indispensable medium for teasing out and exploring the fraught, antithetical meanings embedded within the notion of the Public Sphere, that is, human rights. By revealing the fairness of the contemporary regime of the Public Sphere in the nation, postcolonial Nigerian fiction paradoxically suggests a location for a re-conceptualization of a newly invigorated, capacious and robust vision of social justice in the nation.

The Sword and the Pen: An Enduring Dissonant Relationship

Knowledge is developing, and the divisions that existed among different disciplines are being erased. This informs the incursion of literature into the fields of social sciences and Human Communication. Thus, the rapprochement between African fiction and Habermas's theory of the public sphere is not an anathema. Writers are useful as watchdogs in societies, as they help

protect the public from those who do harm – from high government officials to petty criminals. They help to shape public thoughts, spark debates and fight for societal good and against societal ills. They embolden the masses and give them hope when it seems there is none. Writers may be too critical and too adversarial or become like mere lapdogs, too timid to take on the sometimes dangerous, often tedious and costly task. Over the years, politics and socio-historical realities have exerted a pull on Nigerian writers. However, writers' endeavours to expose and critique the misdeeds of rulers have always been continually challenged.

The ancient belief that the poet (the writer) has magical powers still survives in certain distorted ways today. In early European culture, the writer was associated with awful audacity. He had the ability to encroach on divine prerogative, akin to the belief among the Yoruba that the king dares not kill a writer (Oba kì í pa òkorin). In traditional Yoruba society, the writer was a protected being, even for a king. Therefore, he was an object of peoples' admiration, a target of their ambivalence, dogged, and heroically prepared to die in defence of the ancient right of the poets. He stood in a very special relation to his society by enhancing its well-being, defending it from its enemies, and mediating between the governed and the rulers. However, all these virtues, rights and obligations of a writer came with a complementary danger, both personal and social. A writer was an object of hate and fear, both honoured and loved for his or her positive roles. The writer was hated and feared because of this power to expose ills. Such was and is the ambivalent attitude of society toward its writers. The ancient law, most especially The Roman Twelve Tables, threatened with death anyone who would 'chant an evil charm'. Plato's laws also recommended extremely severe penalties against similar activities. Old Irish law undertook, zealously, to regulate the activities of writers, making provision for the reward of 'good' writing (directed toward a socially sanctioned end), but laying down heavy penalties for 'bad' writing (that which was wantonly injurious). Writers were then banned for libels, and skated on the thin edge of censorship and legal retribution.

The writer faces comparable problems today. In democratic countries, like Nigeria, the writer attacks individuals only at the risk of grave financial loss to himself and his publisher or risks death during the reign of a totalitarian ruler. In fact, there are considerable demonstrable effects of political and economic pressures on Nigerian writers in the form of restrictions and repression. In Nigeria, like in many other countries of the world, freedom of expression in general and for the press or for writers is the exception rather than the rule. Some writers in the country have been subjected to imprisonment, and some have been gruesomely murdered. There is a seeming

cold war between the sword (the ruler) and the pen (the writer) in Nigeria. Freedom House rates Nigeria's news media as 'partly free', with 53 points on a scale of zero to a hundred. With respect to this rating, one should note that Nigeria's constitution ostensibly guarantees freedom of expression and of the press. However, it is observed that the state often uses arbitrary action and extra-legal measures to suppress political criticism and expression in the media and creative writings. It can also be noted that libel remains a criminal offence and the burden of proof in such cases rests with the defendant. Nigeria's State Security Services are known to use arbitrary detention and extra-judicial measures in attempts to suppress expressions of the press and writers, and to muffle political activism and criticism.

One pertinent issue which should be resolved at this juncture is this: Do Nigerian writers attack institutions or the perversions of institutions? To Northrop Frye, the writer attacks primarily neither the man nor the institution; he only attacks an evil man who is given high stature and protected by the prestige of the institution. In Frye's words, 'the cowl might make the monk if it were not for the satirist' (1945:80). However, rulers frequently react violently against writers' attacks, because it could be argued that such attacks lead to an indefinite extension in the reader's mind, and thus into an assault on the whole structure of that which the phenomenon is part. What primarily stands as a local attack often ends by calling the whole institution into question. Therefore, the ruler will keep on suspecting the writer, and the relationship of a writer to society will necessarily remain problematic. A very recent example of the dissonant relationship between the ruler and the writer in Nigeria was the conflict between the writers in Kano State and the Censors Board constituted and inaugurated by the government of the state. In his defence of the attempt of the government to censor all publications in the state, Abubakar Rabo, the Director General, asserted:

> Knowing how important reading is to the development of the mind, it is very essential that we safeguard what the public is reading, especially our youths. There are some literatures that are obscene going around, such are the types we are trying to kick against (*The Nation*, 6 August 2008:26).

However, some writers see the Censors Board as outrageous and anachronistic. For instance, Denja Abdullahi, the national secretary of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), reacted to the setting up of the Board as follows:

> The action is condemnable. It is like taking us back to the Stone Age. Banning of literature in a society sets it back to the time of the Stone Age. It is not good for the country and the society at large. There is no need for that. Presently, there is no place in the world where such is done (*The Nation*, 6 August 2008:27).

Niyi Osundare frankly decries the existence of the Board:

> Censors board? What does Censors board have to do with writing? It is backward and extensively diversionary. This is grotesquery. I thought we have left this behind hundreds of years ago. At a time when the whole world is moving forward, Nigeria appears to be backward, and with this development, then, it shows that we are actually retrogressing very fast. This takes us back to 1644 when John Milton the great English poet wrote *Areopagitica*. He did it in respect of free speech and unhampered expression (*The Nation*, 6 August 2008:27).

Thus, it is an open secret that there is an uneasy relationship between the rulers and the writers in Nigeria. Governments have imposed varying levels of censorship on the writers. Even when not censored, their works may be subject to intense scrutiny. At one extreme, Nigerian writers have been called propagandists, labelled unpatriotic, even treasonous. However, it should be reiterated that freedom of writers and the press is a cornerstone of democracy. People have a need to know, and writers have a right to tell. However, responsibility includes the duty to be fair. Nigeria has experienced a turbulent social and political history, and there is an alarming climate of political, social and economic tension in the country.

Fictional Case Studies of the Failed Promise of the Public Sphere in Nigeria

Despite the official pressure and even violence directed against them, Nigerian writers are still vibrant and are especially vocal about unpopular state policies. They are always a source of inspiration and consolation through their works during the reign of despots who enact poison-tipped policies, ruling the nation with rod and scorpion. In such periods, nothing moves as it is supposed to; only official corruption, official killing, do-or-die politics and the like thrive unabated. Nigerian writers always rise to the occasion and challenge the excesses of government that are detrimental to the well-being of the nation. Of course, it is difficult to determine the precise influence of Nigerian writers in trying to sustain the evolving democracy. But one wonders what the nation would have become at the hands of the neo-colonial rulers of the country if Nigerian writers had put down their pens. Adebayo Williams contends that:

> African writers have resisted oppression and injustice on the continent with great force and courage. Literature is fundamentally incompatible with tyranny. In its purest state, literature is subversive of authority and authoritarian rulers. Its joyous and spontaneous celebration of life, its near anarchic contempt for regulation and regimentation makes it the most natural enemy of dictatorship. While the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation (1996:350).

Creative and critical literature in Nigeria is more than ever before required. It is no longer a question of how the British colonialists 'ruined' the country, but of how Nigerian leaders have aborted the great hopes and expectations of independence. As the comment by Niyi Osundare cited above argues, socio-political commitment is not a mere aside, a parenthesis or a footnote in the creative consciousness of postcolonial Nigerian writers. They write not only to entertain and please, but to change their society in the process.

Chinua Achebe's 'Anthills of the Savannah': An Imaginative Chronicle of 'The Trouble with Nigeria's Public Sphere'

In his essays and interviews, Achebe maintains that in Africa, literature is a communal celebration. Thus, the African writer has no choice but to be committed, for there is no room for art for art's sake; rather there is always art for life's sake. In his work, Achebe traces the trouble with Nigeria to the doorstep of tribalism, the absence of patriotism, social injustice, indiscipline, corruption, and the like. These vices, Achebe believes, originate at the top of the political order and work their way down, as we find in his 1984 work, *The Trouble with Nigeria*.

Following the template offered by Abdul JanMohamed in his analysis of Achebe's writing in the light of Georg Lukacs's theory of realism, this paper analyses the main characters in *Anthills of the Savannah* and their profound alienation. In this novel, Achebe employs three main characters (Ikem Osodi, the Editor of the *National Gazette*; Beatrice Okoh, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Finance; and Chris Oriko, the Commissioner for Information) who in turn narrate the story. With this narrative structure, the reader is enabled to see 'His Excellency' (Sam) and understand the problem of the failed promise of the public sphere in Nigeria from a multi-dimensional perspective.

Anthills of the Savannah is Achebe's most sustained treatment of political issues in post-independence Nigeria. The president of a fictional African state, Kangan (unmistakably Nigeria), is intoxicated with power. In his book *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe affirms that the trouble with the country is 'simply and squarely a failure of leadership' (1984:1); *Anthills of the Savannah* is the fictional exposition of this source of failure. In the text, there is a transition from love and friendship to disillusionment and violence. The President is apathetic towards dialogue, constructive criticism, egalitarianism and communication. The public sphere is rejected in his domain, because it is seen as an anathema.

In the world of the novel, the public sphere is not allowed to materialize. The expected avenue 'made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state' (Habermas 1991:176) is not allowed to function in the cosmos of Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Rather, flattery comes to assume the place of real debate, and the moral force of governing is displaced by internal struggles over power. For instance, one of the narrators believes that, in order not to irk the president, it is good to 'keep your mouth shut' (Achebe 1987:2). The Head of State even says authoritatively: 'You know I've never relied on you fellows for information on anything or anybody' (1987:15). He informs the Commissioner for Justice and Attorney-General: 'You may be the Attorney, but don't forget I am the General' (1987:24). Surprisingly, the Attorney-General also concurs by saying: 'we have no problem worshipping a man like you' (1987:24). This reverence is due to His Excellency's personal background. The Attorney-General attended a 'bush grammar school', unlike His Excellency who was born with silver spoon in his mouth and attended an elite school. In fact, within two years of holding the reins of government, Sam has become a totalitarian dictator. The government is absolute in power; it 'holds the yam and holds the knife' (1987:33). Beatrice testifies to the sudden negative metamorphosis of the president:

> In the early days of his coming to power I had gone fairly often to the Palace with Chris and sometimes Chris and Ikem. But then things had changed quite dramatically after about a year and now apart from viewing him virtually every night on television news I had not actually set eyes on him nor had any kind of direct contact for well over a year (1987:71).

The President recedes up the hill, communes with his cronies and forgets the very people who legitimize his authority. This is to attest to the fact that many postcolonial African leaders forget that, in Africa everything is connected, interrelated and dependent. Instead, they engage in massive corruption, subservience to foreign manipulation, second-class hand-me-down capitalism, shootings of striking workers and demonstrating students, and destruction and the banning of independent unions and cooperatives. Consequently, there are many fugitives in the fictional nation of Kangan; for instance, Emmanuel Obete, a former President of the Students Union. These problems are attributed to the failure or neglect of the public sphere in the nation, that is: 'the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being' (1987:141).

The leadership style of His Excellency, Sam, shows that the military operates through 'might is right', and it is usually tyrannical in approach. In fact, the ordeals of the people of Kangan reveal that military rulers are really dictators under whom the masses suffer untold economic and psychological hardships. And for the simple reason that man desires comfort, he rebels

against oppressive tendencies in the rulers. Crawford Young (2004) comments on this claim thus:

> Military intervention became the sole mechanism to displace incumbents, but the putschist in power normally formed a new single party to legitimize permanent status for his rule. Thus citizens became once again merely subjects, facing an exclusion from the public domain reminiscent of colonial times. One important difference: whereas the colonial state asked only obedience, the post-colonial polity demanded affection. Mere submission did not suffice; active participation in rituals, loyally (support marches, assemblies to applaud touring dignitaries, purchase of Party cards, display of the presidential portrait, participation in plebiscitary elections) were mandatory (2004:25).

Because the people become terrified under dictatorship, just a few courageous members of the society take it upon themselves to bear the burden of all and sundry. These individuals become martyrs and heroes in the process. It is the attempt by a few courageous individuals to create alternative voices through which the masses can be informed of developments in their society that gives rise to the resistance culture which runs through Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.

It becomes extremely difficult for the press to write and publish what it knows to be true. The way the press ignores warning signals, the brutality that befalls the masses of the nation, would have served as a cruel reminder of an intolerant regime that permits and promotes falsehood above national ethics and moral ethos. It is instructive to note that oppressive and repressive regimes prevent freedom of speech to their personal advantage. Since words alone cannot sufficiently bring down a tyrant, there is, therefore, the need for collaboration between the press and members of the pro-democracy pressure groups to create a bigger platform by which the tyrant is confronted and hunted down eventually. Therefore, Sam's attitude to opposition, especially critical views by the press, makes Ikem and his collaborators (Beatrice, activists, labour leaders, and the like) think into existence alternative routes of resisting the draconian rule of military dictatorship. To Ikem, journalism is not meant to make things cosy for leaders who are despotic. It is meant to prod them to act in the interest of the larger society and to cause them sleepless nights (Kunle Ajibade 2003). The press is one organised group that has helped to give bite to the cause of human struggle and resistance against oppression and oppressors in the nation of Kangan. This is a commendable action because, if the press abdicates this responsibility, the leaders will operate without restraints.

According to Umelo Ojinmah (1991), 'such concepts as moral principles, tolerance for opposition, and the use of power for the benefit of the people do not have much meaning to the leaders' (Ojinmah 1991:61). Sam begins to demonstrate his despotism at a cabinet meeting when he obstinately refuses to visit the drought-stricken province of Abazon. He wants no opposition, and, at all cost, demands the submission of a dissident province to the central authority. He addresses and harasses his cabinet without caring whose ox is gored. His high-handedness is reflected in his abusive words to Chris, the Commissioner for Information: 'I will not go to Abazon. Finish! Kabisa!' (Achebe 1987:1). This rejection of assembly and dialogue unveils the stark reality that military dictators habitually distance themselves from the people they rule. Sam orders Professor Okong, the Commissioner for Home Affairs, to meet the Abazon delegates and give them empty promises about the welfare of the dispossessed and forgotten inhabitants of the province. He urges the Commissioner to 'find some nice words to them. Tell them we are tied up ... with very important matters of the State ... tell them they can be rest assured that their complaints or rather problem ... will receive His Excellency's personal attention' (1987:17). So Sam, in his anti-public-sphere posture, rejects the opportunity of generating opinions and attitudes which could have served to affirm or challenge, therefore, guide the affairs of the nation. Consequently, there is no ideal public sphere in Kangan, due to the anti-democratic temper of the Head of State, who refuses to allow the public opinion needed to 'legitimate authority in any functioning democracy' (Paul Rutherford 2000:18).

Thus, the abuse of human rights is an endemic problem engulfing the fictional State of Kangan. It is correct, thus, to agree with Ojinmah's (1991) assertion that:

> Achebe sees the soldiers as not being any better than the civilians they ousted ... they have become worse, having perfected torture, intimidation and cold-blooded killing as weapons to cow the opponents of their policies (Ojinmah 1991:86).

In his bid to undermine press freedom, Sam charges Chris to check the editorial 'excesses' of Ikem, the Editor of the state-owned newspaper, *The National Gazette*, so that the naked truth of the president's dictatorship remains concealed. Cases of arbitrary arrest which are replete in Kangan also corroborate the satanic inclination of the military tyrants to unleash the reign of terror on dissidents, as demonstrations, whether peaceful or violent, become a taboo. Six Abazon leaders are maimed because of their alleged complicity in staging a protest against the military despots. The omniscient narrator explains: 'Six leaders from Abazon who were involved in a recent illegal

march on the Presidential Palace without police permit as required by decree had been arrested' (Achebe 1987:150).

But the educated elite living in the capital city, as exemplified by Chris, Ikem and Beatrice, believe in the creation of the nation-state. They reject the distinction between State and nation, as practised by Sam, the Head of State, and the people of Abazon. The elite, due to their respect for the public sphere, believe in identifying a State and a national atmosphere where the ruler must come from among the people of the nation, identify with them, and the people in turn would identify with the State. However, Sam's regime, because of its hostility towards the Habermasian Public Sphere, does not allow the masses to have a stake in the country. The governing elite is isolated from the masses, symbolized by the air conditioning in the Council Chamber. This literally cuts off the noise of the people protesting outside, thereby depriving the elite of a vital source of knowledge in the everyday experience of the people. Sam turns his cabinet into a group of timorous courtiers and hedonists, who only strive for personal survival and advancement. No critical debates essential for informed process of policy-making exist in the cabinet.

Ikem, a seasoned journalist, is expected to proclaim and protect the President's image by disseminating only what he tells him. On the contrary, Ikem holds tenaciously to the freedom of the press. Achebe seems to rely on the courageous and principled stance that some members of the elite take to envision a nation where the yearning of the masses for the public sphere is met. Ikem, for instance, attempts to provide genuine independent political opinions. However, he is soon labelled as subversive and, subsequently, murdered by the security police. He traces the trouble of the nation to 'the failure of our rulers to establish vital links with the poor and disposed of his country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being' (1987:141). Sam is killed in a coup, and his tragic flaw is depicted to be his inability to embrace the establishment of a nation-state. He encourages the potentially disastrous discrepancy between the state and the nation. To Habermas, the existence of a distinct public sphere mainly rests upon access to full information being guaranteed to all citizens, not just only small, self-selecting and more or less privileged particular public as the case is in Sam's Kangan. Also, the key idea of attaining truth through unrestricted public discussion among knowledgeable citizens is not allowed by the despot. Through the misrule of Sam, Achebe has, therefore, taken the wrapping off the military government and laid bare its perfidies.

Incompatibility of social classes leads to inevitability of conflicts and struggles. The society is in total grip of the 'petty bourgeoisie', that is, the intelligentsia. The oppressed and deprived people (the workers and peasants)

are not given major roles to play in the society. According to Emmanuel Ngara, they are 'either pushed to periphery or relegated to oblivion' (Ngara 1990:122). There is a huge gap between the hybrid class of intellectuals and the downtrodden class of the oppressed. This rape of democracy, that is the failure of the public sphere, leads to crisis in the fictional society. There are agitations for free debates against the encroachment of totalitarian control of the military despot and his collaborators, popular protests and later a coup d'état. Since Sam refuses to engage in discourse in the public sphere, that is, he refuses to engage in dialogue with the Abazon delegates, Ikem persists in believing that he can, through his Editorials in *The National Gazette*, make the President realize that despotism is an abomination in a supposedly democratic state. This is achieved through the efforts of Chris, Ikem and Beatrice to re-establish bonds with the people (shops saleswomen, taxi drivers, student activists, trade unionists, village elders, and the like). Through this effort, they are able to forge at least a brief period of national solidarity and truly representative political consciousness.

Commendably, the hybrid classes of intellectuals – Chris, Ikem and Beatrice as representatives – assume the temper of dynamic characters and take on the responsibility of playing a redemptive role in the society. Kangan workers and peasants are depicted as a social class with enormous potential. This unity-in-diversity shakes the rule of His Excellency and frightens him. The masses of Kangan prove that they are unwilling to remain oppressed, but would rather choose to fight consciously against the lies, corruption and despotism of the ruling class. However, their revolutionary ardour is constrained by their lack of power. This is captured in the allegory of the battle between the Tortoise and the Leopard. Therefore, although the masses come to fight, they do not have any extravagant hope of winning; they only fight symbolically to gain some psychological satisfaction. This is why they need the intellectual guidance and inspiration of the hybrid class. However, the hybrid class, in its attempt to play redemptive role in the society, faces two hurdles. In the first instance, the members of this class must abandon their position as part of the ruling class. Secondly, they need to immerse themselves in the mass of ordinary people, that is, identify themselves with the people and become part of them. They must in effect cross two class borders.

The heroic deaths of Chris and Ikem educate the masses of Kangan and enable them to become aware that reconciliation among various social classes is essential for the unity of the nation. Achebe's prescription for the failed promise of the public sphere in the country is reconciliation among various social classes. They should re-adjust and improve human relationships for

the sake of the stability of the nation. The rulers should also humble themselves in order to truly understand and care about the people in the downtrodden class. The governed also need to make compromises while fighting to survive. This is revealed, for instance, in the cross-class love between Ikem and Elewa, cross-class understanding between Beatrice and Agatha, and especially in the new born baby, Amaechiwa ('May-the-path-never-end').

Ben Okri's 'The Famished Road': A Magical Refraction of the Failed Promise of the Public Sphere in Nigeria

Although *The Famished Road* offers an insight into a pre-independence epoch, it is also very relevant to post-independence Africa, a revelation of the unsavoury intricacies that permeate the social terrain of a developing country as a result of skewed human relationships and the failed promise of the public sphere. The Abiku myth is used as a political metaphor. The exploits and ordeals of the spirit-child, his vacillation between two worlds (terrestrial and extra-terrestrial), unfold in the socio-political, cultural and moral fabrics of the society. The episodic plot of the novel involves a quest motif, involving three characters (Azaro, Black Tyger/Dad, and Jeremiah, the photographer). One of them (Azaro) is recognized at the apex of the identity-search ladder; the other two are significantly subsumed in the first, but their search is single-mindedly political. The pursuit of a humane and just society in the physical realm is uppermost in their consciousness. Azaro's attempt to navigate life towards self-discovery, as encompassed by the road myth, seems to be rough, tortuous and sinuous:

> In the beginning, there was a river. The river became a road, and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river, it was always hungry (Okri 1991:1).
>
> The road became my torment, my aimless pilgrimage, and I found myself walking to discover where all the roads lead to, where they end (1991:114).

Through the exploits of Azaro, the reader is able to understand the rigours of existence: 'the unfulfilled longings, the enshrined injustices of the world, the labyrinths of love, the ignorance of parents, the fact of dying' (1991:3). The author describes a political system that has turned into a festering sore. The wide gulf between the rich and the poor is revealed in some people living in clover, while others are condemned to the impecuniousness of the slums, religious perversity, political insincerity on the part of both the Party of the Rich and of the Poor, and other eccentricities. All these impediments discourage Azaro from defining himself permanently within the corporeal reality. In the milieu imaginatively portrayed in this novel, revolutionary nationalist hopes have given way to the disappointments and disillusionment of the

corrupt post-independence state that Frantz Fanon foretells in Chapter Three of *The Wretched of the Earth*. The succession of one corrupt regime by another (like the 'coming and going' of the 'Abiku' child) has been a persistent pattern that has defined the politics of almost the entire continent, and one which shows little sign of changing.

Dad (Black Tyger), as a result of his abject poverty and unemployment, resolves to become a boxer to earn a living. His status as a boxer and nonconformist pits him against the Party of the Rich, the governing authorities, his landlord, and at times, Madame Koto – the last two being members of the Party of the Rich. Because of Dad's unyielding opposition to the Party, his landlord hikes his rent, which he bemoans in statements tinged with political rage: 'where am I going to find that kind of money every month, eh? That's how they make you commit murder. Do you see how they force a man to become an armed robber?' (Okri 1991:237). He rebuffs his landlord's attempt to coerce him to vote for the Party of the Rich during an election: 'what right has the landlord to bully us, to tell us who to vote for, eh? Is he God? Even God can't tell us who to vote for. Don't be afraid. We may be poor, but we are no slaves' (1991:203).

In the society portrayed in *The Famished Road*, politicians are presented as embodiments of greed and corruption. Okri is equally concerned with the indifference which most of the exploited members of the society show toward their conditions. The interrelationship and interdependence required of them to change the status quo is, however, lacking. In spite of the fact that Okri paints a bleak social and political picture of this period of Nigeria's history, he leaves everyone in doubt as to the solution to the problems he has portrayed. This confirms Brenda Cooper's (1998) assertion that Okri's novel is elusive with regard to 'the possibility of change' (89). Okri's ability to recount the impossibility of a stable and acceptable public sphere among the people situates the text within a particular historical period, and this removes it from being a mere magical realist novel and qualifies it as a social realist text. It is when we consider these dissonant and discriminatory human interactions in the novel that the full impact of the social and political decadence really strikes us.

The society depicted in the novel is polarized into the poor, represented by Dad's household and the rich, represented by Dad's landlord and Madame Koto. Okri shows that this society, like most highly stratified societies, is characterized by the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Dad and his neighbours are subject to constant exploitation by the landlord. Even though the roof is leaking, the landlord continues to increase the rent and often threatens to set thugs on them. Only Dad is aware of the social realities and sometimes challenges this domineering figure, while others seem to be less

concerned. There are no serious and purposeful social interactions geared towards catalyzing a change among the deprived masses. Dad seems to be the only man of conscience struggling to change the society for good. While his family's situation worsens, those of Madame Koto and the landlord improve. Madame Koto in the process is transformed from the kind of woman who helps her needy neighbours. Her metamorphosis is so complete that Azaro says: 'she changed completely from the person I used to know, her big frame which seemed to me full of warmth now seemed full of wickedness. I didn't know why she had changed' (1991:251). Madame Koto becomes a stranger to the ghetto dwellers when she comes in contact with the politicians. Through this negative metamorphosis, Okri conjures up, in detail, the abuse of power and national resources by Nigeria's ruling class.

Dad, in his uncontrolled outburst declares: 'some people have too much, and their dogs eat better food, while others suffer and keep quiet until the day they die' (1991:380). His efforts to earn a livelihood afford him an insight into the realities of his society. He awakens to the fact that he, along with other members of his social class, has been condemned to lead a life of hardship and abject poverty from which it is impossible to escape. This situation is even worse on the political front. Political affiliation is deeply polarized in two (The Party of the Rich and The Party of the Poor). Okri uses this polarization to show the difference between the lifestyle of the members of the Party of the Rich and their supporters and those of The Party of the Poor. For members of the Party of the Rich, wealth and power have become the principal pursuit, and the unavoidable consequence of the situation is a total disregard of any moral or social consideration in the drive to satisfy individual desires. This recalls Abubakar Liman's (1999) comment that *The Famished Road* is 'a way of depicting the life of the poor in Nigeria who are caught between the urge to life, a better life and the difficulties of a system built on injustice and exploitation of man by man' (Liman 1999:70).

For Okri, Nigeria is metaphorically an Abiku child who comes and goes at will. For instance, Dad has a similar notion, as he observes and avers that: 'ours too was an abiku nation, a spirit-child, one that keeps being reborn and after each birth comes blood and betrayal, the child of ours will refuse to stay till we have made propitious sacrifice and displayed our serious intent to bear the weight of a unique destiny' (Okri 1991:494). However, despite all this, Dad is optimistic. He believes that one day:

> There will be change ... And when people least expect it; a great transformation is going to take place in the world. Suffering people will know justice and beauty. A wonderful change is coming from far away and people will realize the great meaning of struggle and hope, there will be peace (1991:478).

The travails of Jeremiah, the photographer, are reflective of the cat-and-mouse relationship between the press, writers, and a repressive regime. Jeremiah's ordeals depict the life of many freedom fighters and writers in Africa who are silenced by the government or politicians for attempting to challenge authority. Many of them have been clandestinely murdered, completely silenced by the government, and those who refuse to be silenced are incarcerated. Once, the photographer had to flee into secrecy for a long time after being assailed by the thugs of the Party of the Rich. When his house is attacked, he disappears. He is also sent away from a relative's house when it comes under surveillance. The genesis of his trouble is the taking of pictures of the riot against the Party of the Rich when poisoned milk was being distributed. He takes pictures of the miserable members, especially Black Tyger's landlord who is left reeling in the mire with his torn clothes. He records moments of triumph by the ghetto dwellers and the burnt van of the Party of the Rich. The Party's humiliation gains so much prominence in the papers that thugs seek Jeremiah out for extermination. He is arrested and released after three days, telling tales of torture and brutality he received at the hands of security agents. For displaying pictures at his home of the Rich Party's disgrace, thugs vandalize it. His actions become legendary, but he can no longer continue his trade without molestation. He now makes only nocturnal appearances and becomes a tramp, leading a vagrant life, begging for food. However, despite being hounded, his courage and uncompromising will to expose the ills of the ruling elite become famous. He continues to take pictures of market women fighting with thugs and those of policemen collecting bribes. Such activities are a confirmation of one of the basic tenets of Habermas's public sphere, that is, the public sphere can be animated by opinion-forming associations (voluntary associations, social organizations, churches, sports, clubs, group of concerned citizens, grassroots movements, trade unions and so on) to counter or refashion the messages of authority.

In this work, Okri transmits, analyses, critiques and even transgresses the yearnings of his nation through engagements with myth and historicity and by probing the images and realities of Nigeria's postcolonial experience. From these mytho-cultural experiences and sociological inclinations that have a solid ideological sub-text arise a successful production of a story that narrates the issue of the failed promise of the public sphere in Nigeria. Although the narrative centres on the Abiku myth and is surrounded by almost unending mysteries, the reader is able to obtain a full grasp of political issues in Nigeria. If the continuous disorder and chaos in human life, especially in Nigeria, are anything to go by, there is a need to mythologize experiences and break the

barriers of conventional realism. This has made Okri's *The Famished Road*, considering its narrative modes, a 'distinctive combination of the African, and the European, which reflects the collective modes of discourse underlying postmodern parody' (Olatubosun Ogunsanwo 1995:48). Okri uses magic, drawn from the African oral tradition, to make a social statement – all is far from well with Nigeria's public sphere.

Chimamanda Adichie's 'Purple Hibiscus': Allegorizing the Failed Promise of the Public Sphere in Nigeria

Although *Purple Hibiscus* reads like a mere family saga, it has definite political overtones. It captures the social and political foibles of a neo-colonial African country. It is about tyranny and people's complicity in their oppression; it powerfully evokes the Nigerian political landscape. Through the unhealthy consequences of the filial and domestic conflicts in the story, Adichie calls for an all-inclusive public sphere in Nigerian society. The novel is a political satire that appeals for change in a nation stunted due to the failed promise of the public sphere. An archetype of an average neo-colonial Nigerian ruler, Papa Eugene is intolerant and disallows his family members from the public sphere of his household (allegorically the Nigeria neo-colony). He is, therefore, depicted as a fanatically religious patriarch, who over-exerts his children academically and religiously debars them from interacting with their neighbourhood. Basil Davidson's (1992) comments on the failure of the public sphere in African countries are relevant to the reading of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* as a social and political allegory:

> If the postcolonial nation-state had become a shackle on progress ... the prime reason could appear in little doubt. The state was not liberating and protective of its citizens, no matter what its propaganda claimed: On the contrary, its gross effect was constricting and exploitative, or else had simply failed to operate in any social sense at all (Davidson 1992:23).

This paper argues that meaning is not inherent in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*; rather, it is contextual – a function of the situation within which it is articulated. In reading the work, one must rely on a situated and historical analysis of the specific conditions of the socio-political groups in the story. Thus, Papa Eugene is conceived as a nation's tyrant ruler; his household is a metonym of a nation, and his family signify the dehumanized citizens of the nation. Papa Nnukwu and Aunt Ifeoma are allegorical representations of the radicals and pro-democracy groups in the nation. In Papa Eugene's 'nation', all the factors that are germane to the success of the public sphere are not in existence. This is because the extent of access to the public sphere is not close to universal; the citizens are not free of coercion, and hierarchy is not

rejected in the milieu, as each member of the family is not given the right to participate on an equal footing (Paul Rutherford 2000).

From the beginning of the story, Papa displays his masculine dominance in his typical African home setting. It is a Palm Sunday, and his son (Jaja) refuses to turn up for the communion. On reaching home, Papa wants to know why Jaja did not attend the communion. Jaja's says that the substances used as the body of Christ give him bad breath, and the priest touches his mouth nauseatingly. Jaja's refusal to attend the communion infuriates Papa who throws his heavy missal at him. This misses the boy but breaks a glass étagère, a precious possession of Mama. Here, it can be seen that the story starts with violence due to the attempt of Papa Eugene to bracket off his wife and children from the family's public sphere. This is first revealed in Jaja's defiance and rebellion: 'Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère' (Adichie 2003:4).

Papa Eugene rules his household like a tyrant. The narrator juxtaposes this attitude with that of a tyrant military Head of State. Papa's habitual resort to violence, like an average African despotic ruler, marks the beginning of the breakdown of the family. The family is ruled by the strict authoritarian father, Eugene, who dictates their every move – study schedules, prayer, mass, sleep, church, visitations and the like. He even bans them from spending time with their aged grandfather (his own father) whom he condemns as a heathen. Papa Eugene controls his family through fear and violence, but the violence is never spoken about by the family members who initially keep silent in the face of tyranny. For instance, Kambili and Jaja only communicate with each other through sign language. Papa Eugene's style of 'ruling' his household (his kingdom) is one that offends all known administrative and judicial processes, civilian or military. Things are done brazenly in a manner reminiscent of anarchic times when bestiality is the order of the day. He adopts a monarchical approach to dealing with his family, talking down to them in a manner that makes them felt unworthy of their being human beings.

There is a cat-and-mouse game between the agents of oppressive forces (the ruler of the day and his cohorts) and the resistance forces represented by the tireless press, most especially *The Standard*. Journalists are always in a privileged position which enables them to mould the opinions of the people by appealing to their sentiments. Unlike other professions where practitioners may die obscure, journalists are exposed to a vista of opportunities on a daily basis, because the community has confidence in them and trusts their judgements. They also have the liberty to address the people and direct their thinking concerning a particular matter. For this reason, journalism becomes

a yoke for Ade Coker, the versatile editor of *The Standard*. The reason for his ordeals is not difficult to find. The same privilege enjoyed by him as a journalist is coveted by the dictator; that is, the capacity to control reason, to reinvent and affect other people's thinking. This gives rise to the prevailing tension between the efficient press (represented by Ade Coker) and the totalitarian State. The press is seen to have bravely withstood the tyranny of Nigerian dictators and gone above and beyond their normal remit to uncover news under extremely difficult circumstances and at great personal risk. Of the whole group, Ade Coker is portrayed as the leading force. He may not have suffered losses greater than any other journalist in the country, but he is more resolute and vows to put an end to the despot's reign by whatever means.

Papa Eugene's religious intolerance symbolizes the ugly side of the Nigerian state. The government of the day is depicted as an intolerant one, most especially in its consistent censoring of the press. According to Father Benedict, Papa 'used *Standard* to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising' (2003:3). Papa Eugene also asserts, after a coup, that the newspapers in the country 'are all afraid. Writing about how corrupt the civilian government was, as if they think the military will not be corrupt. This country is going down, way down' (2003:26). Kambili, the narrator, also adds that 'in the following weeks, the newspapers we read during family time sounded different, more subdued' (2003:27). Under the military regimes in Nigeria, press freedom was always restricted, often very heavily. The Nigerian Press, that was known to be voluble if not cantankerous, buoyed by a no-holds-barred approach to matters of national interest and with a capacity for advocacy and adversarial writing against those it considered guilty of malfeasance, suddenly lost its salt in the military attempt to subordinate it to the State. This is revealed in the case of Ade Coker, subject to state harassment and eventually killed by a letter bomb. This is a literary inter-text of the actual circumstances surrounding the extra-judicial murder of the popular Editor of *Newswatch Magazine*, Dele Giwa, in 1986.

Also, in the face of military dictatorship, some journalists become hypocritical, constituting themselves into mere appendages of the military. An example of this is found in the instances where all the other magazines and newspapers in the nation, except *The Standard*, refuse to condemn the incessant coups in the country, but instead described them merely as a 'Change of Guard' (2003:25). This confirms Rutherford's assertion that large newspapers devoted to profit have turned the press into an agent of manipulation: 'It became the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere' (Rutherford 2000:185). The veracity of the claim

of Ali Mazrui (2005:69) that Africa, as a continent, is marked by 'conquerability, docility, malleability and fundamental inferiority' is confirmed in the initial docility of the citizens of the society, here fictionalized in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus.*

However, Adichie suggests a way out of the quagmire. To have a space in the public sphere of the society, Mama (Beatrice) and her children (Jaja and Kambili) later reject Papa Eugene's despotic and intolerant acts. They try to correct the anomalies through protests and defiance by Jaja and Kambili, and later through a 'revolution' or 'bloody coup' by Mama. Also, Adichie does not fail to suggest what the situation ought to be in a true democratic setting. This she does through the use of characters like Papa Nnukwu, Jaja and Kambili, and more significantly, Ifeoma, and her children. Despite the fact that Eugene does everything he can to make his father abandon his religion and embrace the Catholic faith, the old man remains resolute:

> Papa Nnukwu had told the Umunna how Papa had offered to build him a house, buy him a car, and hire him a driver as long as he converted and threw away the chi in the thatch shrine in his yard ... Papa Nnukwu laughed and said ... he would not throw away his chi; he had already told Papa this many times (Adichie 2003:61).

In spite of his poor living conditions, Papa Nnukwu stands his ground. This is a literary testimony to the unyielding anti-dictatorship temper of a few Nigerians who always remain on the side of the masses and refuse offers by tyrannical rulers. Also significant is the tendentious resistance frequently put up by Jaja. The various episodes of his resistance are suggestive of the hidden cry of the Nigerian masses to find a true expression in a society where the promise of the public sphere has remained perennially unattainable.

On a particular occasion, Kambili suffers menstrual cramps on a Sunday morning, and Mama urges her to take pain killers. As a result of this, Kambili takes her breakfast ten minutes before Mass, which, according to Papa Eugene is a desecration of the Eucharist fast. Papa Eugene is infuriated, without listening to the reason for this desecration. He turns wild:

> He unbuckles his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt ... It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm ... I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back (2003:102).

Papa's reason for the indiscriminate flogging of his wife and children is because she watches as the children desecrate the Mass. Papa as a patriarch is well defined – he is cruel, brutal, religiously fanatical, high-handed and oppressive. In another instance, he chops off Jaja's little finger because he misses a question at the Catechism class. Surprisingly, Papa, the looming

male figure in the story, is a modern and educated man. However, despite his academic sophistication and business acumen, he is bestial in the way he treats his wife and children. He is hard-nosed, and he subjects his family's pain to his whims and caprices. He himself gives the reader the impression that his demeanour is conditioned and dictated by religion.

Women's subjugation and marginalization in the African public sphere come in different ways and shapes. One major way through which this subjectivity of women has continued and thrived is the traditional belief in the society. In other words, societal customs, culture and ways of life help to facilitate norms that subdue women. Papa's hard-nosed stance is sometimes at the detriment of Mama's health. Once, on their way to visit Father Benedict after church, Mama starts to feel ill at ease because of her pregnancy, and she pleads with her husband to allow her stay back in the car. Papa asks twice, 'I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car: Mama looked up, "I'll come with you; it's really not that bad"' (2003:29). She agrees to go with her husband (under duress), not because she is willing or physically fit enough, but because she does not want to displease her husband. Her initial unwillingness to go on the visit is interpreted by Papa as thwarting God's will by putting her selfish desires first. Papa Eugene so much dominates his family that it is only his voice that is loud. He treats other members of the family as mere appendages. Everything, every action and every belief is ranked and scaled according to his standard. It is, therefore, convenient to agree with Lily Mabura's (2008) reading of Adichie's text as a postcolonial gothic novel. This is because the anti-heroic tendencies of Papa Eugene are replicas of the features of a gothic character.

The last dastardly act of Eugene against his wife is breaking a table on her belly, thereby terminating her six-week pregnancy: 'You know that small table where we keep the family bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly ... My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it' (Adichie 2003:47). One gets the impression that Papa Eugene has gone morally berserk, for his actions cannot even be Biblically supported. Through this, and many other similar events in the story, Chimamanda Adichie is trying to discourage the oppressed from over-condoning injustice and oppression before the dehumanizing acts degenerate. Papa Eugene's anti-democratic posture had initially been taken without any counter-reaction. However, this situation transforms Mama into a violent person as revealed in the event that unfolds later. Before her transition into a radical feminist, Mama is depicted as a quintessential traditional woman who does not import Western feminist ideologies into the African worldview. Rather, she establishes a 'safe' point that is favourable to the worldview. She

also recognizes the nature of her society as being ancient, and that practices and traditions that have existed for years might not be easily changed. With these ideas, she rejects the proposal by her sister-in-law, Ifeoma, on the need to call her marriage off considering the brutalities she has experienced.

Therefore, propelled by her natural pacifist ideology, Mama initially endures her marriage, hoping things will change for the better. For instance, rather than become furious as a result of the unfair treatment meted out by her husband, Mama always remains calm. In a particular instance, when Papa beats her and her children, Mama takes the belt he uses to flog them from him and lays it on the table. However, human patience and resistance to injustice are limited. Patience, in man, alongside the mechanism for its operation and manifestation, is elastic. It detaches upon further stretching; that is, one tends to exhaust one's patience when evolving circumstances are ridiculous, hence unbearable. As a result of this, Papa Eugene's death, through poisoning, is Mama's way of asserting herself and her will. Papa Eugene's tragic end confirms the assertion that oppression will always meet with equal resistance, no matter the place and people, and that good triumphs over evil ultimately, no matter how long evil lasts. The narrator recalls Mama's ingenious way of exterminating the source of her (and her children's) woes:

> They have found the poison in your father's body. She sounded as though the poison in Papa's body was something we all had known about, something we had put in there to be found, the way it was done in the books I read where white people hid Easter eggs for their children to find (2003:290).

Mama's way of eradicating Papa Eugene, because of his overbearing attitude, is in consonance with the principle of Radical Feminism – that is the adoption of violence in putting an end to masculine dominance, hence enhancing the liberation of women from the alleged bondage in which men have put them. Through the dissenting relation of Mama to the dominant patriarchal tradition of Africa, Chimamanda Adichie implies that the direction that the feminist campaign is taking currently is a bitter one, and that a violent alternative is not out of the question. This idea is reflected in the later radical temper of Mama, and also revealed in Mama's confession about killing her husband: 'I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor' (2003:290). Mama now believes with other radical feminists that violence is the most effective strategy for achieving her freedom.

The violent dimension to the whole situation can be seen as the author's statement that in every woman, no matter how patient, may lie hidden aggression. Here, women assume the mantle of representatives of the masses,

and that there is a limit to their acquiescence. Silence should not be taken to mean foolishness, laziness, complacency or stupidity.

African women are asserting themselves in different ways. Hopeless situations, at times, need radical solutions. The central character, Kambili, the representative of the author's ideology and beliefs, revolts against the established norms in a society where the promises of the public sphere have consistently failed. Therefore, Adichie envisions a nation where the disempowered womenfolk (the masses) will transgress heterosexual codes in order to free themselves from the shackles of patriarchal suppression. This is an element of resistance against the processes of objectification and heterosexual oppression. Thus, Mama, Kambili and the male-feminist (Jaja) oppose compulsory heterosexuality and gender constructions in order to liberate their true selves and desires. In fact, the enduring brilliance of Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is its ability to oppose hegemony in an effort to challenge the power of established authorities that disempowers the African woman (the marginal subject). Through this effort, Adichie re-empowers the womenfolk (the masses) by giving them a space from which they generate alternative interpretative modes and, in turn, speak out and become an agent of their own history. Towards the end of the story, the trio (Mama, Jaja and Kambili), formerly positioned in the peripheries, now move in a series of resisting movements – translocation and masquerading. Consequently, they are able to protect themselves from being totally decoded. This ultimate resistance serves as a buffer to help in preventing Papa Eugene's continuing acts of appropriation and his egocentric manipulation of the family's (the nation's) public sphere.

Conclusion

From this study it is clear that, despite all odds against their lives and arts, Nigerian writers refuse to be caged, and constantly intervene in the public sphere of their nation. The study also shows that inscribed in the novels treated here is a prevailing suspicion of the public sphere, evident by the absence of public concern with the sphere. This is an imaginative mimetic representation of the state of fragmentation, state oppression, censorship of Nigerian writers and increasing national exploitation. The political concerns of Nigerian writers, most especially the desire to take on the power of representation of neo-colonial disillusionment in their country and serve as the conscience of the nation, are vividly exposed. But Nigerian rulers have refused to allow the public sphere to become more inclusive. In fact, the actions, inactions, histrionics and dialogues of the characters in these novels reveal that the little space granted the Nigerian masses during the colonial

period has disappeared due to the unbridled power of the rulers and their fierce pursuit of self interest.

The common motif that is foregrounded in the novels is that, instead of engaging in a free interchange of views, Nigerian neo-colonial rulers, fictionally represented by the President for Life of Kangan (Nigeria) in *Anthills of the Savannah,* the fanatically religious paterfamilias (Papa Eugene) in *Purple Hibiscus* and the violent politicians in *The Famished Road*, repress, judicially murder and jail the governed for daring to express views which are different from those of the rulers. This is symptomatic of the degeneration of the public sphere into violence in the milieu of the texts. In this period of terror, feeble democracy and dictatorship in the country, the Habermasian public sphere is sacrificed to the urgency of political action. This confrontation makes Ikem (in *Anthills of the Savannah*), Kambili and Jaja (in *Purple Hibiscus*) and the hopeless masses (in *The Famished Road*) realize that there is a fundamental contradiction between the utopian space of the public sphere and a tyrannical system of governance in Nigeria that remains largely unchanged since independence.

Another point that merits critical attention is that Achebe, Okri and Adichie present the failed promise of the public sphere as an important element in the Nigerian political society. The novelists, in their respective texts, represent the problem of the potential expansion of the utopian state (the public sphere) to include the political and social concerns of Nigerians; that is, the desire of Nigerian masses to take on the power of representation and to speak for themselves. It is also argued that their novels reveal the refusal of Nigerian rulers to become more inclusive. Ikem (in *Anthills of the Savannah*), Black Tyger and Photographer (in *The Famished Road*) and Jaja, Kambili and Mama (in *Purple Hibiscus*), who think their voices should be heard on public issues, are expelled from the public sphere.

Beyond exhibiting topicality and stylistic innovations, postcolonial Nigerian fiction offers a sustained exploration of the issue of the failed promise of the public sphere, a much-needed theme in current Nigerian literary discourse. It is revealed that, despite all the odds against postcolonial Nigerian fiction writers, there is no sign that an interest in literature of commitment is waning in the country. The reading public of Nigerian fiction has been given a clearer picture of the conditions of the nation's masses than the one offered on the television, radio and the print medium. What unites the three selected novelists, thematically, is a scathing denunciation of the post-independence political situation and the concomitant public disillusionment, a result of the failure of the new governing classes to fulfil the emancipatory promise of independence. Thus, what stands foregrounded in the novels is the cynicism of the masses,

that is, the disgust felt with the mess that their elected representatives and the military rulers have made of their country. What is highlighted and critically interrogated in the texts is the attempt of the rulers to erode the legitimacy of a defensible core of rights (public sphere). In this sense, we can say that postcolonial Nigerian fiction offers imaginative case studies of violated human rights in the nation. The formal structure of the novels also revolves around dissonance between rulers and the ruled. The texts give an imaginative representation of the total inadequacy of the public sphere, and offer a vision of human vulnerability and dependency that presents a much-needed corrective to the excessively inflated present-day aspirations for human rights.

The survival of the philosophy of harmony and integration among the diverse people of Nigeria, that is, the concept and significance of the collective will, is under great threat in the cosmos of each of the novels. Due to the refusal of the rulers to allow the masses to be active participants in the nation's public sphere, the expected collective will is jettisoned in favour of the European cosmic will. Collective will is a force that operates in a communalistic society like Nigeria, where the emphasis for group survival overrides that of the individual. The primacy of place is supposed to be given to the group rather than the individual, because it is understood that the part exists within the whole (Zulu Sofola 1988). Therefore, Sam, the Head of State of Kangan, the corrupt politicians and their cohorts, and Papa Eugene all ignore the fact that, in Africa, the power and strength of the individual exist in the strength of the collective will of the group (see for example Kwame Nkrumah's *Conscienticism*, 1964). Each of the fictional despots falls from grace to grass because of their hubris; that is, appropriation of the power of the collective will to themselves.

Clearly, these novelists are suggesting that an inclusive public sphere and the freedom of the press and of creative writers are the cornerstone of democracy. Nigerian writers have a right to serve as the conscience of their society. Nigerian writers should be able to enjoy the hard-won freedom of imaginatively reflecting and refracting the foibles of their rulers and the ruled. Neo-colonial Nigerian rulers should see the writers as partners in progress, rather than as illegitimate interlocutors in the nation's public sphere.

Given all that has been said about the problem of the failed promise of the public sphere in Nigeria, as narrated in the selected prose texts, it is suggested that there should be a harmonious blend of all the segments of the citizens of the nation (poor or rich, young or old, female or male, disabled or non-disabled, employee or employer, ruler or the ruled, literate or illiterate, and the like) to enable each citizen fulfil his or her destiny and achieve the inalienable right of self-realization and actualization without the destruction of the whole.

It is the total rejection of this philosophy that leads the rulers in the texts to their tragic ends. They use the power vested in them to destroy other lives and are, therefore, evil agents who must be punished and expunged. One didactic message which is a motif in postcolonial Nigerian fiction is that law-abiding citizens of the country must be allowed to take their rightful place in the order of the universe and the political set-up of the nation, and they must seek to maintain the cosmic equilibrium of the nation. This viewpoint conscientizes the masses of the societies portrayed in the selected novels to engage in real and latent revolts. They are ready to drive basic issues home and effect a change. This temper may offer an antidote for leading our groping nation from the woods of confusion, despotism, totalitarianism and anarchy.

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Trans-nationalizing the African Public Sphere: What Role for Trans-border Languages?

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Abstract

At a time when the notion of 'trans-national public spheres' is gaining more and more currency in academic circles, the role played by languages, and trans-border languages in particular, cannot be ignored in our attempts to rethink the African public sphere. In the African context, language has been a major factor in determining cultural and ethnic identity among various groups, whether they live within the same nation-state or are territorially dispersed. This situation problematizes the idea of a Westphalian citizenry resident in a national territory, and challenges the assumption that languages map onto states. This paper focuses on the Fulfulde language – a trans-border language spoken across several national boundaries in West Africa – and assesses ways in which trans-border languages contribute to the emergence of a transnational public sphere in Africa.

Résumé

À une époque où la notion de « sphères publiques trans-nationales » se répand de plus en plus dans les milieux universitaires, le rôle joué par les langues en général et les langues transfrontalières en particulier ne peut être ignoré dans nos efforts pour repenser la sphère publique africaine. Dans le contexte africain, la langue a été un facteur important dans la détermination de l'identité culturelle et ethnique au sein de différents groupes, qu'ils vivent au sein de le même État-nation ou qu'ils soient éparpillés sur des territoires. Cette situation rend problématique l'idée d'une citoyenneté westphalienne résidant sur un territoire national, et conteste l'hypothèse que les langues correspondent plus aux États. Ce document met l'accent sur la langue fulfulde -une langue transfrontalière parlée à travers plusieurs frontières nationales en Afrique de l'Ouest- et évalue les moyens par lesquels les langues transfrontalières contribuent à l'émergence d'une sphère publique transnationale en Afrique.

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Introduction

The public sphere as conceptualized by Jurgën Habermas rested on several institutional presuppositions that were all implicitly Westphalian. One of Habermas's presuppositions regarding the public sphere was that of a single national language which, in his view, was supposed to be the linguistic medium of the public sphere and public communication. This perspective problematizes the notion of a democratic public sphere in Africa where African societies are for the most part multi-linguistic. In addition, during most of the post-independence era, there has been very minimal progress in the promotion of indigenous African languages, the languages of African masses, whereas colonial languages continue to have the status of official languages and remain the primarily tools of communication in public institutions. However, despite the fact that the local African languages have been put on the backburner by both colonial and post-colonial governments for a long time, they continue to play a vital role in the lives of African communities both within and beyond their national boundaries.

At a time when several African countries are witnessing an increasing democratization of political structures and when there has been notable progress and growth in independent and pluralistic media, debate about the public sphere and public opinion in Africa is gaining a special resonance in academic circles. The rapid development of mass media in Africa characterized by a pluralistic media and participatory forms of dialogue and expression gives voice to marginalized and isolated communities in both national and transnational public spheres. However, the public sphere is by no means new to Africa. Examples from various ethnic groups in Africa suggest that, traditionally, there existed a public opinion that limited the power of the political elite, which was indeed comparable to Habermas's concept of a coffee-house culture of eighteenth-century England. Even though social categories such as elders, men and members of the nobility enjoyed privilege in public debate, groups all along the social ladder were also given some space to voice their opinions on matters pertaining to their communities' public life. Public entities such as the *Battu Futankoobe* (General Assembly of Pulaar People) among the Pulaar people of Fuuta-Tooro along the Senegal River Valley, or the *Pencu Lebu* (General Assembly of Lebu People) among the Lebu people in the Cap-vert region in Senegal both suggest that participatory forms of dialogue in the public space existed.

In our day and age, the core feature of the modern public sphere is a common and publicly accessible space such as a marketplace, pub, newspaper, radio, television or internet, which serves the purpose of framing public opinion. This paper is premised on the assumption that whatever form

of communication is used in order to frame public opinion, the language or languages of the public sphere, whether in print or in oral form, constitute a key element in our efforts to rethink the public sphere. The public sphere constitutes a key element in any society that calls itself democratic. Public debate in a public space can only occur when there exists a free exchange of information and ideas, when citizens can voice their opinions on issues of public concern and are able to transmit their public will to official authorities, and when they have the means to influence decision-making.

There is little doubt that the continued status of colonial languages as official languages in most of Africa – a legacy of colonialism that independent African governments carried on – constitutes a major obstacle in attempts to create a democratic public sphere. However, language has always played an important role in defining group identity. Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, argues that 'language is perhaps the most enduring link which unites man'. It is true that a common language has not always translated into group cohesion and cooperation, but evidence from several places in the African continent suggests that even groups that were arbitrarily partitioned by colonial boundaries are often brought together by their common linguistic, ethnic, and cultural bonds. Deeming language 'the element of culture par excellence' Chumbow (2005) regards a common language as an instrument for bringing people together and for achieving peace and harmony between nations in Africa, and argues that trans-border languages have a major role to play in achieving pan-African ideals and the goals of continental unity. Chumbow states:

> Despite the disruptive effect of arbitrary boundaries on the cultural and ethnic unity of partitioned peoples, however, they quite often cultivate and reinforce pre-partition networks of intra-group or intra-ethnic relations and in some cases (at least historically) they consider the boundary as binding only on the colonial powers or present-day governments and not on their own internal relations with their kith and kin, which they consider 'inviolable' (p.183).

This paper focuses on the Fulfulde language, a transnational African language spoken in roughly fourteen countries throughout the Sahel region of West Africa to the borders of Eastern Sudan. The first part of the paper demonstrates the existence of a transnational Fulfulde cultural heritage, very apparent in the concept of *Pulaagu*. It then traces the birth of the Pulaar literacy movement in Senegal and Mauritania, and examines the socio-historical and political contexts that contributed to its development. It examines the ways in which the movement around the Pulaar language, a movement whose beginnings started outside the borders of Senegal and Mauritania, has been used to influence social structures and political institutions at home in

both countries, especially in Mauritania where literacy in Pulaar was the medium through which Pulaar populations voiced their dissatisfaction with a racist political regime and its policies of 'arabization'. The last part of the paper looks at the emergence of a global Fulfulde civil society, which is increasingly becoming a forum for real issues affecting Fulfulde communities. In this paper, the terms 'Fulfulde language' and 'Fulbe people' will be used, respectively, to refer to the language and its people throughout the West African region and beyond, while the terms Pulaar language and Pulaar people refer specifically to the language and its speakers in Senegal and Mauritania , the region known as Fuuta-Tooro.

A Transnational Fulfulde Cultural Space

To study a society, its traditions and its evolution, literature – whether written or oral – provides a good starting point. Fulfulde and its mutually intelligible dialects represent the language of roughly 25 million people across several national boundaries in West Central Africa. Over the centuries, Fulbe people migrated throughout the Sahel and Savannah regions of West Africa and evolved into many subgroups with a variety of designations corresponding to specific geographical zones where they were concentrated as Fulbe, Fellaata, Fulakunda, Gorgaabe, Haalpulaar, and Woodaabe, to name just a few. Presently, they live in communities throughout much of West and Central Africa – from Senegal to Cameroon – and are dispersed as far east as Sudan and Ethiopia. The Fulbe people are concentrated in six major west African regions where they historically had an impact, namely Adamawa (Cameroon), Kanem-Bornu (Chad), Masina (Mali), Fuuta-Jallon (Guinea), Fuuta-Tooro (Senegal and Mauritania) and Sokoto (Nigeria).

There has been a long tradition of writing in Fulfulde in the above mentioned eighteenth and nineteenth centuries states, which were also major Islamic foyers. The Fulfulde language is indeed one of the most written African languages. With the progressive expansion of Islam and Q'uranic education, writing in Fulfulde using the Arabic script – a system of writing known as *ajami* – was developed, leading to the emergence of a small literate class of people. Fulfulde *ajami* texts are primarily religious texts dealing with theological, juridical, and political content, and are only accessible to a small minority of Fulfulde speakers. However, by localizing the Arabic language, this literate elite was able to touch a larger public. This written literature is shared by the entire pan-Fulfulde region. According to Christiane Seydou (2000), this literature was developed in the context of major state formations in Fulfulde history from Senegal to Cameroon. Seydou explains that these political formations throughout Fulbe people's history have in fact contributed

to the progressive settlement of a people who traditionally were nomads and who were now organized politically, creating more favourable conditions for the development of a literate class and the expansion of literacy.

While the Fulfulde written literature was the work of a small elite of Fulbe scholars and was only accessible to a small audience of literates in Arabic, forms of writing based on oral traditions encompassed a rich and varied cultural heritage throughout the Pan-Fulfulde region and transcended political borders. These productions represent different genres – from proverbs, folktales, riddles, and poems to epic novels – which transmit important aspects of Fulbe people's cultures and traditions. An epic novel such as the Senegalese Yero Dooro Jallo's *Ndikkiri Jom Moolo* (Ndikkiri the Guitarist), the first epic novel written in Fulfulde, is primarily based on Fulfulde oral culture.

Christiane Seydou emphasizes the importance Fulbe people attach to their oral literary expressions and places language and the art of the verb at the heart of this cultural and aesthetic investment. She defines language among Fulbe people as 'le seul bien aliénable, toujours présent et disponible meme dans l'isolement ou la solitude' [the only unalienable asset, always present and available even in one's isolation or loneliness] (p.63). Lilyan Kesteloot takes the issue further and discusses the centrality of oral literary productions throughout the West African Fulbe diaspora. This literature relates more to the ethnic group and the language it represents than to the borders of the modern state, for its linguistic and cultural characteristics transcend political borders. Referring specifically to the question of the pan-Fulfulde oral traditions, Kesteloot writes:

> Le caractère artificiel des frontières coloniales qui délimitent aujourd'hui les États africains a été maintes fois dénoncé. Mais c'est lorsqu'on étudie les espaces parcourus par la littérature orale qu'on prend conscience de leur réelle absurdité. Dire, par exemple, que la littérature sénégalaise s'arrête à Podoor ou ne dépasse pas la Falémé est absurde, pour qui sait que Sambà Gelaajo appartient aux Tukuloor des deux rives, et que Sunjata est chanté depuis la Gambie jusqu'à Bobodioulasso, en passant par la Casamance, la Guinée, la Côte d'Ivoire et le Mali ... Ainsi la littérature pël du Sénégal marche avec les transhumants jusqu'au Niger, à travers tout le Sahel ... (Kesteloot, Unpublished paper).
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> [The artificial nature of colonial borders dividing African countries today has been denounced many times. However, it is when one studies the areas covered by oral literature that one is conscious about their absurdity. Arguing that Senegalese literature ends in Podor or that it does not go beyond the Faleme region is absurd to anyone who knows that Samba Gelaajo belongs

> to Pulaar speakers on both sides of the river, and that the epic of Sundiata is sung from the Gambia to Bobodioulasso, via Casamance, Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Mali. Thus, Fulfulde literature crosses the borders with pastoralists up to Niger and throughout the Sahel region ...]

Any assessment of the of the vast panorama of Fulfulde oral literature cannot ignore the significant contributions made by the well known scholar Amadou Hampate Ba in promoting Fulfulde and West African oral traditions. Originally from Mali and born to an aristocratic Fulbe family in Bandiagara – the capital of the pre-colonial Tekruur kingdom – he is considered one of the major intellectual and literary figures of the twentieth-century Africa. As a storyteller, poet and historian, this self-made intellectual is considered one of the most gifted and multi-disciplinary scholars of his time. Today, there exists a considerable interest in Hampate Ba's published works, which have been translated from French into several European languages, as well as Japanese. A historian, collector and translator of oral and ethnological texts, he was also a poet in his native Fulfulde and the author of prize-winning and widely read literary works. He was also appointed to the UNESCO Executive Council where he pressed for the systematic collection of African oral teachings and for the rescue of African oral traditions, not only because of their cultural value but also because they enshrine a vast sum of historical, religious, philosophical, scientific and literary knowledge. He claimed to be a medium for preserving, transmitting, and translating this oral knowledge and art of Africa to various audiences. Hampate Ba is perhaps best known for his statement: 'En Afrique, quand un vieillard meurt, c'est comme une bibliothèque qui brûle' [Every time an old man dies in Africa, it is as if a library has burnt down]. On the dichotomy between writing and orality, Hampate Ba (1972) – quoting his philosophical master the Malian Sufi mystic Thierno Bokar – points out: 'L'ecriture est une chose et le savoir en est une autre. L'écriture est la photographie du savoir, mais elle en ait pas savoir lui-même. Le savoir est une lumière qui est en l'homme, l'héritage de ce qui lui a été transmis' [Writing is one thing and knowledge is another. Writing is the photographing of knowledge, but it is not knowledge itself. Knowledge is light within man, the heritage of what has been transmitted to him.]

Although written in French, his entire work is emblematic of a deep Fulfulde cultural heritage rooted in his native Masina customs and traditions. The same observation can also be made about the literary productions of, for example, francophone Senegalese writers who ethnically and culturally belong to Fuuta-Tooro, which has led some critics to characterize their literature as regionalist or as *littérature de terroir*. Though classified under Senegalese and Mauritanian Francophone writers, novelists such as Cheikh

Ahmidou Kane (in *L'aventure Ambiguë* or *Les Gardiens du Temple*), Abdoulaye Kane (in *Markere*), Tene Youssouf Gueye (in *Rellâ ou les Voies de l'Honneur*) and Moussa Lam (in *La fièvre de la terre*), give a vivid representation of Fuuta-Tooro as a territory and a cultural space that transcends the political borders of Senegal and Mauritania.

Writing in Fulfulde is still very prevalent in Fulbe circles of West Africa and continues to be greatly influenced by Fulfulde oral traditions. This has led critics to argue that alongside these two modes of literary productions, a third and more 'modern' literary movement has emerged in the last twenty five years. As Mohamadou (2000) explains, it is in Fuuta-Tooro that the weight of this literary movement has been most felt and is most influential. Actors in this literary movement have also been at the forefront of the Pulaar grassroots movement in Senegal and Mauritania, creating a momentum in the formation of organizations and, therefore, contributing to the development of an increasingly global network of Fulfulde speakers.

The Pulaar Grassroots Movement in Senegal and Mauritania

Fuuta-Tooro corresponds to the middle valley of the Senegal River in present-day northern Senegal and southern Mauritania. It is the territory of the *Haalpulaaren* or those who speak Pulaar. The Pulaar people are also referred to as Toucouleurs, a designation that derived from Tekruur, an ancient Islamic kingdom, which prospered roughly parallel to Ghana during the ninth and tenth centuries. Strong kinship ties have, to this day, brought Pulaar communities together, making the boundary between the two groups only an artificial one, regionalizing an area that encompasses both sides along the Senegal River.

In Senegal, Pulaar is spoken by roughly one-third of the Senegalese population. The use of Wolof as the *lingua franca* of the country was reinforced by the French colonial administration, as it became the primary language of trade and business near towns and ports throughout the country. Those who speak Wolof chose it as the language of the majority in Senegal for practical reasons. Although recent attempts to promote Wolof as the national official language of Senegal have triggered strong reactions from militant speakers of other languages – especially from Pulaar speakers – Wolof has naturally grown into a *lingua franca* and is considered by many as one of the most important homogenizing factors of the Senegalese society.

In Mauritania, Pulaar is spoken by a much smaller portion of the population, estimated at around five per cent of the total number of three million Mauritanians. However, because the promotion of Pulaar and other local languages spoken by black Mauritanians – namely Wolof and Soninke – have purposely been pushed to the back in favour of the arabization of the

school system and the arabization, or 'beydanization', of public services (Ly 1997), a very strong Pulaar movement in Mauritania has come about, inspired by acute political problems. Militancy around the question of the promotion of Pulaar in Mauritania led to the creation of l'Association Pour la Renaissance du Pulaar en Republique Islamic de Mauritanie (ARPRIM) [Association for the Revival of Pulaar in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania] in 1974, also known under its Pulaar name as *Fedde Bamtaare Pulaar e Muritani* [FBPM]. This association was recognized by all public institutions in 1976 and played a pioneering role in the promotion of Pulaar culture. It opened Pulaar literacy classes for the Pulaar masses, and strongly advocated the necessity to introduce local languages in the Mauritanian school system. A major step in the evolution of ARPRIM the creation of Institut des Langues Nationales [Institute of National Languages] in 1979 and the eventual introduction of Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof languages in the school system. In addition, ARPRIM established the magazine *Fooyre Bamtaare*, the only magazine in a national language other than Arabic. The Pulaar movement in Mauritania led to the emergence of activists who contributed as language activists, journalists, poets and broadcasters, such as Mammadu Samba Joob (most commonly known under the name Muurtudo or the Rebel), Tene Youssouf Gueye, and Ibrahima Sarr. Each played an instrumental role in fighting for the promotion of the Pulaar language and the improvement of the social and economic conditions of their people, and they used the struggle over language and cultural identity as a tool for changing social structures and political institutions. Quoting Ly (1997), Fagerberg-Diallo (2001) notes:

> In Mauritania, teaching in national languages had a particular character. It was the result of a struggle mobilized by a powerful grassroots movement for cultural identity whose origins went back to the 60s [the moment of independence]. Just after independence, the black African population of Mauritania mobilized themselves to fight against the arabization of the school system, to the detriment of French, and against the beydanization of public services (p.161).

Indeed, even though ARPRIM founders were interested in revitalizing Pulaar from a cultural perspective, their militancy led them to jail, exile and death (in the case of Tene Youssouf Gueye) at the hands of the Mauritanian Arab government.

In Senegal as well, a Pulaar national association by the same name was created a few years later, which shared the same literacy goals as Mauritania's ARPRIM. Senegal's Association Pour la Renaissance du Pulaar (ARP) was founded in 1982, although it had its roots in a non-official Pulaar cultural association formed in 1964 by Pulaar-speaking students and workers in Dakar.

ARP-Senegal was very much influenced by the Pulaar literacy movement in neighbouring Mauritania and, through the years, the two movements have closely joined hands in their struggle to fight for the Pulaar cause.

In both Mauritania and Senegal, several factors have contributed to the development of Pulaar literacy. First, as early as 1966, UNESCO sponsored a meeting that was held in neighbouring Mali for the promotion of major West African languages spoken across national boundaries such as Fulfulde. An orthography was suggested for Fulfulde and was recognized internationally. This was a major development, for an internationally recognized orthography was a necessary step if countries were to share texts and publications. Second and most importantly, the mid-1960s also saw the development of a popular Pulaar grassroots movement led mainly by Pulaar speakers in universities in the Middle East, namely in Cairo, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, but they also included other Fulfulde students originally from other parts of West Africa. The Pulaar literacy movement presents an interesting case, for its beginnings did not take place in these two countries. Instead, a group of Pulaar intellectuals living in Cairo during the 1960s and 1970s started the movement and spread it among Pulaar-speaking students and workers who migrated to France in the 1980s before it was to have an impact in both Senegal and Mauritania. A federation of associations for the promotion of the Pulaar language was founded under the name *Kawtal janngoobe Pulaar e Leydeele Aarabeebe* [Association of Pulaar students in Arab Countries]. This marked the beginning of a Pulaar diasporic movement away from Fuuta-Tooro. Activists originally from both sides of the border experienced a heightened diasporic consciousness that, as will be discussed later, expanded beyond the borders of Senegal and Mauritania.

The experience of emigration, especially in France, had in fact a fascinating effect on the Pulaar speakers' motivation to learn. The majority of workers in France participated in the Pulaar literacy classes. As Fagerberg-Diallo (2001) points out, living in a highly literate society reinforced their motivation to learn to read and write, whereas their experiences as a group functioning within the margins of French society and public sphere forced them to cling to their language and cultural identity. This takes us back to the point made earlier in reference to Kestleloot's argument about language and the lonely, isolated pastoralist, the notion that 'it is the only unalienable asset, always present and available even in one's isolation or loneliness'. Pulaar activists in Mauritania and Senegal were at the forefront of this movement. They made scholarly contributions ranging from writing novels and poems in Pulaar to establishing various language magazines, newsletters and broadcasting services.

One of the most active and charismatic militants was the late Yero Dooro Jallo. In fact, his trajectory as a Pulaar activist provides us with a full story of the ARP-Senegal. Jallo arrived in Cairo from Senegal as a student in 1966 and took a leading role in the Pulaar movement in the Middle East. A prolific writer, he was the author of several literary works, including two epic novels – *Ndikiiri Joom Moolo* and *Mammuddu Mbuldi Bul kassum*. He was a key actor in the establishment of the then Cairo-based *Kawtal janngoobe Pulaar e Leydeele Aarabeebe*, which he always sought to expand and include all Fulfulde speakers from the West African Diaspora living in the Middle East and in Europe. Jallo created the Cairo-based Fulfulde broadcasting service that was aired throughout West Africa for twelve years, from 1968 to 1981. A professor, researcher, writer, journalist, storyteller and specialist in oral traditions, Yero Dooro Jallo's contributions played a pioneering role in trans-nationalizing the Fulfulde cause. Subsequently, he was also at the forefront of the transnational Fulfulde organization, *Tabital Pulaagu International* (TPI), an organization launched in 2002 in Bamako, Mali. This organization, as will be discussed later, represents Fulbe people living in fourteen West African countries and the Diaspora, namely, in Europe, the USA and Asia.

Upon Yero Dooro Jallo's return to Senegal, he continued his militancy around the promotion of national languages in general and Pulaar in particular through his broadcasting service, which he transferred from Cairo to Dakar. Jallo played a leading role in the recreation and recognition of APR-Senegal as a national Pulaar association in 1982 by Senegalese public institutions. In 1990, a small non-profit publishing company called Associates in Research and Education (ARED) was established and began to publish books in Pulaar.

The political climate in Senegal provided a far more stable environment for Pulaar activists, especially after the 1989 Senegal-Mauritania conflict. Desertification and the struggle for basic resources – namely land and water – were at the root of the Senegal-Mauritania conflict, a crisis that some refer to as a Black Mauritanian-Arab Mauritanian conflict. Arab pastoralists were forced to push south towards both banks of the Senegal River, an area entirely occupied by sedentary black farmers. Mauritania used the crisis as an excuse to expel about 30,000 black Africans. The majority of these people were in fact Pulaar citizens of Mauritania. Entire villages previously inhabited by blacks were cleansed. Among those targeted and expelled from Mauritania were Pulaar activists who were considered a potential obstacle to the Mauritanian Arab government. It is in this context of political crisis that the Pulaar movement became a much more forceful trans-border public network that transcended political boundaries, thanks to a common language and common cultural heritage.

Prior to French presence in the region, Arabs dominated the region since the fall of Ghana in the eleventh century, forcing many of the blacks such as the Sereer group of present-day Senegal who lived in parts of Mauritania to flee further south. There exists tangible evidence that blacks from various ethnic groups were the first people to live in the region. This situation changed during French colonial rule, when colonial Mauritania depended on colonial Senegal both administratively and economically. After both countries gained independence in 1960, Mauritania became and remained a buffer between the Maghreb and Black Africa (Parker 1991). Throughout its existence as an independent state, Mauritania has, for the most part, not been able to govern effectively a mixed population of Arabs, Haratines and black populations including Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof ethnic groups. The country's arabization programme has deepened its internal racial divisions.

The government's mistrust of Pulaar activists goes as far back as 1966, following its decision to make Arabic a compulsory language in secondary schools. There were strong reactions from the Pulaar community and other ethnic black Mauritanians against such a decision, leading to the merger of three black underground parties to form the African Liberation Forces of Mauritania (FLAM) in 1983. What followed were a series of arrests, jail sentences and a more general purge of Pulaar militants.

Activism around Pulaar became the medium through which Pulaar populations could express their frustration against the Mauritanian government's racist political regime. Fagerberg-Diallo (2001) notes: 'Acute political problems inspired the development of both writing and literature in Mauritania, perhaps best remembered for the galvanizing poetry which was well known on both sides of the border' (p.161). The Pulaar movement in Mauritania had a substantial impact in Senegal especially, following the 1989 Senegal-Mauritania crisis. According to Fagerberg-Diallo, when the crisis broke out, the deportations from both sides resulted in an influx to Senegal of professionally trained teachers in national languages from Mauritania, which had a major impact in the professionalization of teaching in Pulaar in Senegal.

Beside the movement around Pulaar literacy, the Senegalese media also had an impact on both sides of the border during the crisis, especially in Senegal where there existed a free open Pulaar press. While the two governments at first played down the crisis and stressed the need to guarantee the security and well-being of foreign communities, various Pulaar radio programmes played a major role in raising awareness about the plight of black Mauritanians. As some have argued, a vociferous Senegalese public opinion was very influential and forced both governments to take the crisis more seriously. Mauritanian journalists, such as Amadou Sarr, who were deported were given opportunities to voice their opinions through various

media sources in Senegal. Other Mauritanian activists, for instance Murtudo Diop and Saydou Kane, found refuge in Senegal and joined the Pulaar movement there. As a result of their combined activities and initiatives, a greater number of Pulaar radio stations flourished in Senegal during the post-conflict years.

Such development of free media fuelled a stronger public opinion and a rapid mobilisation of Pulaar movements and associations from both sides of the border and beyond. These networks functioned independently from the State and constituted a major factor in the emergence of a civil society whose influence in the public domain transcended political boundaries. Other key players in this context of political crisis were religious leaders. They represented a very important part of civil society and played an influential role in the political sphere. Senegalese Pulaar *marabouts* in particular – whose disciples lived on both sides of the border – had an informal, though important, function in reducing tensions.

Although the Pulaar grassroots movements in Senegal and Mauritania operated within two different social and political environments, they shared the same goals and influenced each other throughout their history. The political crisis of 1989 created a momentum for both movements. Today, the movement around the promotion of Pulaar language and culture has expanded its activities and joined other Fulfulde networks. These networks are perfect examples of structures that operate beyond the purview of the nation-states and provide us with an emerging paradigm for rethinking African integration.

An Emerging Fulfulde Transnational Network

Today, there exists a wide range of Fulbe networks in every part of the world. Fulfulde websites, internet radios and online newsletters abound throughout the Fulbe diaspora, creating what may be called a virtual transnational and global Fulbe space. This however does not imply that Fuflfulde transnationalism is a new phenomenon. The Pulaar association movement started as a diaspora movement in Arab countries that later spread to Europe. Throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, activists such as Yero Dooro Jallo undertook concrete initiatives geared towards trans-nationalising the movement. There is however no doubt that the current rapid development of new information technologies and the increasing expansion of Fulbe diaspora populations globally have created the resurgence of a far larger Fulfulde movement, with far more organized structures.

The largest and most active Fulfulde organization is Tabital Pulaagu International (TPI). This transnational network is an umbrella organization of Fulbe peoples' associations under the same name in exactly fourteen countries in West and Central Africa and in the Fulfulde diaspora, namely in

Asia, Europe and North America. The idea of creating a federation of various Fulbe associations came about in 1998 during a Fulfulde cultural festival in Mali. Four years later, in 2002, Tabital Pulaagu was born in Bamako under the impulsion of the Senegalese writer and former minister, Cheikh Hamidou Kane and the Cameroonian hydrologist and businessman, Kadry Yaya who served as the first president of the organization. At its inception, the official headquarters of the organizations was Yola, in Eastern Nigeria. Yola has a historical and symbolic significance, as it was the capital of the Fulani Sokoto Empire in the nineteenth century.

As indicated by its name, the primary goal of TPI is to safeguard and propagate Fulfulde language and culture. Indeed, Yero Dooro Jallo's long standing hope to create a pan-African and pan-Fulfulde organization was rooted in *Pulaagu*, which refers to the sum of Fulfulde values. He was convinced that there existed a single Fulfulde identity and was committed to promoting the creation of a movement such as TPI. Jallo served as the vice-president of ARP/TPI, the Senegalese branch of the organization, until his death in 2006.

Since its creation, the organization has worked on the challenging task of harmonizing the various Fulfulde dialects and standardizing their alphabets. This initiative was deemed extremely necessary in order to facilitate communication between various Fulbe groups. TPI is currently working on identifying universities, research institutes, publishing companies, television and broadcasting services worldwide that are interested in the promotion of Fulfulde culture (*Pulaagu Magazine* 2008). From this perspective, and based on conversations held during the March 2008 annual Festival in Dakar, members of the organization began harmonizing the various Fulbe groups and Fulfulde dialects. Now, in place of the terms Fulani, Haalpulaar, Peul, Toucouleur, Pullo Macina, Pullo Jeeri, etc, the term *Fulbe* is used to refer to the people and *Fulfulde* for the language.

Although TPI is primarily a cultural association with the objective to defend and promote Fulfulde language and culture, it has grown into a global Fulbe civil society that seeks to inform and raise awareness about real socioeconomic issues that affect Fulbe people globally. This emerging Fulbe civil society transcends political boundaries and is becoming increasingly transnational. For instance, at the 2008 Tabital Symposium on Sustainable Development and Globalization, scholars, policy makers and government officials representing all of the Fufulde diaspora debated and exchanged ideas about important issues concerning Fulbe people such as the effects of climatic change on Fulbe pastoralists, Fulbe women and sustainable development, and clandestine immigration. These challenges as well as other pressing issues such as conflict resolution and trans-border cooperation, regional and

transnational development programmes for poverty alleviation, are not exclusively Fulbe problems and are relevant to other African communities.

At a more formal level and as an example, the challenging issue of pastoralism, which affects the lives of most Fulbe peoples and several other groups throughout the continent, has recently forced the African Union and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to formulate a continent-wide policy framework on pastoralism in Africa. Pastoralism has also been a key issue in Tabital's agenda, and any formal institutional policy geared towards addressing the humanitarian and development challenges of pastoralist communities should involve the voices of civil society groups such as Tabital.

Conclusion

As we rethink the transnational public sphere, we must understand that it does not correlate with a particular public opinion operating within a specific national citizenry in order to influence the power of the state. A pertinent question one should ask, then, is to what extent does any transnational movement have the political force to influence individual states' political power in order to translate their initiatives into tangible and concrete solutions that would respond to the multiple challenges of African countries and communities?

At present, there exists a momentum in the debates around efforts to establish closer economic and political ties between Africa's multiple countries. It is clear that there exists a renewed impetus to establish closer economic and political ties among the continent's numerous countries. A good number of economic communities have been formed across the continent, and the political and security dimensions of integration are being put on the agenda of many regional and sub-regional institutions. Factors such as trade integration, the development of roads and other infrastructure, as well as the strengthening of regional institutions, are often identified as key to the integration process in Africa. However, to ensure greater accountability and popular involvement, there is also an urgent need for a more grassroots-centred regional integration in Africa. Indeed one of the major weaknesses of regional integration schemes in Africa has been the lack of grassroots representation and engagement. Besides the important role African leaders and elites have to play in the process of integration, it has become clear that marginalized groups such as women, youth, religious or traditional leaders must engage in the process of integration.

A key element in the process of African integration is the existence of a civil society operating across national African boundaries and its their diasporas. The notion of a transnational African sphere with an active transnational civil society may in fact seem like an illusion and is yet to

emerge. However, as the transnational Fulbe movement shows, the potential role – whether formal or informal – that people and their organizations play, constitutes an extremely necessary element in the African integration project. Similarly, the role of trans-border languages in re-imagining a transnational public sphere and in achieving the ideals of African integration is certainly undeniable.

In fact, the role trans-border languages could play in the African integration project extends beyond the confines of promoting cultural revival and cultural identity. In the context of African regional integration, trans-border languages have an extremely important role to play both politically and economically. Efforts to bring people who speak the same language across national boundaries together could translate into positive political implications between nations. Besides, such efforts could also help reinforce socioeconomic ties between countries.

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Negotiating Nation-building and Citizenship through the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's 'Dramatic' Spheres: A Reading of Two Post-apartheid Plays

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Abstract

Having a voice, either at the level of the individual or the community, has been one of the atavistic ways of defining or asserting humanity. This allows for the inscription of the twin-capped hegemony of successes or victories and frustrations at both the private locus and the public sphere. The disruptions of this possibility by rifts between natives in pre-colonial South Africa were aggravated in the heat of the colonial suppression it suffered, and was compounded by the operation of apartheid rule. By reason of this misrule, voices were suppressed, with a few cacophonies of dissention breaking forth. The culmination of these disenchantments into the demise of apartheid significantly presaged the need for reconstruction and redefinition of citizenship and cohabitation, and hence the necessity for establishing a public sphere, or put alternatively, a public domain in the form of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the dramatic world(s) created using the material properties of the TRC in John Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* and Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort*. The paper argues that the domination and manipulation of this public realm by the state at the expense of the individual is not only counterproductive, but constitutes a denial of the relevance of such spheres. The paper, going by indices in the plays, therefore, concludes that every individual should not only be: given a voice, and be heard, but be allowed equal unbiased participation. Otherwise, the public sphere would not just be impotent, but the idea of nation-building and desirable citizenship would be a mere ruse.

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Résumé

Avoir une voix, que ce soit au niveau individuel ou communautaire, a été l'un des moyens ataviques de définition et d'affirmation de l'humanité. Cela tient compte de l'inscription de l'hégémonie à double face des succès ou victoires et des frustrations tant au niveau de l'espace privé que de la sphère publique. Les perturbations de cette possibilité par des clivages entre les autochtones en Afrique du Sud précoloniale ont empiré sous le feu de la répression coloniale que ce pays a subie et ont été aggravées par le régime d'apartheid. En raison de cette mauvaise administration, des voix ont été réprimées, avec quelques cacophonies de dissension. Le paroxysme de ces désenchantements vers la fin de l'apartheid présageait significativement la nécessité de la reconstruction et la redéfinition de la citoyenneté et de la cohabitation, et donc la nécessité d'établir une sphère publique, ou sinon établir un domaine public, sous la forme de la Commission vérité et réconciliation de l'archevêque Desmond Tutu. Cet article vise donc à examiner le (s) monde (s) dramatique (s) créé (s) à l'aide des propriétés matérielles du TRC dans *Nothing but the Truth* de John Kani et *The Bells of Amersfoort de* Zakes Mda. L'article soutient que la domination et la manipulation de ce domaine public par l'État au détriment de l'individu n'est pas seulement nuisible, mais constitue un rejet de la pertinence de telles sphères. Cet article, en parcourant les indexes de ces pièces, conclut donc que tout individu doit non seulement avoir une voix et être entendu, mais aussi jouir de son droit à une participation égale impartiale. Sinon, la sphère publique ne serait impuissante et l'idée de construction de la nation et de la citoyenneté souhaitable ne serait rien d'autre qu'un simple stratagème.

Introduction

As variegated as elements in nature are, human beings seem to suggest that they have achieved a mastery of virtually all these elements as they deploy them for constructing social, economic and political advantages. This unique deployment does not merely give humans the control over natural things, but also allows one individual to assume a more advantageous platform than the others. It is, therefore, not unusual for people to be locked into a cold war of superiority or domination as it is characteristic of human beings, not only to attain sovereignty but acquire power through which some or others are consigned into the position of servitude. This goes to say, therefore, that space is one of the available devices that allow for the externalisation of the domineering nature of mankind through the acquisition of both power and the lever to control those under his or her domination. The conjectures of space are as varying as the assumptions they make and the meanings they create. It then follows that the manifestations of space would be dependent

on the particular signification that is targeted at one point or the other. However, fundamental is the fact that space, in its ontology, talks about the vacuum, the blank spot, centre, platform or fulcrum offered to an agent to function either minimally or maximally. The functionality of the agent is at the same time consequent on the nature and character of its existence. This implies that the performance of a concept, subject or object, derives from the symbiotic relationship between the physicality of the given space and the ontological configuration of the relational element. This receives confirmation from the view of Doreen Massey (2005:20), making reference to what is called 'a long and illustrious history', that 'there is an association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning'. In another vein, Massey (ibid) holds that 'representation – indeed conceptualization – has been conceived of as spatialisation'. The mention made of space at this point is important to the extent of its interrelatedness to 'sphere' or 'domain'. Given the foregoing, it should be made clear that space could be characterised by both size and nature. By size we mean whether space is overt, small, cylindrical, opaque, sinuous, shallow, expansive, and so on, while by nature it implies that space could be simply evaluated on whether it is public or private. However, suffice to make it clear that the possibilities adducible to space, as far as its characteristics are concerned, are not limited to the above. It is significant, however, that the emphasis in this paper shall be given to space in the reality of its nature to interrogate whether it is public or private, or both, or neither.

Spatialisation and Meaning-making

So much theorising has been done on space[1] as a concept. As much as a regurgitation of that would not be necessary in this circumstance, a reading of some of the manifestations shall be done so as to establish a platform for our take-off. Space is conceived as 'an open, heterogeneous, and indeterminate field' which, like the subject, is a void to 'be filled, contested and reconfigured through contingent and partially determined social relations, practices and meanings' (Natter and Jones III 1997:149-150). In another vein, Benno Werlen (1993:1) examines these conjectures by looking at the activities of geographers as much as space is concerned, with a group holding that geographers aim to study space while others believe that they are out 'to analyse the significance of space for social processes'. This is generated in a way that underpins not just the natural responsibilities that space, and objects in it play for human presence on earth, but a secondary enhancement given to space as a form of signification and social mapping. Further to the foregoing, Rosa Ainley (1998:xiii), considering the *Oxford Popular Dictionary* (1993) definition of space, sees space as 'both actual and imagined/dramatized, with a sense of boundlessness, "in which all objects exist and move"'.

The teleology of object and the attendant mobility may appear a utopia considering the various meaning-making negotiations that such a seemingly innocuous stand-point is often subjected to. As mentioned above, space would cease to be a lone agent in social constructions since the positionality of objects that coexist in, and with it, is important as it allows a classification or description of 'certain order of material objects with respect to their specific dimension' (Werlen 1993:3). This indicates that space does not only guarantee the inscription of object, element and agent, it goes ahead to perform the function of ascription, as 'space in the physical world is constituted via the experience of the subject's own body through the conscious self in movement'. Put differently, therefore, space could be used to circumscribe and promote at the same time. This goes to mean that space, as well as 'spatial relations may be expressed as forms of confinement, imprisonment, marginalisation, erasure or silencing' (McCorkle 2001:107). It must be clarified, however, that the above nature of space is both natural as well as artificial. The naturalness of the situation is a function of the realisation that some natural elements in nature could 'conspire' with space to submerge, swallow and repel as the case may be. That sense of reality leaves space as: 'the dimension of quantitative divisibility ... as the dimension of plurality, discrete multiplicity' (Massey 2005:20).

Apart from these, space can be used in classification and categorisation. This is consequent upon the ascription of value or privilege, as well as devaluation of a spatial property, at one time or the other. However, this classificatory differentiation is not limited to objects that share different constituents but includes those that parade a high level of verisimilitude in features and behaviour. Werlen (1993:142) captures this when it is posited that 'while every object can be defined or located spatially, regardless of its content, objects which are otherwise identical can be distinguished by their spatial location'. This explains the different politicisations of geographical space which in turn lead to the addition of values to achieve place naming and gating. Gated communities all over the world are fashioned to respond to the melting of different social groups within a society. Apart from the fact that social differentiations are made, using race and skin pigmentation, social exclusions and inclusions have also been brought about in various social orders based on materiality. The resultant effects of these binaries have been high toned contestations that greeted the relationships between the centre and the margin. While the first strives towards sustaining the beneficial status quo; the latter is bent on challenging and overthrowing it.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the legitimisation of power and the resistance against it leave space as 'the physical terrain and symbolic expanse

over which contestations of power take place' (Bozzoli 2004:7). The many manifestations of space exposed so far instructively nudge us towards the analogous sharing that the public sphere promises. Michael Shafir (2004:1) sees the public space as 'a meaningful mirror of political competition', where (citing Andrei Pippidi 2000), '"symbolic history" is always entangled in the separate, but nonetheless, associate process of a "clash of memories"'. Perhaps, it might be important to emphasise that the only idea brought into the discourse at this stage is that of 'public', given that this paper considers words like sphere and domain as interchangeable alternatives for space. However, this is not as a result of syntax and the prescriptions of synonym, but more as a result of their replaceability in the trajectory of the discourse in this paper. It should be stated that a difference in such a deployment is drawn between public space and public sphere by Charles T. Goodsell (2003:361) who holds that the first is peculiar to Hannah Arendt,[2] a political and moral philosopher, while the latter is credited to the translation of the work of the philosopher, Jürgen Habermas.

Gradation to Public Sphere: Theoretical Frame

Analogous to the polemics that adorn scholarship, it has been argued that the idea of the public sphere pre-dates Habermas in Africa. This was manifested, according to Adebayo Olukoshi,[3] in historical spheres provided by spaces under the Iroko tree and others, where common social events were discussed, and thereby culminating in the building of consensus through proportionality. Olukoshi hinges the Eurocentric singularity of German peculiarity, reflected in the propositions of Habermas, to other prevailing pathologies of adjectives that portend the notion that the continent of Africa is not capable of governing itself or presiding over a developmental process. Be that as it may, however, central to the discourse of the public sphere is the contribution made by Habermas (1962; 1989) on the democratisation of mass communication. Countless ideas have been vented following the prognosis of Habermas on the universalistic application of democratic communication in the globalising world. Although the scholarship on this discourse is enormous, efforts will be made to sift some ideas around it and use them appropriately in the order of relevance. One such development is the purported replacement of hegemony by the public sphere identified by Jim McGuigan (1998:91), citing Nicholas Garnham (1995). Although McGuigan finds some aspect of the proposition which borders on media and cultural studies problematic, he concurs with the fact that 'hegemony ... carries connotations of domination, the power of the strong over the weak, even though the winning of consent rather than crude manipulation is at stake'.

The above is a great paradox, close to the hand-in-hand coexistence of democracy and dictatorship. This is reflective of a state of servitude where coercion is not necessarily an ideal instrument.

This form, no doubt, characterises most relationships, at the different levels of social, political, cultural and economic dealings. It is then the case that the public sphere offers both the space for the ascription of hegemonic dictates and the militating responses of counter-hegemony. McGuigan (ibid) documents this in the sense that 'the public sphere is a positive idea, a good thing ... referencing a condition within which the power of the strong may be checked by that of the weak through access to ... participation in political debate and decision-making'. As much as the view shared by McGuigan above is plausible, in terms of hegemonic propositions and state instrumentality to foster imaginary inclusion, it is in itself self-negating and a far cry from the truth. The self-negation inhered in it is triggered by the fact that the state, or better still, the hegemon (or its agent) is saddled with the construction of the public sphere, using state instruments and power to transform an ordinary simple space to be imbued with characteristics that are suitable to its aspirations at one time or the other. Georges Benko and Ulf Strohmayer (1997:150) support this when they state that 'hegemonic cultural practices will always attempt to fix the meaning of space'. This means that the passive 'placeness' of space is converted through naming to achieve 'social spatialisation' which are the products of what Henri Lefebvre once called a particular 'mode of production of space' under the control of specific groups (Shields 1997:188). Further to this negation is the realisation that the weak, in the real sense of the word, are either particularly created by the state, (or its agent), or whose precarious situation is exploited and sustained by the state for the survival of hegemony. Even when the state shows a 'sincere' concern in the condition of the weak, such sincerity is not allowed to debilitate the interest of the state, hegemony and/or its agents.

'The public sphere' is also defined by Colin Sparks (1998:110), citing Habermas (1974:49), 'as a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens'. We should be mindful of the essence of social formation that is mentioned in the view of Habermas regarding the public sphere. This is more so, considering the fact that only a segment of the public is involved in the construction of such a space. The representation provided by such representatives could at best be taken as what obtains under democratic arrangements and not an ideal response to the yearnings of the masses that constitute a greater part of the public. Habermas argues that 'a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a

public body'. This public body deploys the instrumentality of the public sphere not only to vent its thoughts on issues that affect it in relation to the state, but sets out to challenge what are conceived as excesses or a misdirection or, better still, a misapplication of the resources and instruments of the state. It might be right to argue, therefore, that 'space is equally exhilarating and threatening' (Massey 2005:59) to both the public body and the state. While the state attempts to maintain a firm hold on the public sphere, the liberalisation of such space notwithstanding, the public strives to assume domination of the space by offering counter-narratives to those authored by the state. This is in tandem with the notion of bell hooks' centre and the periphery relationship, where 'power in the margin, constitutive outside, a peripheral power', is 'poised to deconstruct any center of which it is a part'.[4]

It is in the light of these considerations that this paper looks at the configuration of the public sphere resulting from the convocation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by the South African government, following the demise of the apartheid order. There is for example the investment of ordinary space in town and community halls[5] with symbolic meanings of social, legal and psychological regeneration. This fits very well into the abridging of the 'striking contrast' (Goodsell 2003:361) that exists between the different usages that respective disciplines bestow on the terms. There are 'those who refer to it as the social realm of unfettered discourse of matters of public concern and those who conceive of it as a physical, public place, such as a town or urban plaza'. The paper argues that the state's deployment of the public sphere to achieve its programme does not preclude the public body from externalising its thoughts and ideas on such issues – most especially the collective amnesia recommended by the state and the lack of intent by the previously abused in doing this, but rather the desire on the part of the violated for a show of remorse by their oppressors.

Such a process could be matched with a genuine commitment by the government to improve the lot of the previously disadvantaged people. By this token, the public sphere behaves like what Therese Tierney (2007:80), quoting Stan Allen (1998), calls 'a field condition', which is 'any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each'. Succinctly put, therefore, 'yet hegemony, as the process that naturalizes both space and social relations, is like any form of power: never fixed or inevitable but always open to exposure, confrontation, reversal, and refusal through counter-hegemonic or disidentifying practices' (Natter and Jones III 1997:150). When considered from the perspective of socio-political negotiations, the public sphere is capable of manifesting what Therese

Tierney (2007:79) refers to as 'outsidedness, within the mode of presencing'. The presenceness identified is depictive of the locational positionality of the state both within the public domain and outside it, while outsidedness captures the estrangement of the masses which might not necessarily be in terms of physicality.

Analysis: The South African TRC, a Public Sphere?

Among other socio-political engagements apparent in Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort* and Kani's *Nothing but the Truth*, the two play-texts make a statement about the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission[6] that was set up to look at the various violations of human personality committed during apartheid[7] South Africa, most especially in the light of black South Africans who were oppressed 'from the cradle to the grave' (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004:302). Since the Commission required testimonies from the violated and confession from violators, the TRC tallies with the idea of the public space shared by Charles T. Goodsell (2003:364), re-echoing the view of Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone, 1992, as 'the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds'. Goodsell proceeds further to state that 'such places are seen as a social binder for current residents and a connector to the past through accumulated personal memories and showcased historical monuments'. It should be pointed out at this stage that the notion of the public space will be construed from two approaches. One is the various physical spatial loci[8] that the plays parodied and the idea of art, which is the play-texts, as a configured public space where the actual world is brought to the crucible. These texts, in a way, interrogate the use of power and how they are spawned into historical-fictional narratives, thereby correlating with Elden's (2001:152) assessment of Foucault's work, cited by Chris Philo (2004:124), as 'not just as a history of the present but as a mapping of the future'. These mappings that are done in form of art and literature, 'give form to the remnants of these histories' thereby coalescing into 'the literary public sphere' (Goode 2005:7). While the interactions in *The Bells of Amersfoort* are directly confrontational between two major characters, Tami and Johan, through the use of the flashback technique to re-enact the TRC, *Nothing but the Truth* merely presents an interrogative process through the discussions of Sipho, the major character, the daughter Thando, a teacher and an interpreter at the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the daughter of his exiled brother, Mandisa, who has just returned from London for the burial of her father, Themba.

Even though the two instruments of the TRC and the engagement made with it by art could be lampooned by the modernist and postmodernist intricacies inherent in them, the intention of art, as much as possible, is to

challenge the modernity intention of the TRC. David Clarke and Marcus Doel (2004:34b) while appraising the revelations arising out of the study of the Holocaust, have accused modernity for having 'out-rationalized (adiaphorized) the moral impulse, unburdening individuals of moral responsibility by delegating it to a higher authority', while they query postmodernity for out-aestheticizing by keeping the moral impulse and sentiment at bay, but rather choosing 'as its points of reference and orientation the traits and qualities possessed by or ascribed to the objects of spacing'. It would be sheer insensitivity to the nature of art if, in this case, it is vilified for aesthetic inclinations considering the fact that aesthetic elements provide the necessary instruments through which art navigates the trajectories of social materials that art interacts with in both fictional and factual worlds. As variegated as the relationship art shares with life is, and the case of South Africa being a very strong one, it might be right to situate art momentarily within the ambit created by Joanne Sharp (2007:275) which she has called, citing S. Lacy (1995), 'a more participatory form of public art practice ... new genre public art, wherein artists move to engage with communities and existing social struggles, to develop collaboration and dialogue with residents, and to employ different modes of address'.

However, though, this type of inclusivity was particularly peculiar to theatre in apartheid South Africa [9] when it turned into an instrument of resistance. Of particular analogy is the theatre for development which was almost an elongation of the communal traditional practices of theatricality. The plausibility of what art could do to both the hegemony and people on the margin is the construction of a space which is poised at 'recreating community history, governed by desires to represent it for generations who might not know the origins of the place in which they were growing up' (Sharp 2007:279). This foregoing prognosis is saying the obvious, considering the intentions and the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Consequently, all truth commissions, the South African one included, 'seek to engage the dimension of the social and political space, a space of collective bargaining within civil society to spotlight terrible crimes and abuses, but also to animate public discussions and opinions' (Enwezor 2002:17).

Most nations all over the world, particularly post-colonies, are enmeshed in attempts to grapple with their past, as constituted in present realities, even when they should be, or are, forward looking. Appraising the construction and reconstruction of racial inferiority by the colonizers of Africa, Chinua Achebe (1975:70) has recommended that rather than just concentrating efforts on condemning past spoilers, people should look back and try to find out where they 'went wrong, and where the rain began to beat' them. This

accounts for the interest of the new South African government to memorialise the despicable past of the apartheid regime, by knowing where things went wrong, and how not to recede to such abnormality. The sudden emergence of the bridge of negotiation, following the huge human abuses and degradations that the perpetuation of the apartheid prisms and the oppositions staged against it, is minimally commendable. This amount of commendation is made necessary more so, going by the fact that it was done in a sharp and rude departure from the 'amorous' and 'passionate'[10] past. Most particularly, the approach employed is analogous to Mahatma Ghandi's experiment with *Satyagraha*, a non-violent protest strategy against racial discrimination, which he first developed in South Africa. However, the convocation of the TRC as well as its subsequent activities have been criticised most severely at one point or the other as a result of what certain groups or individuals perceive as the overbearing hold of the state, most especially its deployment as an instrument of achieving state programmes and intentions. One of those intentions was the fact that the TRC was part of other measures put in place for inscribing assurances following the players' readiness to guarantee amnesty for white apartheid leaders who were threatened with the possibility of revenge after the transition into a democratic regime. Therefore, it could be argued that 'the TRC was born of political compromise, like most truth commissions' (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004:302), or what Michael Shafir (2004:1), quoting Miklos Haraszti, calls 'the handshake tradition'.

An excerpt from the final clause of the democratic South African Constitution given below succinctly captures the negotiation between the old white rulers and the new emerging black order. Inherent in this piece are several other nuances of compromises which are apparently at variance with the aspirations of individuals, most especially victims of the brutalisation of the past, who might not have access to government hoarded opportunities with which they could seek pacification for their wounds:

> The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions of strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu (the African philosophy of humanism) but not for victimization. In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the past (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004:302, quoting Krog 1998:vi).

No doubt, the above is reminiscent of an attempt to find a smooth transition from a past history of pressures, instabilities and conflicts. This transitional endeavour has been 'equated with the construction of a new social environment based on the lessons learnt from experiences, leaving behind past abusive and dependent relationships and providing the basis for a more just, and equitable society' (Fombad 2004:193). In spite of the tabula rasa being sought by the dictates of this negotiated Constitution, the TRC processes in a way helped in inscribing some aspects of the undesirable repudiated past. However, the paradoxes occasioned by the realities of the Commission and the responses to them form the platform for the contestations between the state and certain strata of the political community.

The apartheid era that lies in the past in a way reminds one of the constituents of memory, surrounded by different propositions, most especially the transformation and promotion of private memory to the level of collective or national memorials. Further still, these personal memories were made public through the theatre which the TRC in effect staged. In another vein, Alan Baddeley (1989:51) sees memory as a system for storing information which is required 'to take in the necessary information, to store it, and to retrieve it at the appropriate time'. Baddeley however adds that 'memory is potentially fallible at each of these points'. Memory and the TRC share a correlative interdependence in that the latter is involved in achieving the former. For instance, memory, just like the TRC, 'serves to preserve intimations of the infinitive possibilities of such regressions of the human mind – and the dangers they spell for the harmonization goals of our world' (Soyinka 2000:23). This explains why the past is being 'remade' for achieving reconciliation in the present, even as the wounds of past violations are being re-opened for examination in the public sphere through the instrumentality of the TRC (Nuttall 1998:75). We should, however, be reminded of the various challenges that memory is vulnerable to, mostly when issues like recollection and forgetting are involved. It is little wonder that the past is brought to engage with the present through settlement, as against revolution, and garnished with rhetoric and narratives of how to process the future, which has been designated as nation-building.

As a result of the abundant literature around the South African TRC, some restriction of scope is required if one is to make informed prognoses as are sought in this paper. The documentation and recording of the pains of the apartheid past were considered necessary for rebuilding the new South Africa. Kader Asmal et al., (1996) carried out an explicit interrogation of the TRC and came up with reasons for its constitution. Starting from the putative note, quoting Willem de Klerk, that the 'apartheid system was darkness

masquerading as light ... a crime against humanity', Asmal et al., posit that 'in moving away from the discredited governing consciousness of the past, we will need to build a new, shared and ceaseless debated memory of the past' (Asmal et al. 1996:9). This debate, in their view, is important in order to harness the diversity precipitated by the history of the nation and the people as well as preventing possible social, economic and political contestations. An abnegation of this responsibility would be counterproductive as the authors fear that 'for the new South Africa to abandon accurate remembrance in these early years of its birth would be the most cruel self-slaughter' (Asmal et al. 1996:12). Although the idea of remembrance as mooted by Asmal et al. is good in itself, the fact that it must be accurate and limited to the early life of the new South Africa is contentious. This is consequent on the realisation that the act of recollection and remembering cannot be accurate, as the process is liable to silences, gaps, omissions, stultifications, both deliberate and inadvertent.

The implication of the above is that repressions are deliberately achieved by the agent trying to remember the past while injuries and physical as well as psychological interferences could lead to unavoidable amnesia. Asmal et al. hint that the TRC was put in place to aid the process of reconciliation which required 'a just moral appraisal of the past' (Asmal et al. 1996:14), even though dealing effectively with the past 'is an exercise of immense difficulty interacting in a vast network of political, emotional, ethical and logistical considerations'.[11] The difficulty inherent in the preceding statement is so central to the argument of this paper since actors, most especially victims of the apartheid regime giving testimonies before the Commission, reject the process as lacking the will to effectively elicit confessions from their past violators and compensate them appropriately. The compensation being sought is not purely material, but psychological. Tensions arising from these disaffections are scarcely relieved, considering the fact that 'an important goal of the commission is to act as a catalyst for swift and thorough disclosures of past horrors in order to accelerate – and so eventually end – the ready and corrosive drip of the past pathologies into the new order' (Asmal et al 1996:26). One of the scathing devaluations of the TRC is that contained in the lengthy and detailed memoir that Alex Boraine put together to capture his time as the deputy chairman of the Commission. In a review of the memoir by Stuart Wilson (2002:364), Boraine is said to have claimed that the TRC was able to settle scores but with the notion that 'some fellow commissioners subordinated the TRC's integrity to their short-time political interests at critical moments'. Succinctly put, therefore, it might be tenable to subscribe to the belief of some democratic theorists that the sponsorship

of the public sphere, like that of the South African TRC, is 'antithetical to the core of idea of uninhibited conversation' (Goodsell 2003:368).

Some have argued that the TRC smacks of the identity of an 'exemplary civic theatre, a public hearing of private griefs (sic) which are absorbed into the body politic as a part of the deeper understanding of how the society arrived at its present position' (Catherine M. Cole 2004:219, quoting William Kentridge). The Commission has been subjected to scathing attacks from some quarters which saw the ontology of the institution as a deliberate move to secure power and protect former perpetrators. This protection, as we have seen above in the excerpt from the constitution, was supposedly achieved in the form of amnesty. Cole (2004:221) further captures this when it is submitted that:

> even though the emotions expressed during the hearings were deeply felt, the Commission was not a public reckoning. Rather it was a symbol of a compromise that, most significantly, offered the possibility of amnesty to perpetrators who gave public disclosure.

The TRC process could, therefore, be succinctly captured in the view of Rory Bester (2002:164) to the effect that 'the two outstanding features of the TRC process were the public nature of the hearings and the "individualizing" of the application for amnesty'.

Kani and Mda on the TRC

This sense of resentment is captured in the two play-texts being examined in this paper for the explication of the TRC as a public space. Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort*, recounts the experience of Tami, a black South African first in exile in Holland. In doing so, he conveys the feeling that the TRC was a travesty. Using the cinematic technique of segueing, Tami comes face-to-face with Johan, a white South African who participated in her torture in South Africa. Johan shares a Dutch ancestry and nurtures an attachment with Holland, where he has come to undertake theological training. A deep contestation arises between Tami and Johan at their meeting, with the former demanding that the latter should account for his past misdeeds, while Johan insists that he has been given amnesty by the TRC. Johan predicates the possibility of obtaining amnesty, in line with the requirement of the TRC, on the need to make a full disclosure of past violations and accept responsibility for them. Even though he starts by claiming that he was misled by the elders who painted Tami as an enemy threatening the opportunities they have created and hoarded for him, he has to assume responsibility for his actions to earn amnesty before the TRC.[12]

Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* also subjects the work of the TRC to interrogation through the major character, Sipho, and his daughter, Thando, who works as an interpreter at the amnesty hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the latter's cousin, Mandisa, who has just returned from London to bury the cremated ashes of Themba, her late exiled father. Themba specifically requested that his body should be buried close to those of his parents, should he die in exile. His exile life was a consequence of his involvement in the liberation movements which pitted him against the apartheid state. At the personal level, he was haunted by the unforgiving attitude of his brother, Sipho, who was enraged by the 'negative influence' Themba had on his late son, Luvuyo, the suspected sexual relationship between him and his former wife as well as unhappy childhood memories. Sipho conveys his idea of forgiveness at the end with a commitment to write a letter to the president on why he should not be excluded in service delivery.

The oppositionality of the spaces occupied by the victims and the victimisers allows the former to bear witness about past violations, while the latter make a full confession of past misdemeanours. It is believed that through the confessions of the perpetrator, the violated come to understand what was responsible for their suffering and how it was carried out. This most especially allows people who have lost relations to know how they were killed and, if possible, where they were buried.[13] However, this process is betrayed as a mere commitment to secure reconciliation even at the expense of victims who are still haunted by the memories and realities of their circumstances. For instance, this perceived lack of sensitivity from the government towards the victims is stated in Johan's remarks:

> In any case it was not a requirement that I could only be granted amnesty if you, the victim, forgave me. So, even if you had been there, you would not have stopped the amnesty. I did what the law required. I told the truth and was granted amnesty (TBA, 151).

There is here some correspondence with Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* in the conversations between Thando and her father. Thando starts by expressing her frustration at the numbness she and others at the hearings suffer while Sipho says that the pointlessness of the process informed his decision not to attend the hearings anymore. The two characters proceed:

> *Thando*: The truth does come out, and at least the families get to know what happened.
> *Sipho*: Their version of what happened (NBT, 6).

It is apparent from the above that the victims are objectified and commodified to achieve the aim of the state, which basically is a negotiated reconciliation

for a democratic transition. The consequence of the above is that the TRC does not offer both the victims and the perpetrators similar access to its public process of catharsis and shame, as it has been confined in one way or the other, most especially to the advantage of perpetrators, and by extension, the hegemon. Other than the fact that the full disclosure being sought by the TRC is a sham,[14] as perpetrators are not committed to it, that does not in any way ameliorate the pain and hurt of the victims. Another problematisation inherent in the process of deploying amnesty and indemnity is the realisation that what the commissions accepted as the truth cannot really be taken to be so. People are unwilling to tell the truth, or there are the difficulties of re-membering and recall, which place definite limits on the process of memorialisation. Thando in *Nothing but the Truth* laments the idea of putting something (amnesty) on nothing (lies) when she declares that: 'One gets confused sometimes. Especially when so many lies are told.' (Kani, 7) This type of pervasive and recrudescent ambiguity of truth was encapsulated by Yadh Ben Achour (2002:127) as 'truth in the sphere of politics'. The therapeutic narratological effects the stories of the victims are said to bring about could best be recognised as a promotion of an individual experience to the state of the collective memory of the nation. The lack of specificity, or better still, actualisation, of what should be given to the victim raises resentments such as found in the statement of Tami below:

> You cannot absolve him on my behalf! I want justice! At the very least I must be compensated for what I went through. I want justice! ...You got something. You got amnesty. Even if I want to sue you for what you did to me it would be impossible, because you got amnesty. What did I get? What did the victims get for their stories? ... You and your government have forgiven each other. I am not part of that forgiveness (TBA, 151-152).

The vehement opposition shown by Tami towards Johan and the government is the best way she can deploy the public sphere to attain vindication. In the end, it is largely an indictment of the whole process. The implication is that the amnesty given, the forgiveness dispensed and the reconciliation earned are a mere repression of realities while the surface is cosmetically coated. Arguably, this form of 'publicness' is analogous to the configuration of the bourgeois public sphere where egalitarian dialogue takes place (Goode 2005:4 & 9). Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004:305) hint of this display of dissension by first recognising the South African TRC as a political configuration, just like other TRCs and conclude that 'the TRC was controversial and met with resentments'. The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee was said to have recommended, in some cases, that victims of past violations should be paid R26,000 for a period spanning six years, but the government declined because

of its unpreparedness to accept 'responsibility for the wrongs of its predecessor', in spite of the argument by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the TRC, 'that without some financial reparation, those who told their stories would feel cheated' (Fomdad 2004:199).

Critically speaking, the quest for reparation and compensation by the victim would have amounted to a commodification of the bodies and pains of the victims that were violated under the apartheid regime. It goes almost without saying that the deployment of retributive justice would not have brought the victim the kind of compensation that would not reduce the charred and cherished past to mere materiality either. The potency of these 'sacred' memories would be lost the moment they were purchased for a monetary price, since every sense of guilt would be eliminated, reducing the process to that of commercial bargaining. One could argue that the best way to compensate the victims would be for the government to galvanise the process of citizenship transformation so that the victims of past brutality would be encouraged by the sacrifice they made even as the future could also be guaranteed for all and sundry. It would then be like the case of forgiving their past for the sake of their present and tomorrow, since 'we have seen that the process does not always really alleviate the suffering and frustration of the victims' (Achour 2002:113).

It is also the case that few of the perpetrators were forgiven directly by the victims because 'people felt raw, angry, upset, the more so because not many of the perpetrators had been able to show much spontaneous human emotion' (Sachs 2002:55). This should not be unexpected, considering the fact that the process was precipitated purely by the urgency of the political realignment needed to ward off the acts of revenge from the resistance movements amidst international condemnation of the apartheid regime. Like Johan, most of the unrepentant perpetrators claim that they are not really culpable because they were following orders from their superiors, while others like the former President, P. W. Botha, took their stand on reasons of state. The grounds of excuses in the above notwithstanding, the question is how can the sincerity of remorse be demonstrated? Repentance, in the view of Yadh Ben Achour (2002:125), 'loses its authenticity when it is performed under constraints, or out of purely material interest', as is almost always the case in the South African situation. The resultant contestations they lead to is explained by Mahmood Mamdani (2000:180-181) who posits that 'the more beneficiaries appear complacent, indifferent, callous and lacking in empathy, the more victims are outraged. They feel forgiveness to be undeserved. The more they feel so, the more they demand: justice'. Mamdani concludes that 'the TRC ends up fuelling the very demand it set out to displace: justice'.

While Tami in Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort* is mild in making her request for justice, Mandisa, the cousin of Sipho in Kani's *Nothing but the Truth*, believes that people should be allowed to revenge the wrongs done them in the past, or at least, ensure that the perpetrator pays for his wrongs. She specifically queries why the perpetrators of the deaths of people like Ruth First, wife of Joe Slovo, should not be made to face the consequences. Thando, her cousin and the interpreter to the commission, believes that the South African nation is not ready to go the way of Nuremberg as the struggle for liberation is personified as the struggle for and by all. She justifies the granting of amnesty to someone like Craig Williamson to full disclosure[15] which conforms to the rules and requirements of the TRC. Apart from this, Thando reminds Mandisa of individuals like Derby-Lewis, Janus Walus[16] and the police who killed the Pebco Three. Thando cements her position by making reference to the forgiving spirit of Nelson Mandela who was incarcerated for 27 years on Robben Island.

It is implicitly stated that the idea of forgiveness and the giving of amnesty are principally the project of the first democratic president of the country, Nelson Mandela, who has been promoted to the place of an icon of peace. Although this decision in favour of reconciliation through restorative justice helps to halt the killings and violence that characterised the apartheid era, certain individuals benefited directly from the establishment of a democratic government while others, most especially the mass of people, merely had their painful memories displayed in the public domain of the TRC hearings. To this set of people, the TRC is in a way a reopening of the wounds of the past. The healing of the wounds might, however, be hastened by the 'knowing' occasioned by the confessions of the violators and the externalisation achieved through their testimony, as well as the open identification made with them by the hired comforters and members of the commission. It is on record, for instance, that Archbishop Tutu, the chairperson of the commission was in tears while listening to the testimony of victims (Sachs 2002:49).

The outcome of the negotiations by the agents of the state and those of the victims in the public sphere constituted by the TRC is illustrated by Sipho who has the dream of becoming the Chief Librarian of the public library in Port Elizabeth. The snag of his dream is that he is believed to be too old for the position. After his lamentation that he was not considered too old in 1994 and 1999 when he voted for two democratic presidents, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, he complains that: '…suddenly I am too old to be empowered' (NBT, 51). Sipho's complaint is that some people have chosen to personalise the gains of the struggle, which they consolidate through the

TRC compromise. As if reviewing the conditions that determine who should benefit from the immediate and direct dividends of the new South Africa, Sipho declares that:

> I was part of the struggle. I too suffered as a black person. I went to the marches like everyone else. I might not have been detained. I might not have been on Robben Island. I did not leave this country, but I suffered too. The thousands that attended those funerals on Saturdays, that was me. The thousands that were tear gassed, sjamboked by the police, mauled by Alsatian dogs, that was me. When Bishop Tutu led thousands through the streets of white Port Elizabeth, that was me. I WAS THOSE THOUSANDS! I too deserved some recognition, didn't I? (NBT, 51-52).

Sipho seems to be challenging the privileging of certain individuals like President Nelson Mandela and others who assumed 'unrestricted' access to the machinery of state by reasons of their involvement in the liberation struggle.[17] As a result, Sipho appears to be making a deconstruction of heroism and the promotion to the place of iconicity in the South African state. Apart from Nelson Mandela and others who had their unpleasant past memorialised and compensated for, Sipho is making a case for himself and other thousands who have the credentials of a charred past that would get them a place in the state platform. Although he might not be asking for a seat in Parliament or the State House, he, like Tami, nurses the expectation of a better life and being in the new South African nation.

Sipho then elaborates on what he believes is his own idea and process for the deployment of amnesty by using the death of his son, Luvuyo, who was killed as a result of his activities in the liberation struggle. Sipho claims that Luvuyo was shot by a white policeman during the administration of F. W. de Klerk. He wants the policeman to be sent to jail while he awaits trial after which he would be found guilty for killing Luvuyo because he was black. His being pronounced guilty should be followed by his incarceration at St. Alban's Prison outside Port Elizabeth, where he will be subjected to the kind of experiences peculiar to murderers. One is however startled by Sipho's response to the probing of Thando on whether he will forgive the white culprit after he had been made to undergo this punishment. Even though Sipho says he will be willing to consent to the policeman's amnesty, he is not prepared to forgive the white apartheid policeman:

> *Sipho*: It's not about me being happy or not, forgiving him or not. It's about justice. That's what it's about. So that my soul can rest. So that I can say to myself 'yes, justice has been done' (NBT, 54).

Sipho however follows the trajectory of forgiveness the state is seeking for the process of reconciliation as he declares that he has forgiven his late brother, Themba, for his wrongs. He compares this with the forgiveness he extends to the white people in spite of 'what they did to us in this country...' (NBT, 56). The centrality of the notion of forgiveness to the responsibilities of the state and, by extension, the TRC, is quite a touchy one. Since this paper does not intend to interrogate this manifestation within the whole, it would like to reiterate the view of Mark Sanders (2007:88), quoting Derrida, that however profound reconciliation and the work of mourning are, 'they do not amount to forgiveness'. The ideal of forgiveness in the dealings between black and white South Africans has been constructed on the traditional dictates of Ubuntu,[18] which more significantly paints the need for the protection of human rights.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show how art has been dually deployed to re-enact a public space through the various sites constructed through the work of the TRC. Both the parodies of the TRC implicit in the two texts, and the interrogation the two play-texts have achieved as a whole, challenge the privatisation of the public sphere by the state. These two possibilities of the public sphere in the textual materials are a follow-up and, therefore, a response, if not a reaction to the actual public domain of the TRC. Even though it is apparent that the state was able to impose its own case for the TRC public sphere and why it was inevitable, such successes are challenged by the previously marginalized and brutalised whose cries of anguish and disaffection constitute a profound embarrassment for the hegemon. Apart from such plays as these two considered here, the disenchantment of the majority towards the abuse of the public sphere by the government has been embodied in art, other public spheres in print and electronic media, and also evidenced in the rejection of the state-sponsored public sphere. One can cite the words of Ruston Bharucha (2002:370) that 'most reconciliations are fragile, partial, and in constant need for renewal'. We see both drama and the TRC exhibiting the fluidity, mutability and deviancy of truth as 'the most illusory places in the world, where it is legitimate to lie knowingly ... and yet truth matters' (Bharucha 2002:362-363).

Notes

1. For instance, Gary Bridge (2004:61a) re-echoes the contribution of Foucault's 'notion of governmentality in the discursive construction of space for politics'.

2. According to Charles T. Goodsell (2003:362), Arendt defines the public space as 'the sphere of public action essential to democratic citizenship. It is the realm in which citizens engage in collective deliberation and in joint action on behalf of the public good', while Habermas says the public sphere involves individuals' private conversations and discussions that are directed at the interest of the public. Succinctly put, Goodsell believes 'Arendt's public space is primarily an arena of political action, whereas Habermas's public sphere is essentially a medium of public communications'.
3. Olukoshi was speaking at the First Plenary Working Session of the CODESRIA Twelfth General Assembly held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on 8 December, 2008.
4. Quoted in Wolfgang Natter and John Paul Jones III (1997:151).
5. Benno Werlen (1993:174) calls these 'socially constructed artefacts'.
6. The South African TRC, which was headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, started its assignment on 1 February 1996, after the approval given to it by the parliament in July 1995. President Nelson Mandela appointed seventeenth commissioners of the TRC, who, together with eleven co-opted members, formed three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. The TRC proceedings ended on 31 July 1998, and the final report was submitted to President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998 (see Ruston Bharucha 2002:362). Similar Commissions (15), according to Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004:303), were established in countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Germany, the Philippines, and others. The South African TRC activities were carried out by three major committees: the Amnesty committee, the Human Rights Violations Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (Charles Manga Fombad 2004:196).
7. The system was declared a crime against humanity.
8. These include the 'town halls, civic centres, and churches' used across the country (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004:305).
9. Literature in apartheid South Africa was reduced to an instrument of resistance because of the vitriolic engagements it made with the debased government and the prisms of what it stood for. Apart from deploying theatre most particularly for exposing the ills lurking around, it was used to mobilise people from both within and without to condemn it. Because this proved to be an effective instrument, some scholars have feared what literature in post-apartheid South Africa would engage with. This apprehension has been proved to be unfounded as literature in the new South Africa is still involved in the interrogation of the minimal life of the people.
10. Both words are designative of the supremacy and purity that most of the white community was interested in.
11. Asmal et al., in this second quote are quoting the court on the Act establishing the TRC.

12. Mzamo, the chairman of the fictional TRC in the play-text, who is dressed in 'bishop's maroon' to capture the signification of the actual TRC, reminiscences about the constitutional requirements for amnesty in one of his conversations with Johan: 'And now you want amnesty? You know the conditions for amnesty: full disclosure and full acceptance of your guilt and, of course, a political motive for your crimes' (TBA, 150).
13. So many secret graves were said to have been identified with the bones of victims removed to be given proper burial. Although this removal might at the surface be taken as a rupturing of the souls of the dead, such is however attenuated when the temporary burial sites are viewed as a prison of a sort. Therefore, the removal could be taken as a form of freedom and reintegration.
14. Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004:309) re-echoed the fact that most perpetrators deliberately withheld the truth and told what they call 'half-truths and lies'. In another vein, Charles Manga Fombad (2004:198) notes that more than 7000 applications for amnesty were submitted to the committee before the deadline, most of which came from people already in prison. Fombad further claims that members of former apartheid government displayed impunity as they argued that they did not commit any crime. Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora (2004:319) also support this argument by stating that some Afrikaners were opposed to the idea of the TRC. Specifically, P. W. Botha, former prime-minister and president of South Africa, was said to have refused to appear before the TRC.
15. Put in another way Sipho is parodying the TRC, saying 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth', whence the title of the play is derived (NBT, 49).
16. They are said to have murdered Chris Hani (NBT, 29).
17. The wrangling in the ANC after President Thabo Mbeki was recalled, and following the decision of certain members to form a splinter party, has seen such members being described as right-opportunists. This trend further casts an aspersion on the idea of transposing comradeship to leadership.
18. Mark Sanders (2007:25) claims that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report makes reference to the judgement of Judge Yvonne Mokgoro '[u] buntu, generally translated as "humanness", express itself metaphorically in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* — "people are people through other people"'.

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The African Public Space of Dangarembga's *Neria*: A Site for Autochthonous Feminist Agency

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Abstract

The public space is a place where anybody has a right to occupy without being excluded for economic or social reasons. This paper is an attempt to illustrate the 'westocentricity' and inapplicability of the term 'public space' to the African context. This term is steeped in the discourse of capital, one that profits from proliferating labels like 'public', 'free', 'open', masquerading in appearances that gloss over the hegemonic forces like global patriarchy, capitalism and neo-colonialism that largely govern twenty-first century Africa. An interrogation of the spaces that can be called the 'commons' in Dangarembga's *Neria* (1986) and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), (Zimbabwe) and Sene Absa's *Madame Brouette* (2002) (Senegal), shows that such spaces are fraught with social constraints that discriminate against access at class and gender levels, just to mention a few. I will illustrate how language constrains poor and illiterate Africans, especially women, from accessing places such as the river, and legal and entertainment public spaces in the literary works outlined above. It is important for scholarship on Africa to emphasize that 'The African public space' is an oxymoron, a fallacy that does not exist. There is no space that can legitimately be called 'public' in Africa, especially for rural, poor, uneducated, non-Christian/Muslim women.

Résumé

L'espace public est un lieu que chacun a le droit d'occuper, sans être exclus pour des raisons économiques ou sociales. Cet article est une tentative d'illustration de l'« occi-centrisme » et de l'inapplicabilité du terme « espace public » dans le contexte africain. Ce terme est ancré dans le discours du

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capital, qui profite de la prolifération des labels comme « public », « libre », « ouvert », prenant des apparences qui dissimulent les forces hégémoniques comme le patriarcat mondial, le capitalisme et le néo-colonialisme qui gouvernent pratiquement l'Afrique du XXIe siècle. Une analyse des espaces qui peuvent être appelés les « communes » dans les œuvres de Dangarembga intitulées *Neria* (1986) et *Nervous Conditions* (1988), (Zimbabwe) et l'œuvre de Sene Absa intitulée *Madame Brouette* (2002) (Sénégal), montre que ces espaces sont pleins de contraintes sociales discriminatoires dans l'accès à l'égard des classes et des sexes, pour ne citer que celles-ci. Je vais illustrer comment la langue empêche les Africains pauvres et analphabètes, en particulier les femmes, d'accéder à des endroits comme la rivière et les espaces publiques juridiques et de divertissement dans les œuvres littéraires décrits ci-dessus. Il est important que la recherche sur l'Afrique souligne que l' « espace public africain » est un oxymore, une illusion. Il n'y a pas d'espace qui puisse légitimement être appelé « public » en Afrique, en particulier pour les femmes rurales, pauvres, non instruites non chrétiennes/musulmanes.

Introduction

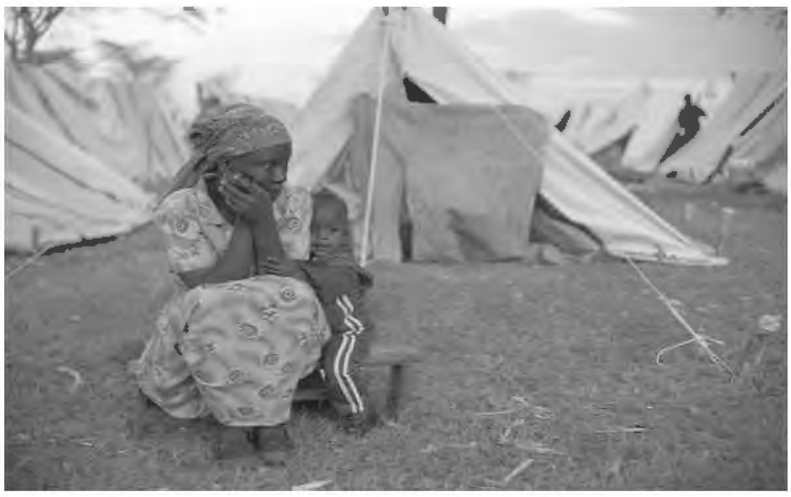
Teaching at a university in North America has shown me that one of the most enduring and prevalent stereotypes about African women is not only that they are the most oppressed in the world, but also have no agency whatsoever to confront their so-called ageless and ever present oppression. Many of my students characterise African women as a monolithic, helpless and pitiful group of people. The majority of my class reports illustrate class discussions inundated by calls for African women increasingly to imbibe Western education and civilisation, so that they can be liberated and join the women of the so called 'free world', the West, totally ignoring two possibilities:

- They are and have always been capable of mapping their own, autochthonous ways to address their oppression.
- Western education is one of the major sources of their oppression.

The coverage of Africa and on African women on CNN, BBC, SKY news or any of the major Western broadcasting stations does not help. It often portrays African women as hopeless victims, recipients of whatever white men, African men and white women dish out to them. This was very evident in the coverage of the December 2007-February 2008 Kenya election crisis. The women of Kenya were largely visible as casualties of the problem. Pictures of the Kenyan public space of that time showed them either weeping for the dead, dead, dying or running away from the turmoil. When it came to pictures of the decision-makers, those with the power and political agency to end this political mayhem, African men were the dominant players.

Figure 1: http://africanpress.wordpress.com/2008/08/10/kibakis-secret-plan-for-2012-succession/

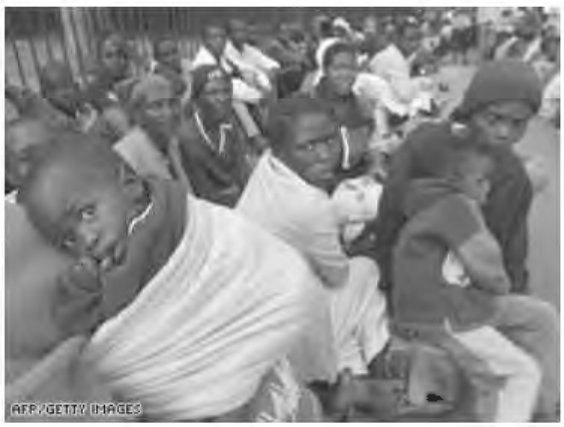
Figure 2: http://doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/alert/article.cfm?id=2590&cat=alert-article



The same goes for the Zimbabwe or the Mugabe/Tsvangirai saga. Zimbabwean women were not in the picture. Zimbabwean women were largely shown to occupy spaces of the victimised and spoken for, for example when it came to spaces featuring the active and those with voice, the ones signing the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).

Figure 3: http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/mbeki105.18508.html

Figure 4: http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/07/25/zimbabwe.sanctions/



Such media coverage constructs African women as largely voiceless and lacking in agency. Africa becomes a space where indigenous and colonial patriarchy[1] rules without contestation, uniformly presiding over day-to-day affairs and constructing women's subjectivities.

This paper is an attempt to negate the perception of the helpless, agentless African woman, focusing on one of the most common strategies that patriarchal oppression uses to oppress women globally: the cultural discourses that control what women do, wear and say. Whilst the author of the paper largely questions the legitimacy of a dichotomy between the public and private space in the context of Africa, especially the Habermasian version (1989) and when one reads that dichotomy along gender and feminist lines, this paper takes the African public space as a given, using it as a base, a fluid space where pockets of feminist agency sprout through in the literary text under interrogation: Dangarembga's *Neria* (1993).[2] The paper attempts to show that the public space of Dangarembga's text is a dynamic space, a mobile and fluid ground for male and female feminists to battle patriarchal oppression. This is one space that patriarchy is forced to meet, clash and converse with other categories like identity, nation, race, language, time, class, religion, education, gender and capitalism; just to mention a few, often robbing it of enough time to establish and maintain the male supremacy principle. In this space, patriarchy manifests itself as a practice, not only as an ideology or institution. This enhances its visibility and the public nature of the conversation it finds itself in, forces it to define itself, a position it is not comfortable with as that is what it normally assigns to other categories. This reduces its ability to normativise and mainstream itself because like other hegemonic forces, patriarchy largely depends on controlling the temporal plane, especially the imported form which needs time to stage itself as the safe and sought-after system of logic, thriving on predictability and uniformity. This paper will demonstrate that patriarchy struggles to control the dynamics that derive from it being made a spectacle in public space, having people gazing at it impromptu. The cracks that sometimes develop within and around it, leave room that feminist agency can and is utilising in Africa. This paper uses Dangarembga's portrayal of the public space of *Neria* (1993) to make a literary argument, taking off from the writer's personal experience with patriarchal oppression in Thondwe, a small village in Malawi's southern region town of Zomba.

The Thondwe Experience

That patriarchy is facing challenges in the public space was made evident to me one morning in Zomba, Malawi. I was confronted by an incident that exhibited the male supremacy principle trying to police my dress, and define who I am, in the public space.

In order to supplement my meagre Malawi university lecturer's salary, my family had a market stall manned alternately by the men we employed to take care of our home and garden.[3] One morning, together with my husband, I drove one of them to the market so that they could be there early and make better sales. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on which side of this outcome of the incident you are, I forgot that I was wearing a skirt that would generally be regarded as 'too short' for a 'respectable' Malawian, especially as far as many market sellers of Malawi are concerned (commonly called vendors). In the previous months, women and girls in various parts of Malawi's markets and streets had been stripped, beaten and raped for wearing clothes that market vendors deemed too short or too tight for women. Why the vendors had appointed themselves fashion and cultural policemen, is an issue that warrants research on its own but will not be pursued in this paper. My skirt was slightly above my knees and moreover, it had a slit. I actually dropped the man at the market but he forgot the small bag for change money. I made the mistake of getting out of the car, running after him to hand over the coin bag. I did not have to cover a long distance, since he had just left the car, but the walk back involved passing through at least five stalls. I knew I had made a big mistake in getting out of the car as I approached him and started making my way back to the car. I am also quite a big person and that did not help.

First came the whistles, followed by the usual 'Alendo! Alendo!', meaning 'visitor or alien', in other words, 'No Malawian can dress like that, you must be a foreigner, someone from another country'. The initial verbal insults came from male vendors. I walked on, telling myself just to brave it out and quickly get into the car, all would be well. As I approached my car, a woman who was selling rice a few steps from the car shouted on top of her voice:

'Otsatsa malonda', 'Alibe mamuna ameneyu, akufuna atenge amuna athu' 'Malonda avuta, mwati muvule kuti mube amuna any'. [This woman is advertising her body so she can be bought, she has not husband, she wants to take our husbands, times are hard for her, she is a tough sell so she has decided to strip naked so she can be bought and take other people' husbands.]

I was so infuriated that even though I had reached the car and opened the door, I went back and confronted her. I told her that I was married, pointing to my husband. I also told her that I did not need to get naked in order to seduce and take her husband from her if that is what she was worried about. Dressed or not, if I wanted to seduce her husband or any man and if the man or men in question wanted me too, I could have the man. Adulterous decisions do not require nudity or being half-naked to execute them. She should rather give women's brains a little bit of agency. Women have mental capacities

that they employ at will, we are not just a reduction of our bodies. I went on and on unloading my feminist beliefs on her because I was very angry about the horizontal violence of which I had just been a victim. I was very annoyed that a woman had joined in demeaning another woman. I told her I would have gone away quietly because I expected men to taunt and castigate me for my skirt, but I had not expected a fellow woman to join in this public assault. What is poignant to this paper is what happened next.

The Class Rebuttal

A man came and asked me to leave this crowd: 'These are just a bunch of people who are poor and way beneath you', the strange man shouted, facing me and also addressing the crowd. He went on to apologise on behalf of the people that had insulted and verbally harassed me, saying that the crowd was uneducated; intimidated by a woman who was driving a car and was a college lecturer. He went to say I should not waste my time on them; I should not join in the 'idle chit chat of the poor, uneducated villagers', telling me that if I joined in their acts, people would not tell the difference. After all, he said, he was sure I had bought the clothes (first- or second-hand) with my own money. That was evidenced by the fact that I could afford to buy a car.[4] He went on to tell the people that instead of shouting at me, they should ask for a job from me. What right did any of them have to criticise what I was wearing and prescribe what I should wear, especially if my husband is fine by it, he asked the market crowd. The crowd, which had already been silenced by my audacity in marching back into the market and screaming a tirade of feminist views to one woman, was not only further silenced, some of them then turned against the people who had been hurling abuse at me. Even the male vendors who had been shouting at me joined in shouting at the woman who had abused me, telling her that she should be careful whom she picks to insult. A woman who had been buying vegetables joined in and asked if it made sense for vendors to insult women who wore the short skirts they sold. She went on to ask them if they thought it was clever and economically sound for them to insult and discourage women from wearing these 'short' clothes, given that they are the ones that sold the clothes and they depended on those sales to survive. Nobody answered these questions. I went to my car and drove off.

Patriarchy on the Back Pedal

This incident raises and leaves a lot of questions unanswered. I am not citing it as proof of a community's attitude change against violence against women. Surely, that requires much more than a market shouting match, but this incident does show how the African public space can be a space where

patriarchy is put on the back pedal and struggles to control the very logic it depends on to construct female oppression. The market crowd had witnessed a verbal attempt to control the way I, a woman, dressed and behaved in public. They had seen me being called a prostitute and whore and all sorts of denigrating names. But that crowd also saw four instant rebuttals of such patriarchal views:

(i) The first was by me, the victim turned survivor.
(ii) The man who had been a spectator and therefore a legitimate participant in this discourse.
(iii) The woman buyer.
(iv) 'Converted' male vendors.

Patriarchy had been confronted by many forces:

(i) Anti- and de-patriarchy men.
(ii) A sisterhood.
(iii) A concoction of categories of capital, class, gender and nation.

This was within a short time and in full view of the public. These questions left patriarchy scrambling to assert itself as a practice, institution and ideology. It had no time to regroup and map a strategy. Instead of patriarchy staging a logical spectacle of how to discipline a woman who transgresses its boundaries, the spectacle had been reversed on patriarchy and now people were gazing at patriarchy in full battle with the numerous resultant categories. I argue that such a reversal weakens the teeth of a hegemonic force, disarming its ability to bite and control the victim. It is like many numbers of animals surprising an ill or injured lion all at once. It struggles to defend its territory and take control, as it always likes to. In this instance, patriarchy did not have a ready answer in this public space when it was confronted by the reality of there being African men who do not subscribe to its dictates and like their wives wearing short clothes. The presence of women like me, who have the muscle of a degree of economic independence and Western education, is an issue that is hard for patriarchy to prepare for and control in public. That needs time in order to deconstruct the right of the woman who not only buys her own clothes but cars, generates employment and business for the vendors. This shows that such a space is not static or fixed; it is an open and malleable space, ideal for contests against patriarchy. What I witnessed in Thondwe is evidenced to a greater extent in Dangarembga's *Neria.* What makes this text ideal for this discussion is that it not only unravels spaces where patriarchy develops cracks, giving way for feminist agency to sprout out, but that this happens in a field long used by patriarchy as a base

and stronghold, that of African culture. Dangarembga eloquently constructs female characters that use their public space to carve out agency that is decidedly home grown, born of local methodology and identity.

The Public Space of *Neria*

Neria is a 1993 Zimbabwean film that was written by Tsitsi Dangarembga and directed by Godwin Muwuru.[5] It is a story about Neria, a widow whose brother-in-law tries to manipulate the 'kugarwa nhaka',[6] a traditional custom, in order to take control of his brother's family and house property (see Note 5 for a full synopsis of the story). Dangarembga's portrayal of the public space in this story shows that patriarchy can be fruitfully battled in the public space, especially when it exhibits itself as a practice. This is because when it is visible, it is more vulnerable because it is easier to target and confront it, unlike when it is an institution or process.

Patrick, the Anti-patriarchy Shona

Right at the beginning of *Neria*, Patrick is shown to be a loving husband who respects his wife as an equal partner in the marriage. We see the couple discuss the economic hurdles facing Patrick's life and map ways to solve them together. It is important to point out that they never discuss the problems facing Neria's family. However, in at least two incidents, Patrick makes it clear to his brother (Phineas) that he regards his wife Neria as his equal, not an entity and person who is inferior. He states that she has worked equally hard for the assets they own as a family. In a good month, she even makes more than him (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 2),[7] so she needs to be treated as a stake holder in this marriage. Patrick says this when he visits his extended family in the village, together with his family. Phineas calls Patrick aside to discuss 'men's' issues (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 2) that is, to make important decisions for their extended family. When Patrick informs his brother that he has to consult his wife before making necessary decisions, Phineas accuses Patrick of not wearing the pants in his family. Patrick tells Phineas that Neria is his partner and in their marriage, they make decisions together. Whilst coming from a drinking session at the village shops, Patrick reiterates to his brother that should anything happen to him, his extended family, including and especially Phineas, should respect his wife. They should treat her as someone who has worked very hard and selflessly for the assets that are in Patrick's home, their children and his village family. He makes it clear that should something happen to him, they (Phineas, his brothers and mother) should treat Neria as someone whom he loved dearly.

In this way, Dangarembga uses characterisation to construct a critique of indigenous patriarchy. She uses a Shona male character to develop a critic of a Shona cultural trait. The fact that Patrick is a primary character, gives him voice to not only register but emphasise the presences of African, Shona men, who not only believe in gender justice but live by their belief, not making their wives inferior, and verbally stating their hatred for patriarchal, controlling marriages and cataloguing their unfairness to women and wives. The placing of the character of Patrick in the plot of *Neria* is also crucial as it comes early, providing a yardstick by which the spectator measures Phineas. Patrick's early departure, after registering his appreciation for and fair treatment of Neria, intensifies his role as a positive character. Since he is a flat character, having him for long in the story can easily make him boring and risks diminishing his value. The shortness of the life of his character intensifies the degree of evil of Phineas's character.

Making Public the Feminist Agency of Shona Oral Literature

It is important to note that Dangarembga uses oral literature, a folktale and song in this case, to challenge the views of men like Phineas who preach that the inferior status of wives in marriage and women in the Shona community is a dictate of the Shona community.

As the brothers are on the road, driving back to their village home, and Patrick is laying out his gender and woman friendly stand of marriage, he leads them to sing a song (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 4) from Shona folklore called 'Jari Mukaranga'. This song tells the story of a wife who is bitter and angry, documenting her complaints for not being appreciated by her husband and his family, yet she toiled to work for the riches that her husband boasts of. This wife is divorced, left in the lurch for a younger trophy wife who did not work for the comforts she is enjoying.

At the same time, back in the village (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 5), their mother is telling the same story to her grandchildren and daughters-in-law. When the children ask her to tell a story by the fire, as grandmothers are traditionally asked and required to, she tells the tale of a woman who came back to haunt a husband who had dumped her after she worked hard to amass wealth for him and his family. This song is sung by both parties in separate scenes, happening at the same time. When the brothers arrive home, they find the children dancing to song around the fire as the grandmother is completing telling the story.

The contents of the folk tale, the song and its being sung in both scenes at the same time, shows that Dangarembga wants to emphasise the unfairness of women and wives not being credited for the hard work they do in marriages.

This song historicises the problem, showing that women have been battling this problem for long. The song also helps women to articulate and own the voice that criticises such a practice, and helps register a problem and make it public. It sets the scene for the audience to question the justice of labelling assets of a family or couple those of a man when wives, women, help accumulate those assets by working in and outside the home. When the brothers arrive home, they join in singing and dancing to the song because they find the children, their mother and wives singing and dancing to it too. This allows Dangarembga to question the oppression women face in marriage from an African and Shona avenue. This avenue is not only publicly owned, it is well known and respected. Folklore, as Mbiti (1989) and Okpewho (1990) have often reminded us, invokes the voice and wisdom of ancestors in Africa. Jari Mukaranga not only labels what happened to the dumped woman wrong, it allows Patrick to make his stand on this issue public and to warn his brother not to mistreat his wife. By having the whole family dance to this song at the end, it puts the questions of widow inheritance and treatment of wives in marriage into the public sphere. It involves the whole family, making it an issue that cuts across gender, age, class, space and time.

Neria and *Kugarwa Nhaka*

When Patrick dies, Phineas makes it clear that he is to inherit all of his brother's property as tradition dictates. This includes the wife and children. Neria dislikes this traditional practice and this is evident in her reaction to the process of the distribution of Patrick' clothes. The problem with such a custom and tradition is that it infantilises wives. It treats them as children who do not know what of their husband they want to discard or keep, muting and disregarding their voice in an issue that is dear to them, at a time when they are already experiencing pain, loss and loneliness. This makes them face double pain, loss and abandonment. First they lose a loved one then they do not even have a voice in proceedings concerning him.

Neria is so angered by not being consulted about this process, especially not getting their wedding pictures, she walks out as they are distributing his things and goes straight to the place the two of them loved to sit and talk in the nearby forest. She goes to talk to him and ask the questions that are plaguing her (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 8). This act locates Neria solidly as a product of her culture. According to Okpewho, for many communities in Africa, when a person dies, he is simply assumed to have departed physically from this world but to have joined the company of ancestors who have gone before. Between these ancestors and the living there is an unbroken line of communication and contact (Okpewho 1992:158-9).

As a Shona African woman, it makes sense that she talks to Patrick as if he is alive, telling him what is going on, asking him to help by giving her advice. Phineas follows her and makes the first attempt to take over as her husband, take his brother's position, but the pain and anger he sees on Neria's face makes him walk away in dismay. This is the first time the family sees the pain, neglect and anger Neria is experiencing. As the plot continues, Phineas takes steps to own and control Neria, her children, furniture and house. What emerges is a tale of how Phineas's manipulation of this patriarchal tradition is contested by Neria in both private and public spaces, but it is in public that Neria delivers a telling blow.

The Court Public Space

After a series of abusive and selfish efforts by Phineas to control Neria, her children and property, Neria sees that the only way to stop Phineas from robbing her and her children of their means of livelihood is to take her friend Connie's advice and take him to court. In court, she exposes Phineas's selfish and greedy behaviour. What is crucial for this discussion is how her brother's patriarchal arguments are defeated in the public space.

Her brother-in-law's pivotal argument in court is that Shona culture dictates that the eldest brother of a brother who has passed should inherit the widow, children and property. Phineas emphasises that if the court sees the issue differently, it is disregarding his culture and that is wrong. Some people may argue that Phineas's stand is not patriarchal; it is just a stand of a manipulative person who is greedy and selfish. Mbuya (Patrick's mother) certainly agrees with that and so do most reviews of this film (see Lopez McAlister, July 29, 1995).

Phineas, Spokesman and Tool of Patriarchy

In an interview with Oliver Mtukudzi, a world-renowned Zimbabwean musician who was in the cast of *Neria*, I asked him his views on *kugarwa nhaka*, to interrogate whether he labelled it patriarchal or not. He emphasised that this traditional practice is designed for the wellbeing of the family of the deceased. It is to make the husband's side take responsibility for that family. Mtukudzi reiterates that the character of Phineas in *Neria* represents people who are twisting cultural laws, manipulating them for personal gain:

Many people are taking advantage of the cultural laws, twisting them just to suit themselves. Inheritance does not mean taking over even the wife. It is the taking over of responsibility. When Neria's husband dies, the family turns against the widow. She is not loved but taken advantage of by the family. Whatever she and her husband had worked for is taken away. She and her husband worked so hard but now it is all taken away. That is very unfair (cited in Kabwila Kapasula 2009:1).

Mtukudzi argues that the taking of responsibility does not include taking over the wife:

> If you are in love with your brother's wife, then you have to propose afresh. It [the traditional custom of widow inheritance] was a rule that was designed to mean well but because men are twisting it to suit ourselves, we are taking advantage of women (Kabwila Kapasula 2009:1).

I agree that Phineas is manipulating the situation but this does not mean this traditional practice is not patriarchal. If it is mainly about responsibility, then it would also apply to widowers, they would be inherited by the female side too, especially if they are well-to-do financially and can help the family that has remained. But this is not the case. This cultural practice puts the male in charge of the female; it makes maleness responsible for and in control of women and womanhood. The tradition erects a structure that says male is superior and in charge of female, which is inferior. So Phineas is a tool of a patriarchal concept.

It is Shona Culture on Trial

As far as Phineas is concerned, it is Shona culture that is on trial here. To Phineas, if he is wrong, then tradition is wrong. Phineas repeatedly tells Neria about his superiority of power as the brother of her dead husband. He is entitled to all that was Patrick's. It is interesting to note that no one questions that Patrick's sisters or mother need to have a say in this issue. They all know that it is the men of the family who are to decide the issue. On several occasions, Neria points out the unfairness of Phineas's deeds to her and her family, but she fails to convince him. Phineas's brother (the one who stays in Malawi) and the uncle, fail to make him change his mind about Patrick's family and property. However, when this issue goes back into public space, that of the court, Neria defeats him and his patriarchal argument resoundingly.

Patriarchy Meets Neria, the Culturally Grounded Woman

It is important to remember that before the final scene, Dangarembga has already autochthonotised Neria and Patrick. We saw the oral literature foretelling what would befall Neria and Patrick positioning himself within it. When he dies, Neria handles his death in a manner in keeping with Shona culture. So by the time we meet her in court, her Shona identity is not an issue that Phineas can question easily. In fact, throughout the narrative, he does not question that part of her. In court, Neria proves that she is a wife who loves and respects her husband and in-laws. She cares for them and her pursuance for justice in this court does not mean she plans to leave them

unattended financially and otherwise. She explains that she wants to make sure they have a good relationship with her and the children. Her testimony on the stand portrays someone who has great respect for her Shona tradition and culture, someone who respects the ancestors to whom she repeatedly refers as 'the departed' and 'those in the winds' (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 6, 7, 9). This disarms Phineas who had planned to posit her as a modern wife and woman who has no respect for her past. Neria shows that she is culturally grounded. Like the vendors who confronted in the market, Phineas has no time to reorder his attack in the face of a culturally grounded and respectful woman that he meets in his sister-in-law.

Patriarchy Meets Patrick, a Non-patriarchal African Man

Neria explains her husband's stance regarding his wife, which is contrary to Phineas's exploitative acts. This shows that not all Shona men believe wives should lose property when a husband dies or that wives are inferior to husbands, women to men. It shows the court what kind of a man Patrick was and this fortifies Neria's argument, leaving Phineas pursuing a lost cause. This incident shows how patriarchy struggles and becomes helpless when confronted by a man who does not subscribe to it.

In the Thondwe case, when a man spoke at length, attacking patriarchy (even though I did not agree with some of his arguments) it was a blow that the initial vendors needed time to sort out and mount an attack against. When that man pointed to my husband and asked what right they had to question my dress if he (my husband) was fine with it, it was too much to unravel and bring under control at one sitting. Seeing my husband there in flesh silenced the woman and men who had attacked me. He was a living proof that there are men who marry women like me and do not hate skirts that go above the knee. The fact that my husband is Malawian, problematised the culture card that is often played to construct patriarchal discourses. Having such men at the point of patriarchal contact problematises the definition of man, proving that patriarchy is a social construct. It is something that some men are free of, can unlearn and do not believe in. It is like facing an opposition army with someone in their own uniform. It unnerves the opposition and robs them of time to digest all that is going on.

Patriarchy Meets a Working Mother who must Pay Fees

When Phineas cites his right to take over Neria and her children, she points out that what she wants is to be able to take care of her children, paying their school fees, house rent and clothes, and feeding them, as her husband would have wanted her to do.

When one considers Omofolabo Ajayi Soyinka's 'Thoughts on double patriarchy' (1993),[8] you remember that the coming of colonialism to Africa not only brought colonial patriarchy, as Ajayi Soyinka argues, Africa also imported capitalism. With globalisation, capitalism has spread and become more entrenched than ever. It is therefore understandable that in the public space of Africa, patriarchy often collides with capitalism. Sometimes this collision works for patriarchy but the point that this paper is trying to advance is that sometimes it does not, and the space that opens when the two forces meet, is the space that feminist agency actualises.

Many people in Africa treasure the ability of their children to go to Western established schools. People know that if the children are staying in urban spaces, whoever is leaving with them has to pay rent. Maybe Phineas could have come up with an idea of how he could fulfil those obligations but in the court space he does not. He and his patriarchal views are caught unawares.

Just like in the Thondwe market, where the vendors could not deny that they need women who have buying power like me to buy the second-hand clothes they sell, many people in the court case show agreement that Neria needs to have Patrick's assets in order to raise the children. Dangarembga's narrative takes time to illustrate how Neria's children end up thrown out of school because their mother cannot pay school fees. Just like the Thondwe vendors had to confront the reality that my having money to buy my own clothes gave me a say, at least some say, on what I wore, this court audience is shown largely to appreciate that Neria needs to have the custody of the means with which to raise the children.

Patriarchy Meets the Temporal Argument

In *Neria*, Dangarembga uses the film text to demonstrate publicly that tradition is not static. In court, Neria's lawyer also underlines the importance of reading tradition as a text that changes with time, one that has modified itself to suit the different contexts of today's world. Neria does this by repeating that she does not want to anger 'those in the winds', a phrase that is constantly used by her friend Connie.

Connie insists on fighting this practice of widow inheritance but she also makes it clear that she is very proud of her Shona culture. Connie is so well connected with her culture and ancestors that the latter reveal to her what is going to happen before it does – for example, Patrick's death and the attack on Neria by Phineas and his wife. Connie insists that the time of husband's relatives taking over the property of widows ended long ago. Patrick also tells Phineas that the time of wives who do not participate in the decision making process of a marriage is long gone. Connie and Patrick show that

culture changes with time. The way both of them argue forces their listeners to question themselves if time does not really change things in life. Once again, patriarchy is confronted by an argument that is difficult to negate instantly.

The argument of time exposes the dynamic nature of tradition and culture, emphasising that categories like nation, culture and tradition need to and do change, to match the changing times. They are impacted by time. Both court scenes, especially the last one, show that people can see that, today, wives do not only work at home (as if that is would not be enough to warrant them the right to keep their husband's assets), they also work outside home and contribute to what a family owns. In Neria's case, she has taken part not only in the giving birth of the children, she has helped her husband get ready for work and supported him. She also is formally employed herself. In court, people can see that if it is an issue of labelling that which one has worked for, then this woman has worked for family too, she deserves to keep them.

Patriarchy Meets Sisterhood

When Neria is frustrated and about to give up fighting as Phineas says he is going to court for the second time, Connie leads Neria and the women who work with her in a song that says the women of Zimbabwe are going to fight for change in issues that problematise their lives. They sing this song to encourage Neria to fight on but it is obvious that Dangarembga uses the words to make a statement on behalf of other Zimbabwean women facing different kinds of woes. The song is very inspirational and when I translate it from Shona, this is what it says:

> It does not matter
> How heavy the load gets
> We stand for what is good
> We are women of Zimbabwe
> We stand for what is right and good.
> We women are very strong and tough,
> Even if things get very tough,
> We will work to fix and solve them.
> Changing things is hard,
> These issues are very heavy and difficult.
> The level of difficult is so high that only women can deal with such problems
> Only we women can bring change to such hard things.
> (My translation, Dangarembga 1993: Scene 6).

This song registers a group of women who are resilient. They are aware of their problems but what is crucial to note is that they are doing something about it and encouraging each other to continue doing so. In this scene, we see the women mount a visible support system for Neria, giving her financial and moral support. Together with Neria, they evaluate their culture, pointing out what is good and bad about it, taking a stand on what must change. It is a scene like this one that inscribes the agency of African women, showing that they are not helpless and defenceless people but very stoic and resilient people who are courageously fighting indigenous and colonial patriarchy.

Patriarchy Meets the Western Colonial World

When the British court rules in favour of Neria both times, Phineas mourns that Neria (and those who subscribe to her views) has won with the help of the white man's system. Phineas believes he has lost because his tradition has no voice and currency in an Africa that has bought and been bought by the Western and colonial way of life. It is easy to agree with Phineas. After all, it is the court that orders Phineas to bring back all the property that he took from Neria' s house, leave the children with her and appoint her as the executor of Patrick's estate. When they leave court, one cannot help but feel that the solution to Neria's problem is once again prescribed by the white world. It seems the solution is yet another prescription from the white and colonial powers that be. Moreover, the court is a space that discriminates against people like Patrick's mother, Mbuya, because she cannot speak English fluently and is not conversant with such spaces. Against such a background, it is very telling that Dangarembga brings the feminist agency versus patriarchal control debate into the village public spaces. It is here that Dangarembga sets up a scene for Neria to deliver the most telling punch, not only to the patriarchy of Phineas, but that of the whole community members who construct constructs practices, institution and processes that render women voiceless.

Patriarchy Battled in the Village Public Space

According to tradition, since Patrick has died Neria has to choose a husband to inherit her. Neria hates this practice and she uses the public space not only to register her dislike of this patriarchal practice but to go against it. When patriarchy exhibits itself not only as an ideology but also as a practice, Neria counters it with a practice by dismantling it to a point that her views on this issue are not only clear and owned by her, they make Mbuya change her stance on them too. One of the advantages of attacking patriarchy in public is that once the attack is visible and more so when successful, it can become contagious and bring about a snowball effect, inviting other people and forces to attack it.

This practice of choosing a husband involves Neria giving hunting gear (symbolising husband as warrior and protector) and/or bowl of water (symbolising the water a wife gives to a husband for him to eat after preparing his meal). Neria does not give the bowl of water and hunting gear to any of the older men. She goes through each of them (three in number including Phineas) refusing to hand them over. She gives it to her son, symbolising that she does not want to be remarried, since her son cannot marry her. The men are very angry, especially Phineas, and they walk away very annoyed, complaining that she is a rude woman, she is not a marriage material (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 11).

What is interesting is her mother-in-law's reaction. She not only accepts and respects Neria's stand, she applauds her on taking it, saying that she has learnt a lot from her. She goes on to explain how wrong her son is, how he is manipulating a practice that was not meant to be oppressive to women. She explains that the practice of 'kugara nhaka' (of course, I still disagree with her explanation) is mainly about the husband's side taking responsibility for the family, not taking over the property and leaving the family stranded.

Feminist Agency – Twisting Culture

Mbuya goes on to say she agrees with Neria that culture has to be 'twisted a bit in order to suit times' that are changing. Neria has explained that she wants to take care of herself. She loved her husband and does not want to be married again (Dangarembga 1993: Scene 10). This is very important not only because Neria shows agency in a village space, in an African setting where the Phineas's of this world will not say the white man is the one who has poisoned the Neria's of this world. It is also important because it shows that African women have agency. They are not passive bystanders who just let things happen to them and are then busy picking up the pieces. African, Shona women like Neria can bend culture if need be in order to attain their goals. What is impressive is that Neria does not bend the culture by accident, what she does reveals a well thought out contestation with patriarchy, one that is owned and celebrated.

African Public Spaces – Spaces Full of Promise for Feminist Agency

Dangarembga' *Neria* shows that the African public space is a battleground with patriarchy. When I read my incident at Thondwe market together with Neria's utilisation of the public space in urban and rural settings, I am convinced that the African public space is the space that feminist theorists, writers, those in advocacy and many other professions, should pay a lot of attention to. It is a space that confuses hegemonic forces like patriarchy, leaving it with cracks that allow for resistant feminist agency to utilise. The

public space of Africa is not only a barometer for gender issues; it is also a laboratory for change. It is a place where context-based agency, acts that subvert lived experiences, takes root and grows. Such agency becomes pillars for those subverting society in one way or another to hold on to and participate in, making new meanings of their citizenship. The African public space is a place to confront the present situation in which one can transform one's status from victim to survivor, especially as far as the woman question is concerned.

Notes

1. This paper defines patriarchy as an ideological and hegemonic force that advocates the creation and perpetuation of male dominance in society, the power that men of any age, race, class, religion and ethnicity use to dominate women.
2. I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to Dangarembga for attending the presentation of this paper in Yaoundé, Cameroon. She asked very poignant questions, was very supportive. The conference presentation was followed by an interview in a forthcoming publication.
3. Usually called 'house' or 'garden boy'. Both are terms that bear a colonially demeaning baggage so I usually called them by their children's names as we do with adults traditionally.
4. Many Malawians, like in many African and third world countries, wear second-hand clothes from Western countries and these can be easily accessed in our markets. One can buy miniskirts and tight dresses from the vendors.
5. Synopsis of *Neria*: (Jesesi Mungoshi) is a 35 year-old woman living in Mbare. She is happily married to Patrick (Emmanuel Mbirimi) and has two children, Mavis (Tsitsi Nyamukapa), aged thirteen, and Shingayi (Manyika Kangai), aged seven. Neria works at a crocheting co-operative. In a good month, she earns as much as her husband. Neria and Patrick are painting their new home, a project to which Neria contributes both financially and physically. Patrick and Neria have been living in the city since their marriage, though they go to the rural home to visit the relatives on occasion. She and her mother-in-law (Violet Ndlovu) get along, but have the basic difference that Neria is a modern woman and Ambuya is a traditional woman. Ambuya doesn't understand their urban lifestyle and wonders why Neria insists on working instead of staying home like a good wife. Neria respects Ambuya's ideas and does her best to please her. As Patrick is returning home one evening, he is hit by a car and killed. Neria is understandably devastated. Her brother-in-law, Phineas (Dominic J Kanaventi), steps in and helps make necessary arrangements. She and her children go to her husband's rural home for the funeral. After a month in the village, Neria realises that she must get back to the city – the children have missed school, she has missed work and they must continue their life.

In the meantime, Phineas is helping himself to Neria and Patrick's things. He takes possession of cash and their joint POSB book, the car, virtually all their furniture, and eventually he takes over her home. She struggles to make ends meet, and though she asks Phineas for money from their savings to help her family, her plea is ignored. In time it is obvious that Phineas is misusing his traditional role as the protector of his brother's family. Neria's best friend and neighbour, Connie (Kubi Indi), advises her to go to a lawyer. But Neria is reluctant as she does not want to offend her husband's family. One day Neria comes home from work to find the locks on her house changed and her children gone. She knows that Phineas has taken them, and goes after them. She arrives in the village to find her daughter very ill and in need of a hospital. Ambuya is away at her sister's village, and only Phineas is around to help her. She pleads with him to take them in her husband's car to the hospital, but he is not willing to help. In desperation Neria carries Mavis to the bus stop and manages to get her to hospital on time. Neria decides that it has come to a point that she must take Connie's advice and seek legal help. After getting the necessary background information, the lawyer advises her of the steps she must follow. With the help of her brother Jethro (Oliver Mtukudzi) Neria goes through the necessary legal channels at the Community Court level and her eldest child is appointed the heir. Phineas is ordered to return the property. Phineas is outraged by the turn of events, as he feels he is entitled to his brother's property. He takes the matter to the High Court, claiming that Neria is not fit to maintain the children, and that in this circumstance it is best to follow Customary Law. After an involved Court hearing which brings to light the exploits of Phineas, the judgement is that Neria will remain the guardian of the heir. Through this process, Ambuya realises that Phineas is twisting tradition to suit himself. She comes to understand that at times tradition must bend with the changing times (http://www.mith2.umd.edu/WomensStudies/FilmReviews/neria-mcalister).

6. Part of the inheritance cultural practice, where a brother takes over the family of a brother who has passed away. He takes over the looking after of the family including the assets. Mtukudzi argues that the taking over of the widow is a manipulation of this practice. This practice is not limited to the Shona of Zimbabwe, it is also present in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*. (Mtukudzi interview, Capital Hotel, Lilongwe, Malawi, 27 May 2007).
7. All references to *Neria* in this paper are to the 1993 production.
8. Ajayi Soyinka argues that colonialism imported the patriarchy that characterised Europe and America of the nineteenth century into the colonised African communities. This colonial patriarchy perpetuated the indigenous patriarchy. This validates the presence of patriarchy before colonialism and proves that it is not monolithic; there are various types of patriarchy.(Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Volume VIII, Number 2, (Kansas: The University of Kansas, 1993), 162.

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'Up as a Rabbit, Down as a Lion': Socio-economic Determinants of New Idioms of Power – Visual Case Stories from Urban Adamaoua, Cameroon

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Abstract

In the 1990s, I felt empathy with the Sultan of Adamaoua. I do feel empathy with one of the richest and most influential industrialists in Cameroon today - emotions which are difficult to convey in today's Norway. Ideas about Africa, about poverty, corruption, etc. make such feelings politically incorrect. My anthropological research is supposed to lead to positive consequences for the people with whom I work. They be 'small' or 'big' people. This is called applied research. My research experience has made me conclude the following: Research should contribute to giving people new voices in new arenas; make them visible in new social spheres. I wish for instance, that my research may promote authorities' listening more to and seeing people who are poor or who are uneducated, and, that their decisions may reach them, empower them. Often, also, one thinks that empowerment only concerns people without power. Since I have for long worked with people with big power, my research should enable their voices to become strengthened and make them visible on the new social arenas that are under pressure from their own behaviour and entrepreneurship, but that they themselves do not see. What criteria do we use when we decide whether our research should empower people in power? It is important that we include the 'small' as well as the 'big' in our applied research. Otherwise, democracy can not be promoted.

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Résumé

Dans les années 1990, j'éprouvais de l'empathie pour le Sultan d'Adamaoua. J'éprouve aussi de l'empathie pour l'un des industriels les plus riches et les plus influents au Cameroun aujourd'hui; des émotions qu'il est difficile d'exprimer en Norvège aujourd'hui. Les idées sur l'Afrique, la pauvreté, la corruption, etc. rendent de tels sentiments politiquement incorrects. Ma recherche anthropologique est censée conduire à des conséquences positives pour les personnes avec qui je travaille. Qu'elles soient de « petites » ou de « grandes » gens. C'est ce qu'on appelle la recherche appliquée. Mon expérience de recherche m'a fait tirer les conclusions suivantes: la recherche devrait contribuer à donner aux gens de nouvelles voix dans de nouveaux domaines; les rendre visibles dans de nouvelles sphères sociales. Je souhaite par exemple, que mes recherches puissent pousser les autorités à écouter et se soucier des gens pauvres ou non instruites, et que leurs décisions puissent les atteindre, les rendre autonomes. Souvent aussi, on pense que l'autonomisation ne concerne que les personnes sans pouvoir. Puisque j'ai longtemps travaillé avec des gens ayant un grand pouvoir, mes recherches doivent permettre à leurs voix de se fortifier et les rendre visibles sur les nouvelles arènes sociales qui sont sous la pression de leur propre comportement et leur esprit d'entreprise, mais qu'eux-mêmes ne voient pas. Quels critères utilisons-nous lorsque nous décidons si notre recherche devrait renforcer les gens au pouvoir? Il est important d'inclure les « petits », ainsi que les « grands » dans notre recherche appliquée. Sinon, la démocratie ne peut pas être promue.

Introduction

Throughout many years of applied anthropological research in Christian and Muslim milieux in Ngaoundéré, Northern Cameroon, I have studied expressions of masculinity and femininity in public and domestic domains. I have progressively developed various tentative hypotheses about transformation processes and dominant dynamics of social change.[1] In this paper, I want to focus on visual idioms of masculinity and political power in Muslim urban settings. My argument is that richness (i.e., economic dynamics) overrides the current processes aiming at legitimizing democratic political power.

I have always used photographs and film as my research tool. Our images allow us, my Cameroonian partners in the field and me, to identify changes in how men have tried and now try to convey, nonverbally, legitimacy of new forms of masculinity and power.

The Norwegian proverb 'op som en løve; ned som en skindfelg' (literally 'up as a lion – down as a piece of skin'), expresses how persons experiencing success in the public arenas may quickly see their success and ambitions destroyed by unforeseen events. In the title of this paper, I have turned this proverb upside-down in order to express how difficult it is for people to

cope with processes of globalization and understand the currently changing rules shared by everybody that differentiate and legitimize behaviour in and access to social spheres. The constituents of spheres are arenas. They may be open like. The Western concept 'public' or domestic, or intimate domains[2] in different social contexts. People are often confused about what symbolizes higher and lower positions in social hierarchies, and for some people, the construction of legitimacy becomes part and parcel of their daily 'job'. What is 'up' and what is 'down'?

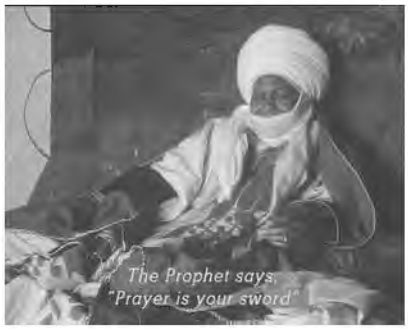
Many Europeans acquire a higher rank when they come to work in Africa. There is a greater demand for their competence in there: 'You have to go to Africa if you want to build castles', a staffer from Paris working in Cameroon once said to me. 'In France they do not build castles like Versailles anymore'. Africans may lose dignity and rank when coming to Europe. A modern African industrialist visiting Paris wants to order a limousine by phone. At first the taxi firm is reluctant to accept the order. The industrialist has to repeat many times that he has all kinds of credit cards; that he will pay cash if they want: 'In Paris I am seen as a rabbit – at home I am a lion', he says!

In Paris a black person might not have access to the same public service as the whites. Or, maybe this is too easy an assumption? The 'border' that was felt and expressed in the taxi-ordering negotiation, though, may well have concerned the difference between people coming from France and people from a country outside France. Not until we have done further research will we know the relevance-rules that lay behind difficulties of getting a limousine in Paris in a supposed public sphere in France. What we see is that some dynamics create an idea of open access, of equality; other dynamics close, exclude people from access, and these dynamics meet in conditioning people's behaviour on social arenas.

From the background of what has been and is presently considered visible idioms of power in today's Europe, and through my personal involvement in their lives, I will look into and compare the practices of a former Muslim Sultan[3] and a modern Muslim industrialist in Northern Cameroon. Both personalities are considered representatives of Fulbe[4] societies. Both experience a serious loss of power in their own societies. Both make me feel empathy. Both succeed to assure power through new means. Both of them have to handle own multi-ethnic origin in their identity management in various local settings. They have to handle local, traditional idioms of masculinity, power and social space and – at the same time – adapt to idioms of power and compartmentalization of social space, i.e., new notions of open/domestic or intimate (public and private) domains. They both travel around in Cameroon. They both go to Europe and come back to Cameroon. Both look at Western and Asian television channels. New definitions of intimate/open spaces/arenas

are currently proposed by the Sultan as well as by the industrialist in the local Cameroonian setting. It is my hypothesis that both of them play with Western idioms in their efforts to construct a powerful image of self (Goffman 1959). But the ways in which they play are different, as are their successes and failures. Often, they do not succeed in incorporating the new definitions in their own and their audiences' already existing social repertoires.

Al Hajji Jawri



Lamiido Issa Maigari

I want to show that difference in access to money has a great implication for such success and for the development of the two personalities' careers; and for their influence in the current transformation of open spheres. I also want to show how the study of and empathy with people in power are necessary ingredients if one wants to understand societal transformation and globalization.

I want to take a closer look into the practices of my two personalities in what may be called open (non-intimate) arenas. I want to discover the interface of local and global dynamics, i.e., where the power of definitions of the games people play is located (Goffman 1959, Barth 1996, Grønhaug 1974 and 1978, Rudie 1994 and 2008, Bourdieu 1979). Then I have also said that my analysis concerns people's, women's and men's access to and power of definition in open spheres, and that it varies whether local or global dynamics and rules are activated.

Time, Space, Practice and Experience: How Do We Identify an Open[5] Social Sphere?

The concept of 'public spheres' has been used in many different ways at different times. I want to examine the relative degree of openness of arenas that comes about through people's fight for power and rank in present day globalized social contexts. An eventual open sphere would then be a configuration of social spaces[6] and arenas that every member of local and national communities thinks s/he has legitimate access to, and that s/he actually shares with others.

The access to and performances in all social arenas are regulated by rules of behaviour, verbal and embodied, and nonverbal behaviour. Notions of nation, state; of the politics of collective access, i.e. of 'publicness' and of democracy, are certainly not yet shared by everybody in Northern Cameroon. One may say they might be being built little by little. And, one has to be aware that local African ways of organizing space and spheres may very well imply interesting ways of assuring collective interests.[7] These rules may assure qualities of human life that could be looked upon as a gift to the global community and as an offer of very interesting principles. This is why it is important that one identifies the concrete local organization of social space and arenas; of the activities, social actors and specific forms of sociability that are related to these African spaces and spheres. Before even thinking of 'public', a concept of Western origin (Habermas 1984), we have to understand the current local transformation of organization of intimacy and of differentiated access to participation in more open social spaces and arenas. From there, we will be able to discover whether a public sphere (and an individual space) reflecting collective and shared notions about common and collective interests and rights actually exists. If they exist, we may disclose whether there are possibilities that they be conveyed to authorities.[8]

Before I enter into the stories about the two Fulbe characters in northern urban Cameroon from 1982 to 2008, I need to offer further details of my analytical position. I deal with three perceptions of time and space: historical time, generational time and my own anthropological time (Rudie 2008). The historical time is the one historians work with, as for instance the history of the Fulbe expansion in Africa: Historians work with documents, remnants and oral traditions in their efforts to describe societal change through time. Generational time is the more or less shared perceptions, social rules and bodily behaviours of a group of people of same age, living together in a certain span of time and in social spaces that they recognize and share. These may be inscribed or incorporated (Connerton 1989). Anthropological time is my (the anthropologist's) perception, inscribed and incorporated, of a specific society as it has evolved through my relationship to it, the moments I have spent with it at various points in time. My perceptions and embodied learning may be partly overlapping with the one of members of the society that is the object of my study. Through time, people change their perception of their own lives and of their own experiences. So does the anthropologist. There is no correct and true form 'out there'. There are constantly changing conditions leading to changed experiences, social spaces and social arenas (Rudie 2008).

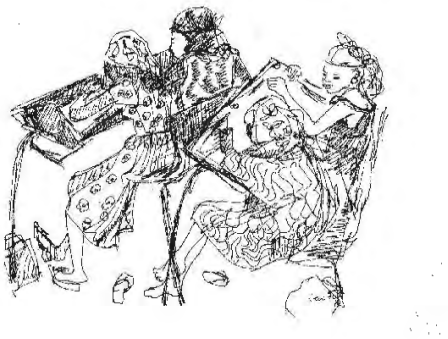
If we want to identify an eventual 'publicness', an openness of a social arena in a specific African society, we may enter the generational time of

people of different age by exploring how they are involved in different social arenas and what characterizes their different sociability there when they enact their everyday practices. The sociability constitutes the rough material for social roles. The anthropologist develops sensitivity towards different people's sociability through fieldwork. This sensitivity allows the anthropologist to identify different social situations and arenas that different people 'see' and their related behavioural patterns, i.e., their social roles. If s/he wants, s/he may also try to learn how the roles enacted in an open arena are built into the identity packages of the social persons of the society (Grønhaug 1978, Barth 1981b).

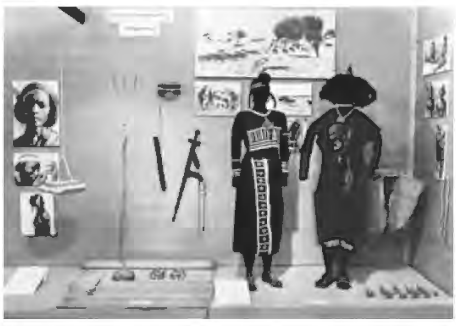
When moving around a person is carrying his/her incorporated cognitive and social skills like a cultural formation. The person represents a 'unit' in a pluralized (or 'globalized') world by being a configuration of skills, sociability and search for meaning. Integration and stability consist in the person's trying to find meaning in a changing world by incorporating new experiences in his/her already existing experience structure. Globalization may be seen as a force that may put pressure on such local integration. The unity of the person and the relative stability may represent obstacles to change.[9] Maybe a fundamental resistance also lies in the person's involvement in space? And maybe such involvement in space may be the reason why (local) cultural differences survive in spite of intense cross-border traffic of cultural material (Rudie 2008).

Yoruba made a drawing of a Manga woman

I made a drawing of her classmates



From the exhibition 'Mainé Soroa: A Village in Niger' at the University Museum of Tromsoe in 1974[10]



Visualization as a Tool in Applied Research

In my methodological approach, I put much weight on the visual dimension. Visual, nonverbal and oral communications are different from written. They convey different things and release different emotions from written texts (McDougall 2006). The rules that allow us to send and receive visual, nonverbal and oral messages promote other forms of experience and knowledge for people and for researchers than the rules of written communication and dissemination. I have always used drawings, photographs, expositions and films as tools in my research in order to discover other people's and my own incorporated knowledge; to identify social persons, their identity packages, i.e., persons as cultural formations, in the communities I study (Holtedahl 1993, 1996, 2009).

I screen images and films for partners and people to try out my preliminary understanding of bodily behaviour, social events and of people's idiomatic expressions in the rushes through tentative explicit interpretations. People will always correct my statements and make me see other meanings, enactment of different role repertoires and not the least; they will indicate to me the conditions and constraints that they see themselves (Barthes 1967; Holtedahl 1973, 1978). Within the analytical framework presented here, the supposed dominance of economic dynamics then means a pressure on the local-global interaction processes and thereby on the configuration of skills and sociability of local actors. It also means that economic dynamics are visible in local social interaction.

Africa and the West as Global and Local Systems of Interaction

Since 1980, Northern Cameroon has been my field of study. Key themes concern the question of how forms of power/subordination and richness/poverty are transformed through socio-political and socioeconomic processes in Cameroon and Africa and in their relationship to the West. It is my impression that the gap between rich and poor in Africa and between Africa and the West grows deeper. Researchers must focus on local African people's resistance and adaptive strategies vis-à-vis global dynamics to understand why (Fanon 1952). A way of doing this is by identifying the interface of local and global dynamics in different African societies. Where goes the line between local and global powers of decision?

In our search for the qualities of today's open arenas in Africa, we have to look at local events of a 'public' character in Africa, at people's relationship to the Cameroonian state in Cameroon. Today, many social fields comprising numerous local arenas involve local people in the global world. Inhabitants of African nations are involved in the fields of religion (Muslim, Protestant,

and Catholic), economy, politics, sport, etc. These are of large or global scale. Protestants in northern Cameroon are directly linked to the Protestant Mission in Norway and the United States. Muslims in Ngaoundéré are linked to the global Muslim world. The Cameroonian state is related politically and economically through its political actors to France, the United States, China. What are the social fields and what are their proper dynamics, *eigendynamik,* and how do they articulate with people's cultural baggage in Ngaoundéré? In our search for aspects of openness, 'publicness', we should not only scrutinize the behaviour of representatives of state and local administration towards local populations. This might make us reify 'public' at the cost of concealing genuinely African forms of organization of space. My material includes everyday interaction in local African contexts and Europeans' behaviour (including my own), and interaction with Africans in African arenas, and vice versa, African actors on the arenas of the West.

I have screened films and film rushes from Africa in Africa and Norway, France, England and many other countries. I have been moving around in social fields of different scale in Africa and in the West. I have especially scrutinized Norwegians' perspective on, interpretation of and knowledge about Africa and interaction with Africans. It is my opinion that in the ongoing processes of globalization, the Western (Norwegian) populations accumulate ignorance about Africa all the while it seems that the opposite is happening. Television programmes, radio and the Internet provide information about Africa but television programmes about Africa are seldom directed so as to open the windows through which Norwegian people look. Their glasses stay ethnocentric (Tvedt 2005). The enormous information flow gives people a facile illusion of learning. There is a great difference between information, understanding and knowledge. The consequence is that many people in the North ignore the concrete initiatives for societal development continuously taken by local people in African countries to promote their collective or individual interests. The ignorance also has consequences when Africans face Western actors in and outside Africa. This means that resistance from African partners may not be taken into consideration by Westerners. For instance, people in Norway do not know African rules of respect. They would not be able to read the current fights for influence and rights in Africa either. Norwegians' strategies for African development are often built on this lack of knowledge of African competences and skills. I therefore want to pay great attention to the (visual) expression that my two characters convey when interacting with people from abroad, Europeans in Europe and in Cameroon. I hope this will allow me to discover the relative power of definition of partners in negotiations, of setting the rules on different social arenas.

Scholars in the North often frame African societies ethnocentrically in spite of their efforts to implement a cross-cultural perspective. In order to help marginalized people, for instance, many Norwegian social scientists concentrate their studies on the marginalized groups (Tvedt 2005). Their cultural baggage makes them blind to their own political correctness and studying locally powerful personalities may not seem important to them. This reflects the culturally defined well known Norwegian 'good intentions'. Norwegians want to be equal and good 'helpers', and they are easily caught in vicious circles generated by their belief that this is also taken for granted by others. They do not easily see, either, if what they do to others is of any help (Gullestad 2003, 2007). These attitudes also often make Norwegian development workers and administrators insensitive to the mechanisms that reproduce the asymmetric relations between people from the South and North. In this way, the struggle of leading Norwegian politicians against the ultra-conservative forces that do not want Africans to come to Norway paradoxically reproduces and enhances imbalance in their relations to Africans (Tvedt 1998, 2006). My conclusion is that dynamics in this social field, Norwegian development work in Africa, generates a North-South sphere with typical asymmetrical positions and interaction perceived of by Westerners as 'public'.

My story about people in power in Ngaoundéré may illustrate the importance of 'studying up' for the comprehension of global and local marginalization processes: the growing gap between rich and poor and between Africa and the West. By studying powerful people's performances in new arenas, I find the characteristics of present forms of openness, 'publicness'. Applied visual anthropology may allow us to reveal and grasp the qualities of the imbalanced encounters in new open arenas and thereby help us develop strategies that may weaken the dynamics that widen the gap between rich and poor in Africa and between Africa and the West.[11]

The Sultan and the Industrialist: Differentiation of Expressions of Muslim, Political and Economic Power?

After visiting and living in urban northern Cameroon for many years, what have I learned about local people's perception and definition of arenas? Did I find some regional or national arenas that were organized in the democratic sense of rights to equal participation in arenas? By studying the organization of people's experience-space could I discover the pressure of global fields and their relative role in the creation and reproduction of power and subordination? Did I identify the interface of local (African) and global dynamics (here Western), and grasp local people's strategies in the face of local (and global) challenges?

First, I must introduce you to two significant personalities. Lamiido Issa Maigari, the Sultan,was an important person, politically, religiously and judicially, for the inhabitants of Ngaoundéré and rural Adamaoua in his 25 year-reign, 1970-1995. The political, judicial and religious dynamics of his time had economic impacts on the life of the local population. Sultan Issa Maigari is seen as a Pullo leader. His mother, however, is Mbum and his father is the former Pullo Sultan, whose mother is also Mbum. Al Hajji Jawri [12] is an important Muslim industrialist living in contemporary Ngaoundéré. Until recently, he was very powerful economically, politically and judicially and influenced nearly all regional development processes. He lost his father when still a child and lived as a poor herdsman, then progressively as shoemaker, smith and tailor. Later he became a bus-driver, owned a transport company and from the 1980s was an important economic, political, religious and social actor not only in Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua but also in the entire north of Cameroon and the nation. He is a member of the 'Bureau Politique' of the President's party, the RDPC.[13] He says his father is a Pullo and that he is himself a Pullo. His father comes, however, from a mixed Njamdji[14]-Fulbe village. His mother comes from Chad and belongs to one of the ethnic groups there. He grows up in Mbumdjeere, the Mbum quarter of Ngaoundéré.

I spent altogether several years on the carpets in the reception halls, *jawleeji*,[15] of the two powerful personalities, i.e., in what they would call their open space, *mi wurti*.[16] The question is to what extent this space may be seen as an element, an open arena, in an embryo of a 'public' sphere as defined above. I have taken many photographs and filmed their everyday activities in their personal reception arenas in their respective palaces. I am able to show to you these behaviours in my photographs and film rushes.

My hypothesis says that economic dynamics overrides other dynamics, for instance local cultural, religious and traditional political dynamics, as to the determination of new behavioural forms and rules of access[17] to new open arenas. This means that poor people have not much say in the negotiations and definitions of new behavioural rules in the emergent open arenas. Their propositions are eventually rejected. The part of your social identity that is displayed in one of these open arenas is in this way governed or directed by others. It is the people who have money and therefore power whose propositions for new behavioural rules, social skills and different social arenas that count. As it is the case with these arenas it is also with most Cameroonian and other arenas of African, Western or Asian economic actors. We have to do with global economic dynamics, and they cover arenas of global scale.

I have come to the above hypothesis through a humdrum comparison of the life stories and careers of these two characters, one a traditional political leader, and the other an upstart industrial entrepreneur, and their inscribed

and incorporated behaviour, mainly in Ngaoundéré but also in Yaoundé, in France (the Sultan and Al Hajji) and Norway (the Sultan).

I find many resemblances as well as differences in their behaviour as Muslim men in power. This I can see when I dig deeper into their respective life stories; into their own repertoire of social space and of social arenas; into the historic past of the Fulbe and their emergence as a hybrid Muslim group with what may be seen as a superficial Fulbe identity in Ngaoundéré and northern Cameroon (Taguem 1996, Adama 2004, Njeuma 1978, Hamadou 2005, Djingui 2000, Burnham 1991, 1996, Vereecke 1989, Schultz 1979); and into my own inscribed and incorporated behaviour as they enfold on their carpets through 25 years and as they may be revealed in the film rushes. Lamiido Issa Maigari allows me not only to film his secluded wives,[18] but also his concubines[19] and female servants.[20] He also allows public screenings in Ngaoundéré, on local people's television, on BBC and Scandinavian television, of images of his four secluded wives in what I see as his efforts to stay in power as a political leader. He actively tries to use the new interest from the outside world (Saïd 1997) [21] – a new global sphere, an open one? – for himself as an African Sultan and for his family to compensate for what he experiences as a progressive loss of local power.

About ten years younger, the industrialist, Al Hajji Jawri, would never allow anybody from local or global communities (open spheres) to see photographs or filmed images of his four wives, even less on an international television channel. One has to look into the experience space of each of my characters and into their different economic positions to understand the genesis of their different adaptive strategies, i.e., the field of economic dynamics. Why does a traditional political and religious leader break local Muslim rules of behaviour? And why does the 'innovator', the upstart and industrialist, stick to them? In order for me to check this dominance of economics as to explaining adaptive strategies, I have to look into and compare the consequences of state, i.e., politics, of literacy,[22] and of richness, i.e. economics, in the Muslim community of Ngaoundéré (Holtedahl 1983). If we enter the generational time of the two characters, we find that global and local economic dynamics are decisive for people's strategies and the change in their space orientation in the modern Muslim society of Northern Cameroon.[23] I want to show how economic dynamics hampers equity in access to new open realms, the ideal, democratic realms that all modern states are supposed to create and protect. In my anthropological perspective, it is the economic dynamics that encourage the very rich man to create unity and balance in his local image of self by expressing and stressing traditional male idioms of power. The traditional leader, losing money and power, wants to do the opposite.

Pastoral Fulbe's Gendered Space: The Wodaabe and the Mbororo

I learnt 'traditional' Fulbe expressions of gender and space in Borno (northern Nigeria and eastern Niger) and in the northern Cameroon region among Wodaabe and Mbororo families through my life as an anthropologist. After 1970, I lived as a member of a Wodaado family in Eastern Niger. My closest collaborator was Gorjo bii Riima, a Hanagamba [24] man born around 1946. He taught me Hausa, the lingua franca in the area, and helped me in establishing contacts with the citizens of Mainé Soroa and the pastoral populations (Holtedahl 1973).

From 1982 to today, I have also been a member of a Mbororo family in Cameroon, the relatives and children of Malam Oumarou Nduudi.[25] Both families live under extremely modest economic conditions, surviving with a few cattle, some agriculture, and sale of milk, butter and traditional medicine. From my own involvement in their lives and from anthropological texts (Dupire 1970, Stenning 1958, 1959, Vereecke 1989, Djingui 2000, Riesman 1979, Boutrais 1984, Bocquené 1986) and films (Bovin 1991, 2000, Ahmadou 2007, Baba 2003, Holtedahl 1997) I learnt a gender specific organization of behaviour, experience and space among these pastoral Fulbe. The Wodaabe and the Mbororo organize their camps into a female and a male space. All domestic work and the social relations of men and women are differentiated along gender lines. The work and sociability are gendered. Men's space is centralized; women's is reticulated, compartmentalized (Bonnemaison 2005). Men stay in their quarters, women in theirs. There are neither tents nor houses, but every adult woman has her own fireplace, cooking and milking equipment. The husband sits together with other men on the opposite side of the calf-rope that divides the wife's space from his. All physical and bodily behaviour of all members and visitors is regulated very strictly on the basis of gender. One notices an invisible architecture, so to speak, that organizes the open space in which they all live. Women only cross the 'wall' when bringing food to the husband and his visitors. Women communicate with children and female relatives in their open space and men with men in their open space. The experiences of men and women and their space are different as regards numbers, size and structure. They are conditioned by a certain coordination of body and the materiality of space. Women fetch water, prepare food and milk. Men manage the movements and reproduction of herds. Husbands and male relatives are authorities around whom women and children circulate.

Hude's, Gorjo's wife's, quarter

Gorjo's sons and grandsons gathering on their mats

Gorjo and Hude visiting me in 'my quarter'

Men take the important decisions as to where and when to move. Men represent the families in relation to decisions about access to wells, local authorities, veterinarians, etc. Recently, Gorjo became a representative of his Wodaabe group at the local municipality council. Through the forty years I have known them, there has been very little change in their way of life. I have seen the incorporated generational behavioural practices and the gendered person as cultural formation being reproduced through two to three generations. These families relate to local and regional communities; to markets and people at the wells, as they did before. I wanted to follow up on the socio-cultural continuities, as they might be expressed in generational performances and personal and cultural formation by the now sedentary Fulbeized urban groups (Azaria 1978, Schultz 1979, Van Santen 1993) of northern Cameroon, by visiting two milieus in Ngaoundéré, Adamaoua, Sultan Issa Maigari's and Al Hajji Jawri's. But, first, I will present a summary of the historical time.

The Fulbe Conquerors and the Conquered

Around two hundred years ago, the first pastoral Fulbe arrived in northern Cameroon in search of new grazing grounds. They came originally from Mali, Macena. At that time, they were living like the Mbororo and Wodaabe do today. But some of them had converted to Islam when staying in the Muslim Borno Empire headed by the Kanuri people and they led a religious war, a *Jihad*, under Ousmane dan Fodio who conquered local populations and founded Sultanates in northern Cameroon. Sultanates characterized by centralized political leadership based on slavery, physical violence and strict social hierarchies were established in the process. In Ngaoundéré, local sedentary groups, Mbum, Gbaya and Ndii, were assimilated into fulbe-dominated Muslim empires. Through very subtle political diplomacy and force, the Mbum were assimilated into the Sultanates. They were delegated varying tasks and responsibilities (as slaves, servants, soldiers, tax collectors, etc.). The Mbum were humiliated by this experience. The humiliation led – among other things – to reduction in the fertility of these people,[26] the reproduction of generational behaviour, and the transformation of persons as a cultural formation (Hino 1984,1993). The Gbaya, Ndii [27] and especially the Mbum lost self respect and incorporated the new political environment into new attitudes and images of self. In modern Cameroonian public arenas, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, the expression of the differently inscribed and incorporated Gbaya and Ndii experience may be observed in the current inter-ethnic struggle over influence (Lode 1990, Drønen 2007, Gullestad 2007). Many Mbum people, originally the dominant population in Ngaoundéré (Gondolo 1967), have 'become Fulbe' today. The Fulbe

did not use physical violence, it is said, when the Mbum population was incorporated politically as subordinates in the Fulbe Sultanate of Ngaoundéré. So states the present Bellaka SawMbum of Nganha. The process relied on Mbum tradition. In spite of being organized in a centralized political kingdom, their incorporated behaviour towards strangers is expressed in hospitability, and as a result they would not refuse to collaborate with the Fulbe when they were asked to 'collaborate', intermarry etc., in a new political organization. The Mbum who stay Mbum in Ngaoundéré today have lost power progressively with the diminishing of the power of the Sultanate.[28] After the multiparty elections in 1992 they have, however, become more visible as a people and cultural tradition. This story, or history, resumes the interethnic traditions and behavioural practice in the 'former open arenas' of the Fulbe Sultanates of Adamaoua.

The new Sultanate of Ngaoundéré, [29] formerly the centre of the Mbum kingdom with its Bellaka,[30] incorporated especially the Mbum political traditions (a government with ministers responsible for politics, health, agriculture, magic, etc.) all the while the Mbum were violently oppressed as a people. The Bellaka had to give young Mbum women as slaves and wives to the Lamiido. The architecture of the Sultan's palace, the building techniques, the crafts; the court and the ministers of the Faada, all represent the continuity of a gendered Mbum sociability and space (Tegomoh 2002, Faraut 1981, Hino 1984, 1993, Holtedahl 1993, 1996). A Mbum woman may not marry a Fulbe Sultan. The Sultan is however today seen as a Pollo, and descent is assured in the male line. The Sultan's children with his legitimate wives, Rewbe Teabe, 'become' Fulbe whether these are Hausa, kanuri or Fulbe.

Do we see any continuity of the organization of the gendered space and politics of the pastoral Fulbe and agricultural Mbum in Sultan Issa Maigari as a person as and cultural formation? Actually the gendered Mbum bodily behaviour is reinforced. The female servants are bowed when passing by men's arenas and get on their knees when in front of the Sultan in a typical Mbum way (Mahamadou 2001). We find the gendered Fulbe space and hierarchy too. The Rewbe Teabe spend all their time in their houses surrounded by Mbum servants who undertake all practical tasks. What impact then does the Cameroonian state presently have on these traditional ways of managing space? Do we find an emergence of a notion of publicness of the new arenas?

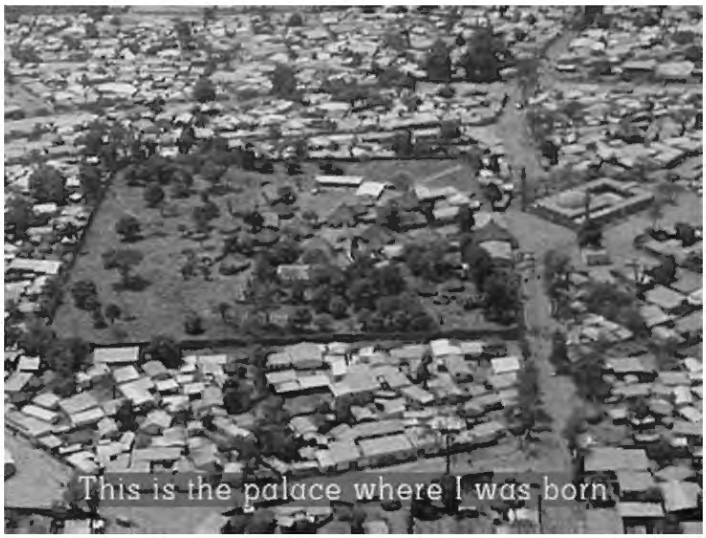
The Organization of Social Space and Arenas in the Sultan's Palace

The palace is organized geographically into many separate quarters and rooms by high walls. These are divided into many arenas through the social organization of space. You pass through several entrance halls before you enter the last reception hall of the Lamiido. Behind the Sultan's reception

houses[31] (open or public arenas one wonders) you find his horse house, his equipment house with musical instruments, carpets, pillows, umbrellas, fans etc., and his private quarters and own house. In the innermost quarters, you find the huts of the Sultan's male servants, his mother's hut, his female servants and concubines' huts and wives' houses.

The third entrance hall of the palace

The Sultan's palace from above[32]



The Sultan visiting one of his wives (Holtedahl 1993)

Female servants and concubines working in servants' quarters (Holtedahl 1993)

A female servant on her knees asks the Sultan for attention

The male servants, *maccube*,[33] must always kneel deeply in front of the Sultan. They do not look at him when talking. They may not sit on the Sultan's carpet. The female servants may not approach the Sultan when in an open arena. They also always have to lie down when they address the Sultan. Only the servants, however, are allowed to move around in the whole palace. They connect the secluded wives, the Sultan and the world. The Sultan's power and authority are expressed in the concubines' and servants' bodily attitudes, i.e., distance.

When the Sultan is accessible, *o wurti*,[34] i.e., to people from outside in his reception house, he constantly shifts place. The reception halls and courtyards are organized into different social spaces. Organizational rules, spaces and arenas, define different statuses and activities of his visitors and concern his protection against the evil plans of enemies. A mobile throne protects him against aggressors. People may never know where to find him. His ministers also are on their knees when addressing him. But they are on the carpet together with visitors from the province.

The Faada in front of one of the thrones demonstrating that they are ready to defend the Sultan from the Mbum rebels

One of the Sultan's thrones

The Bellaka's wives, children and grandchildren in the women's quarter, Nganha Palace

The Bellaka in his reception hall, Nganha

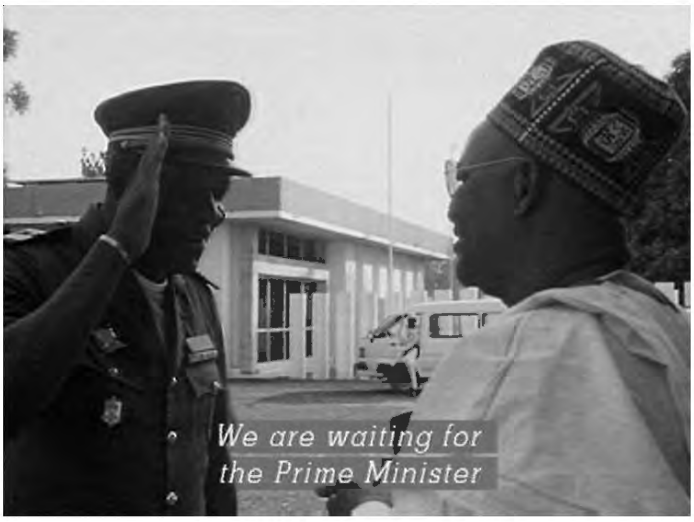
In this way, the Sultan's person and social space and authority are embodied and visualized in the behaviour of the people of the palace as well as by visitors. The Sultan as person, identity package and space has been incorporated through political strategies and oppression in the pluralistic context of Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua.

His person is a configuration of attitudes, skills and sociability reflecting political dominance, predatory expansion and the incorporation of cultural elements from the conquered group, the Mbum. The Mbum servants as persons express very different configurations. The Mbum experienced a conquest which puts their integrity under severe pressure. Their cultural persons are configurations of skills representing specific adaptive strategies to manipulations and oppression, they receive orders, they are subordinates to their Master.[35]

Compared to the Wodaabe and Mbororo women, Sultan Issa Maigari's wives (who are supposed to be Fulbe) are much more limited in their space. They only see children, female relatives and friends. They cannot go anywhere without the Sultan's permission. In their isolated houses, by entertaining female friendship and Fulbe family relationships, they reproduce their higher rank as Fulbe women towards the female and male Mbum servants. The Sultan's male prestige lies in the invisibility of his four wives. The invisible walls that organize the pastoral Fulbe's gendered social space may lie behind the gendered space organized by physical walls in the Sultan's palace. But the walls may also reflect a gendered Mbum tradition as well as a more recent urban, Arab, Muslim separation of men and women. Male and female Mbum servants in the palace assist as subordinates to the Fulbe (of hybrid origin) in the survival of total seclusion of the Fulbe wives by building and constantly rehabilitating the constructions of the palace and as messengers that connect the wives to the outer world.[36]

But, times are changing. As a white woman, I am allowed to sit on the sofa next to the Sultan when he receives people in his reception house. My eyes are at the same level as his! This is a total anomaly in the context of the Muslim Fulbe society of Ngaoundéré. This would only be possible for people who were not his subordinates from the Adamaoua province, and for his new superiors: representatives of the state, ministers, generals of the army, the governor and the Catholic archbishop, etc.

The army general greets the Sultan at the airport with a totally new sign: respect or lack of it?



As a white woman, I am a total stranger who does not conform to a locally organized gendered identity that could fit the rules of the Sultan's open space. Analytically, I may be seen as an agent of a force of globalization. And my relation to the Sultan may be seen as a current negotiation between local gendered power (economic and political) dynamics and global power (economic and political) dynamics since I belong to the North. Our negotiation takes place in his cultural space but our communication relates his space to me as a person and to my space of global scale. I am in his open arena. Do we see an embryo of an open global sphere? Does this articulation of local and global add a quality of publicness?

Continuity and Change in Fulbe Political Leadership: From Lion to Rabbit?

Western education came late to northern Cameroon. President Ahidjo,[37] himself a Pollo from the North, had difficulties developing the uneducated Muslim and now also Christian North[38] in the 1960s and 1970s (Fah, Eldridge, Müller, Drønen). Local Sultans of the North were political anchors of the German and French colonizers, and Ahidjo continued to rely on them for political support. He also strengthened the position of the *Al Hajjis*[39] of the North, his own region, in order to promote economic enterprise and development. The rich Muslim entrepreneurs received huge loans from the

Cameroonian state, loans they never paid back. Gradually, a state apparatus was built in the North, and the position of the Sultans was threatened (Sadou 2001; Holtedahl 2009b).

Since 1982, Paul Biya has been President of Cameroon. He is a Catholic from the Centre. More and more bureaucrats from the South start working in the urban areas of the North. In 1991-1992, I collaborated closely with the Sultan of Adamaoua and the people in his palace for several months, while together with a film team I shoot the material for the film 'The Sultan's Burden' (Holtedahl 1993). It is a time of the preparation for the first multiparty presidential elections in Cameroon; a period of serious turmoil and rebellion, especially in the North. The new processes of democratization lead to a sharpening of regional ethnic dichotomization (Ela 1978, 1982; Burnham 1996; Holtedahl 1993). Some members of the Mbum community threaten the Fulbe lamidate. Many members of the Sultan's court, Faada,[40] shake their swords. The following year, the palace is set on fire and all the entrance halls burn down. One has the feeling that the state's effort to control the North may be rooted in a divide-and-rule policy towards the different groups of the region.

By then the Fulfulde language is only spoken in the Sultan's *jawleeru*, i.e. in the Sultan's open space. These organizational rules, this space, still govern most behaviour in new open arenas in Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua. The Sultan receives generals and ministers; vice-chancellors and provincial delegates; Protestants and Catholics; Gbaya and Ndii peasants, pastoral Fulbe, sedentarized Fulbe and urban Fulbe citizens; women and men but no representatives of the rural and urban Mbum society.[41] He presides over the traditional court of Adamaoua,[42] assists the *sousprefets* and the *prefets* in their tax collection in the arrondissements, departments, provinces. Illiterate people fear him. But the literate do not.

Other dynamics also put the Sultan's identity management under pressure. Behind the walls of the palace the dominant language is Mbum. The Sultan's mother, a *sullado* of the Sultan's father, only speaks Mbum. When I meet former slaves, servants and craftsmen, they express suffering and hopelessness. They say they suffer a double oppression, the one of the Fulbe conquerors and in addition the consequences of the Sultan's progressive loss of power. Since Cameroonian independence most Sultanates of Northern Cameroon have declined. Only the famous Lamiido Rey Bouba has resisted and stays on as the head of a state in the state (Eldridge 1988, 1990, Müller 2000).

The Cameroonian state contributes strongly to the reduction of the Sultan's power. This decline of the Sultan's prestige and power is played out at various ceremonies that take place in front of the Governor's buildings, at the Place

de l'Indépendence. The ceremonies organized by the national authorities express visually the marginalization of the Sultan and his followers. Ministers, governor, provincial délégués, prefets and sousprefets, vice-chancellor and heads of police and army sit in the middle on the first bench of the tribune whereas the Sultan sits on his traditional throne surrounded by his servants far out on the side – not in the centre of men who represent power.[43]

The Minister of the Interior gives his speech and demonstrates a new bodily and organizational language of power

The sayings of the Minister of Interior do not help either: 'We have to eliminate traditional ways of behaving in order to develop our country!' (Holtedahl 1993).

The governor as well as the leaders of the army are now the Sultan's superiors. The Sultan has become an employee of the state and receives a monthly salary, around 300,000 CFA. He is allowed neither to receive a fixed part of the harvest from the peasants, nor to keep slaves. The former idioms of the master-slave relationship are no longer as relevant for communication, negotiation and dissemination in the new upcoming arenas of the municipalities, provinces and state, as they were. In these new arenas, everybody fights to obtain respect for their idioms of social rank, for their space and persons as cultural formations. The Sultan also fights. These arenas are totally dominated by men. Women who are present are singers, dancers and audience. Here, in these new arenas, it is the space of representatives of the President and of the local administrations that govern people's power of negotiation and definition. The Sultan has to adapt to this pressure on his image of self. His survival strategies reveal the weight of the incorporated Fulbe leadership in

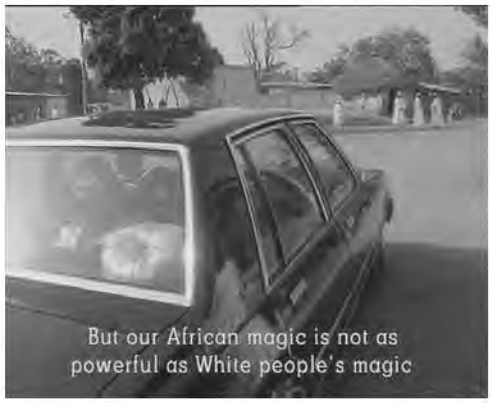
this new socio-political context. Here lies the interface of the local, national and global roots of current power dynamics. Who defines access rights and rules of behaviour on the new arenas?

Who may and may not 'touch the Sultan's carpet' is less certain than before. Time has for instance become an 'object' of negotiation of relative power in these new open arenas. Whose definition of space wins? Now, when the Sultan is on his way to the local airport to receive the Minister of the Interior, he has to wait for five hours before the minister arrived. All the singers, dancers, local people see him sitting there all that time, waiting; he who is normally always supposed to make people wait. Like many other citizens, the Sultan has to fight to keep his position through continuous negotiations about how idioms of superior/subordinate, big/small have to be conveyed. Little help is to be found in the black limousine that takes him to the airport. The Sultan's 'modern' symbol does not add to his power of negotiation.

Efforts to Enhance a Fulbe Regime

One day as I was filming in the palace, one of the Sultan's *scalds* (*griots*, *bambaabe*[44]), screamed to me and my camera 'Lamiido Issa Maigari is stingy! He only offers beans while he himself eats chickens! In former times he offered clothes, food, horses, everything we needed. Now, we only get the crumbs that the tourists give to us'. Not many servants heard what he said, but he spoke to my camera! A camera gives access to a new kind of arena, potentially a global one. Maybe this is frightening? Maybe they will offer the dreamt of opportunities?

The Sultan on his way to the airport to meet the Minister of the Interior (Holtedahl 1993)

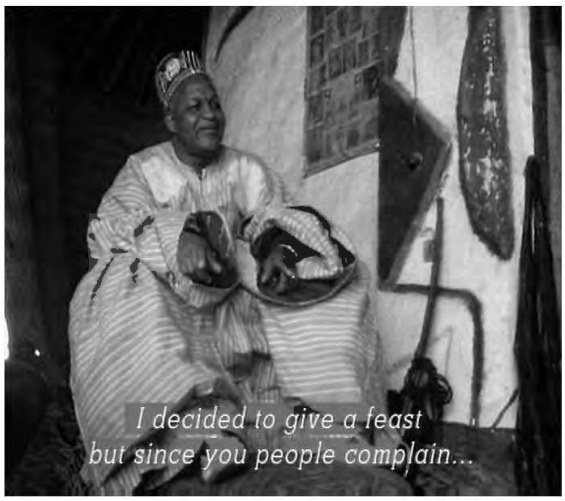


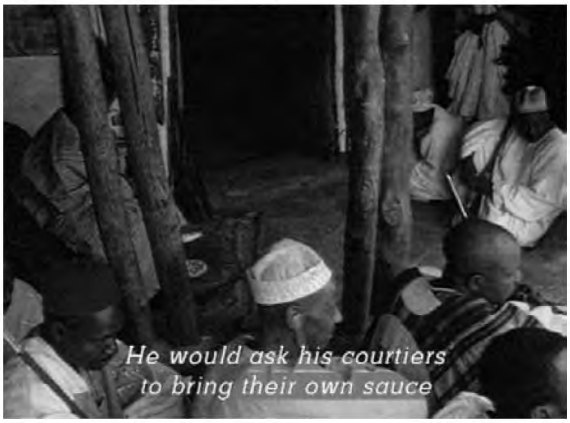
The Sultan is waiting and waiting till sunset before the Minister arrives (Holtedahl 1993)

In this case, however, I was within the Sultan's space, his open arena. In the Sultan's palace – as it was the case in the king's palaces in the Middle Ages in Europe – news circulates quickly. The Sultan was immediately informed about what the *scald* said. He has since long started directing 'my' film. This was a necessary consequence of my wish to have him teach me his perceptions, his space. I therefore soon found him sitting on one of his many thrones, tediously explaining to all his ministers why he had to be seen as a clever Sultan, and how he saw to it that everyone in his palace, his ministers included, were being taken well care of by him. He was not stingy!

My presence with the camera puts pressure on the Sultan but he profited from the fact that he and I collaborated on a film about him to negotiate with his servants, scalds and ministers, how his superiority and their subordination must be expressed and understood. He was also speaking to the BBC, Danish and Norwegian television companies, an open unknown sphere out there, a configuration of arenas, a global community that he knew of but did not really know. To me he said that the black man's magic is not as strong as the white man's. He also told me that he is shown more respect by white people in Cameroon than from his new black superiors, his subordinates and servants. He therefore wanted so much, he said, to go to *lesdi nasaara*,[45] the white man's land.

The Sultan is explaining to his court why they must respect his leadership in the face of change (Holtedahl 2002)





The Lion's Dream

Later on I had the opportunity to discover what happens when Lamiido Issa Maigari visited Norway and different ways of organizing experience and social space meet, Norwegian and Cameroonian/Fulbe, when the Sultan meets people at my University, missionaries in Stavanger, etc. In the Norwegian arenas where these different repertoires and skills meet, we find the interface of global and local dynamics. What is, for instance, the scale of the incorporated skills of a Muslim Fulbe Sultan's person as cultural formation? Can he, at all, use his competence and skills in Norway? To what extent do Norwegian norms decide how things must be done in his presence?

When I asked my colleagues from Norwegian universities, whose students are being well received by Sultan Issa Maigari when they do fieldwork in Adamaoua, to invite Sultan Issa Maigari to visit their universities and the University of Tromsø, they told me that this was not a proper academic initiative but a tourist event. In the Norwegian academic field of African studies, where academics consider themselves as competent actors in the international arena (public arena?) this reaction reveals a gendered Norwegian space that organizes Sultans as belonging to a tourist category that cannot be linked to the academic sphere. Academics do not invite informants/research partners from the field to the academy. The Director of the Norwegian Research Council in Oslo,[46] however, was interested in the use-of-film-in-research-project about the Sultan and agreed to organize a workshop for the staff in the Research Council and at the University of Oslo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Development Cooperation. 'The Sultan's Burden' was screened for a big audience, including Sultan Issa Maigari, in turban and *gandura*,[47] together with his *walkiiri*[48] and Minister of Cultural Affairs. Upon questions from the Norwegian audience about his experience from his stay in Norway, the Sultan replied surprisingly, that he actually felt like a 'small man' here in Norway. Ever since he was born, there had always been very many Norwegian missionaries in Ngaoundéré. He grew up with them, he told the audience. His grandfather gave land to these missionaries. He has also always imagined that he would meet as many Cameroonians in Norway. But to his surprise, he was told that there are only eight Cameroonians in the whole of Norway. This must be an expression of the white man's magic!

Since Norwegians had always behaved respectfully towards him in Ngaoundéré, he thought Norwegians in Norway would also behave respectfully towards him. The fact that there is only a small number of Cameroonians in Norway expresses, he said, a serious lack of hospitality towards Cameroonians which he felt as if it were a lack of respect for him and his forefathers. The elephant king,[49] the lion, has become a mouse or rabbit.

When the Sultan visited the University of Tromsø in northern, marginal, Norway the following days, students and staff tried to find out how to behave towards an African Sultan. It is not easy. But the Sultan appeared more relaxed since he knew many people there and he did not seem to feel as hurt as in Oslo. Should we consider the Sultan's visit to Norway an event in an open global sphere that includes Norwegian and African public arenas?

Sultan Issa Maigari visiting the Norwegian Research Council and greeting Director Tove Strand Gerhardsen (Holtedahl 2009c)

The Sultan giving a lecture about how he faces societal change at the Department of History, University of Oslo (Holtedahl 2009c)

Sultan Issa Maigari visiting my family and me with Dr. Trond Waage in Ersfjordbotn, Norway (Holtedahl 2009c)

If the Sultan's visit to Norway does not satisfy his expectations, the rumours in Cameroon about his journey to the West, the white man's land, do. In the eyes of local Cameroonian po*pul*ations, he might now be compared with other important Cameroonian men who travel to the white man's land – higher functionaries, university researchers, politicians. The Sultan's journey provokes at the same time a consolidation of his power in Cameroon and a threat to his image of self and in relation to his dream of acquiring political resources in Norway. His visit to the Norwegian Research Council resulted, however, in the allocation of funds for the establishment of a Master's degree programme in visual anthropology at the University of Tromsø, including scholarships for Cameroonian students.

In spite of all the difficulties the Sultan suffered, globalization and national and regional dynamics revitalized his position. When he died a few years later, one might have expected that the Sultanate would become a purely tourist kind of institution. But the opposite happened. Many ambitious men fought to have their candidate – one of the descendents of the Sultan – elected. The strong backstage involvement of the 'former' colonial powers and of the young state in the 'selection'/election' of a new Sultan revealed that many people saw political potential and new opportunities in a blurred and conflict ridden context of local/national/global politics. To be an ally of a 'traditional Sultan' may be strong card in future multiparty elections. When finally all the local political, traditional and modern, elites agreed about a

candidate, the President of Cameroon set aside the local consensus and appointed his own candidate the following day. These events illustrate how national politics create new configurations of local, regional and national arenas (an emerging public sphere?).

I empathise with the Sultan, the big, small man. My empathy concerns the Sultan's helplessness that was revealed in Cameroon and Norway. The globalization processes promote pressures on the poor as well as on the rich and powerful men and women in Africa, and they enhance the hegemony of the West in Africa. The interface of global and local socio-political dynamics is very close to the ground. My film and fieldwork during endless hours and many years on the Sultan's sofa taught me much about the articulation of global and local power mechanisms.

Al Hajji Jawri: Creator of a Public Arena in Ngaoundéré?

Al Hajji Jawri assured the symbolic survival of Lamiido Issa Maigari when he was most humiliated by the Cameroonian state's actions. Lamiido Issa Maigari feared to lose more respect and tried to find alliances locally in order to survive as the political leader of Adamaoua province. When once he took sides with one of the multiple new political parties, he was severely sanctioned by the state. The very rich Al Hajji Jawri helped him out. Al Hajji never went to school but he is the pioneer and founder of the first agro-industrial complex in Northern Cameroon, Maiscam.[50] He was the first Pollo to create an agricultural industry in the Sahel zone of West Africa. He is a member of the 'bureau politique' of the RDPC and had full support of the President. This means national support for import and export monopolies. Al Hajji supported the Sultan by rebuilding his palace. He paid for a new entrance hall, walls and buildings in modern Arab architecture, and he rehabilitated the mosque in front of the Sultan's palace.

Al Hajji Jawri is an 'arriviste' in the eyes of the Europeans and the elite from Southern Cameroon. Since 1997, I had collaborated with him on a film about his work and his career. His story teaches us important lessons about the transformation of Adamaoua society; and about an eventual emergence of 'open arenas' in Cameroon – and perhaps also in Africa. It is my knowledge of the Sultan on the one side and of his behaviour and influence on the other that leads me to present the hypothesis that the field of economics dominates in the moulding of the actual open arenas in Adamaoua.

Al Hajji's Career

One of several mysterious aspects of Al Hajji's life is that, despite his never having attended school, he is still able to read and write. He speaks four African languages, in addition to French and English. He uses mystification

actively in his everyday enterprise of coordinating many worlds: Italy, France, USA, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Mali; the banks, the industrial complex in Europe, the new elites in Cameroon, on the one side; poor people in Ngaoundéré, poor friends, immigrant workers, Rwandan refugees, herders, peasants on the other (Djingui and Holtedahl 2002, Geschiere 1995). He sticks to a Fulbe identity whereas everybody knows that his ancestors belonged to many other tribes – as is the case with most people assimilated into a kind of Fulbe identity. He says he is a Fulbe. His behaviour is that of a Fulbe, while he also regularly demonstrates his mastery of Mbum and Hausa conduct that he was familiar with during his childhood in the Mbum and Hausa quarters of Ngaoundéré (Gondolo 1978). People who explicitly manifest a Mbum identity, however, never appear on his carpet, the arenas he governs.

To be rich in a spectacular way is incompatible with the basic Fulbe notions of *pulaaku*.[51] Al Hajji Jawri's activities, his position in northern Cameroon, people's behaviour towards him, illustrate that his power today may be even stronger than that of a Sultan at the time of the Fulbe conquest. He has the power to influence the lives of ordinary people independently of the emergence of a seemingly more 'democratic' national policy. He decides where people work; if they may have work; what they earn; if they may vote; to whom they give their vote.

His life demonstrates the complexity of modern life in the region. From an analytical point of view, social persons represent a pluralistic, globalized world by being different highly complex configurations of competences, sociability and search for meaning. After his experience as a herdsman, a smith, shoemaker and tailor apprentice, Al Hajji became a driver apprentice. A friend, the Norwegian missionaries' driver, taught him how to drive. Al Hajji became the chauffeur and also the assistant nurse of a French military surgeon. The surgeon helped Al Hajji with a loan which allowed him to buy a bus. Through hard work, Al Hajji built a transport agency which carried people between Koussiri and Douala. He would drive day and night. People said that his magic was so powerful that it emptied the petrol from other people's cars when he passed by on his way to Garoua or Maroua. He became renowned for his intelligence and work capacity.

From 1997 to 2006, he worked on the building of a palace outside Ngaoundéré. Many white, European engineers and craftsmen assisted in the building. His architect, Peter, was from Serbia, had studied architecture in Rome and lived in Paris. Responsible for the electric installations was Monsieur Blacizeck from the former Jugoslavia. Responsible for the construction work was Monsieur Barison from Italy. Monsieur Franco, responsible for the tilework was from Italy, and Monsieur Maniou was from France as was the person in charge of the staff work, Monsieur Gruel, and so on.

Al Hajji's Negotiated Position in Time, Space and the Cultural Process

As it was the case with the Sultan, Al Hajji Jawri also felt belittled when he visited the white man's land. As mentioned in my introduction, Al Hajji felt humiliated by the people on the other end of the telephone when he called the taxi central in Paris to get a limousine. They recognized an African voice. He says this made him feel like a rabbit in the great city while he was considered a lion in Cameroon.

As I followed Al Hajji on his journeys with my film camera around the world, I was able, as was the case with the Sultan, to discover the interface between local and global social, economic politic dynamics, to see what kind of pressures they exert on local integration. The use of the camera allowed me to study the negotiations of Al Hajji with all kinds of people and to learn the idioms he used in order to convey the image of himself that suited him in Europe and in Cameroon. Analytically, we may see these efforts as expressions of his creation of a new kind of position in the context of a specific generational time and of local people's embodied behaviour. A question one may ask is: why did Al Hajji build a huge palace in Adamaoua since he did not want to be considered a person suffering from 'folie de grandeur',[52] and since he already had a big house and a private mosque in town, a ranch in the bush, a compound at Maiscam, a villa in Douala, and apartments in Paris and a castle in southern France? And also, since Fulbe values say that ostentatious behaviour is contrary to Fulbe identity, to *pulaaku*.

Al Hajji relating his philosophy and magical powers in his castle in France (Holtedahl 2002)

In Cameroon, Al Hajji feels like a lion, while the Sultan is an elephant. The Sultan's court reinforces his leadership through its incorporated embodied behaviour. The court and the people on the carpet represent many layers of the urban society of Ngaoundéré. The persons around Al Hajji, in spite of having no formal economic, political or administrative positions within the present state, represent important powers rooted in Al Hajji's economic and political position. Many of them are highly educated (accountants, directors of his industries), others have been trained at the Sultanate (advisors, intelligence agents, and guardians). Among those who eat meals with him in his *jawleeru*, you will also find his closest friends from his childhood. These childhood acquaintances take care of small daily tasks involved in running his business and exerting his influence. You may also find people who betrayed him in childhood. You find beggars and refugees from Rwanda, Chad, Congo. When I was present, I could see that Al Hajji ran much of his life like the Sultan in his palace. The idioms are the same: the physical positions of the people present; the distance; the bowed backs. If a woman enters she is on her knees and leaves as soon as she has received Al Hajji's message or asked him for a favour. This is a male community. The women are behind the walls, as in the Sultan's court. Al Hajji covers all expenses. The only observable idiomatic difference from the Sultan's reception hall lies in the fact that if he does not sit in one of the five sofas, Al Hajji often sits on the floor himself, among his people, but always at the head of the circle. By doing so he expresses the inherited and embodied meaning of equality among men, of male sociability.

Al Hajji sitting on the carpet. He mediates by imposing solutions on and paying gifts to small people to keep his allies, the local authorities in power (Holtedahl 2002)

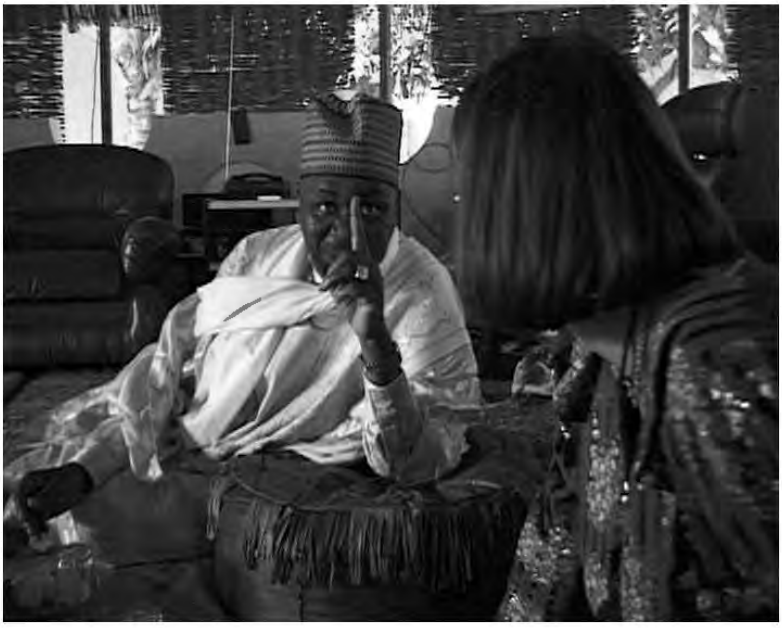
There is, however, no role for women in this arena, a somewhat open arena, in Al Hajji's space, except for their very short visits. They do not belong. I myself am as it were 'matter out of place'.[53] I am 'not present'. If I am addressed by Al Hajji, an entirely new role is being generated by him in his space, in his public sphere, as was the case at the Sultan's palace: I am a white person, a social person he knows how to deal with. In his house in Ngaoundéré, my presence allows him in a sense to show his Western competence. He legitimizes my presence by saying to everybody that I am making a film to tell another story about black people who succeed in order to correct white people's notions of Africans as poor and prone to making wars. Her film is about clever, successful and rich black people, he says. He offers me the opportunity to become a new kind of local/global actor in a transformed male arena. But as a woman, I am addressed by him as a subordinate. He gives me orders as to a woman behind the walls or to a servant. I am told to 'go and eat now'; 'go to the periphery now', and so on. Is this a germ of a new open (public) arena becoming part of a wider African sphere where women are 'allowed' to be present?

Al hajji sits on the carpet with his Christian female secretary. 'Christian Women are more trustworthy', he says (Holtedahl 2002)

It is his wealth that allows Al Hajji to gather a court around him that is much larger than the one of the Sultanate. He has become the new Sultan in Ngaoundéré. People address him exactly like a Sultan. He even performs

judicial functions for all men on the carpet. He 'solves' their conflicts in a way that enhances his control with state employees and traditional leaders. He offers them gifts to induce them to accept the authorities' decisions. He also scolds his subjects. He moralizes for hours. He reproves the director of his own cinema theatre, because he has heard that the director tried to seduce a married woman. What would the world look like if he himself did a thing like that? All this happens in front of the camera. He is also taking on himself the role of a model for religious behaviour. Thousands of people gather at Friday prayers in his private mosque. His personal imam follows him and his supporters all over the world.

Al Hajji impressing the anthropologist with stories about his paranormal competence manifested since his childhood (Holtedahl 2002)



All Al Hajji's economic enterprises are anchored in the global economic field. He necessarily becomes a central political actor. His economic enterprises are protected by the President through monopolies and he is therefore the person who choreographs all the campaigns of the RDPC at all municipal and presidential elections in Northern Cameroon.

The President of Cameroon is dependent on Western regimes.[54] You cannot avoid the white man as a partner or a boss if you are the President of Cameroon. This also counts for he who manages extensive international economic activities. His position as a kind of Sultan is not a sufficient source of economic success and political power. Al Hajji also has to cope with big Western companies – in Cameroon, France, Italy and elsewhere – if he wants to continue to succeed. He has not only to prevent Westerners, the whites, from treating him as a rabbit in Paris. He has to be treated with respect by the many white men who come to Cameroon to assist in the building of his palace. These men do not show Al Hajji the respect that one owes a local Sultan. He has to negotiate with them and he has to give orders to his people about how to behave towards the white men who visit him. He must oblige his court to accept, for instance, that white men do not need to sit on the floor. The negotiations about who must take off his shoes shows to what degree a local or global power of definition is being institutionalized in this local African context. The white man seems to receive privileged treatment.

Black Cameroonians[55] are not the only ones forced to negotiate the power of definition. The white man who comes to Africa has to cope with new rules of power and influence. It is interesting that a number of 'rabbits' from Europe openly say that they have become 'lions'. Nobody in France builds castles like Versailles today. When Al Hajji moved into his palace after ten years of construction work, there were fifteen new palaces that had been built in the meantime. When he started, there were none.

Al Hajji built his palace along the lines of the principles that characterized the Sultanate as well as the Mbororo and Wodaabe 'houses' and the Mbum architectural tradition. Such a style includes several strictly separate quarters: the reception part (the guardians' house, the reception hall, the mosque, the guest houses), then Al Hajji's own building complex arranged so as to allow them to meet people from Africa and the North (you find marble fountains, swimming pool, an enormous dining room, crystal chandeliers, handmade Chinese carpets, golden fixtures in bathrooms) and finally, behind tall walls, the quarter where wives, servants and children live. The architecture is an expression of global and local traditions, a mixture of oriental, Muslim and Mbum architecture. Al Hajji's palace allows him to receive people in the way of the Sultan, on the carpet in the *jawleeru*; and as the white man receives prominent guests, in big saloons in his own building. Here, he receives Cameroonian politicians, military leaders, white industrialists, ambassadors. An entirely new scene is constructed in which new events of a public character will take place in the future. The actors as well as the rules of the games are being defined in a complex moulding process where questions about 'who is up and who is down' are constantly being posed. The sudden richness lies behind.

Carrying concrete to the building site (Holtedahl 2002)

Al Hajji with friends on the building site describing the future beauty and costs of the palace (Holtedahl 2002)

Al Hajji mediates global/national/local political and economic dynamics. It is in this palace that one sees the global pressure from the economic field and how it releases, through Al Hajji and his peers, new rules for the expression of power. It is apparent that Western rules for conveying power dominate African styles.

Many of the white building and electrical engineers, gardeners and so on look down on Al Hajji. In their eyes, he is an upstart. They express this attitude in many different ways through their embodied language. It hurts Al Hajji. And it often also is expressed behind his back – as when he spends several hours discussing with a French gutter company team where to put gutters in the palace. The palace has roofs, not only on all houses, but also on all walls and columns.

When Al Hajji, very seriously, evaluates the aesthetic outcome of gutters on all these thousands of roofs, the engineers with apparently serious expressions but showing that they have difficulties hiding how ridiculous they find him, start counting how many kilometres of gutters are needed to cover all these roofs. Actually there is no need whatsoever for gutters on the walls and columns. This may be seen as a global pressure on a local identity and a global pressure in a public arena.

The greatest pain is felt by Al Hajji in his negotiations and quarrels with Peter, his architect (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2005). This arises given the economic risks and the threats to Al Hajji's own dignity: the architect knows how to promote his own self-interest, and how to challenge Al Hajji's self image. Al Hajji sets many traps when they visit the Fiera del Milano, Milan's annual furniture market, in order to prevent Mr Peter benefiting himself by directing Al Hajji to pre-selected furniture salesmen.

At the Fiera, Peter and Al Hajji discuss with great fervour what is in good taste and what furniture will suit the palace under construction in Ngaoundéré. Peter prefers simple and elegant furniture. Al Hajji wants to buy big, heavy and dark furniture, ornamented in gold. Al Hajji patiently tries convince Peter why he wants to buy the heavy Louis XVI furniture. Only such furniture will impress and pay respect to the local population in Ngaoundéré. Make them dizzy. If he puts the furniture that Peter recommends in the *jawleeru* local people will think it has been bought in the local market in Ngaoundéré. In other words, Peter's furniture would not make Al Hajji a big man in the eyes of the local population. Peter criticizes Al Hajji and says that he has a vulgar taste. He is not civilized (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2006). Al Hajji gets cross and says that the one who does not wear a *gandura* is the uncivilized one.[56]

My film material shows many scenes where Peter and Al Hajji openly quarrel about what rules they should adhere to. For example, without Peter's permission we hear that Al Hajji has copies made of some of Peter's drawings, and directs his masons to construct other copies of the house – five or six at his hotel in Garoua in Northern Cameroon, four at his ranch near in Ngaoundéré – without paying Peter his commission. Al Hajji's and Peter's efforts to build an image of self are confronted continuously. Al Hajji knows that Peter would not be able to obtain such commissions in France as in Cameroon. It gives him some power over Peter. Peter in turn says that he works with primitive people in Africa.

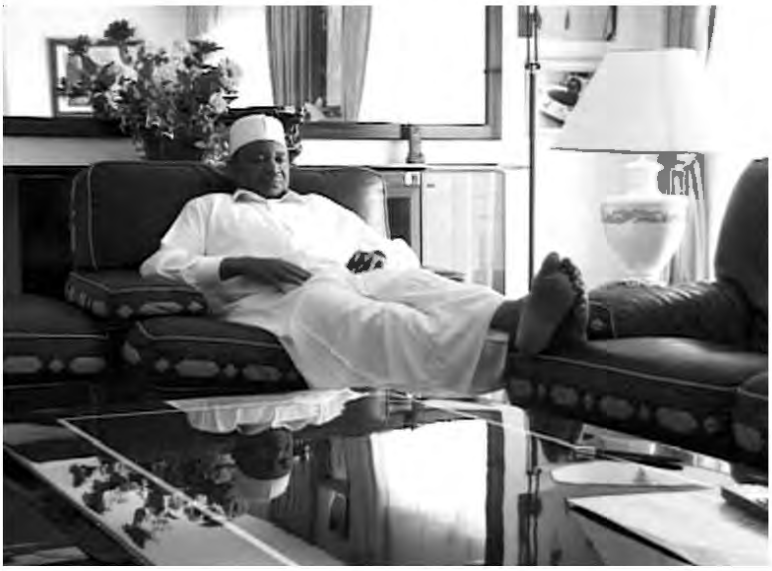
Al Hajji trying to convince Peter … with his whole body
(Holtedahl 2002)

At times, Al Hajji's international economic ambitions force him to swallow the white man's idioms of hierarchy. One day, he says about Peter to Mr Blacizek: 'A Serb who says that a black man is not civilized!'. Al Hajji thinks

that 'I have realized that I, "un noir", cannot be a friend of a white man.[57] The white man does not know how to show respect to people in Africa'.

As long as this hurdle is not overcome and routinized behaviour developed that expresses equality at the local/global level, for instance in the arenas of foreign policy, the quarrels continue. Continuously, the two men try to compensate for their experience of a lack of equality wherever they meet, at the building site, in big luxury stores in Europe. The important difference lies in the fact that only Al Hajji really experiences a loss of dignity in the West and in Africa. Maybe it is in the humiliation and shame we find the germ of the building of the palace?

Al Hajji in his villa in Douala talking about white-black relations (Holtedahl 2002)



I have film rushes of events that express how Al Hajji's everyday life developed and was 'constructed' over ten years. I am conscious about the dangers that lie in my handling of them as to his image in the Muslim, Western and African worlds. I am also aware that I will be able to use the material to make a documentary that narrates the articulation and relative pressures of national, international socioeconomic, political dynamics on Al Hajji. But I of course do not wish to make Al Hajji look ridiculous or to objectify him as a

person. I want to use the striking images of events that I have shot to convey his gaze on African societies, on Africa's relation to the West. My position in the global/local processes in which Al Hajji lives is the one of a catalyst who may or may not damage his opportunities (Gullestad 2007). I am myself among those who, in relationship with Al Hajji, articulate the pressure on the integration of the local person as cultural formation. I am also potentially promoting an image of Al Hajji as an agent of local adaptive strategies, the local resistance to globalization as well as an agent of global pressures on local communities. My camera also potentially disseminates his voice to the national and international community. My camera and our film become an agent in an open, local and global sphere.

A Time of Crisis

When I visited Al Hajji recently, I was reminded of the power that lies in the visualization of global processes. The campaign for the municipal elections was underway. Al Hajji was in difficulties. For the first time, I saw him try to avoid one of his responsibilities, in this case the management and the funding of the campaign of the President's party, the RDPC. He took the train to Yaoundé on his way to Paris together with several of his wives and his group of followers. He told the President that one of his wives was sick and needed to be operated upon urgently in Paris. A couple of days later he returned by train to Ngaoundéré. People claim that the President ordered him back to assume his responsibilities in the campaign. Adamaoua is the province in Cameroon that has the greatest number of opponents to the President and his party.

Many things have happened lately. Al Hajji is no longer chairman and proprietor of the majority of shares in the big companies in Douala, Yaoundé and Foumbot. Many critical newspaper articles are being published about Al Hajji, for the first time in my experience. In the past, whenever critical voices were heard regarding Al Hajji, a horde of journalists arrived at his house with orders to write articles of praise about his pioneering role in Cameroon. Now, in a recent interview, Al Hajji made fun of a younger opposition politician in the party; a Mbum politician, highly educated, who lately has achieved much local success. He has obtained widespread support among local groups in the RDPC and is now a threat to Al Hajji's Fulbe candidates in the elections. Arrogantly, Al Hajji calls him a 'petit funtionnaire' whom he can easily eliminate. Cameroonian intellectuals publish articles daily on this fight for power in the party. Never had I seen writings so critical of Al Hajji. Apparently, Al Hajji does not have full control anymore, the control of dynamics touching upon his image in the new open sphere. He is accustomed to possessing the money and power to control these political processes. What will happen?

View from Al Hajji's sitting room to the women' quarter

View of the mosque and the *jawleeru* of the palace

The mosque at sunset (Holtedahl 2002)

In this study, we are dealing with complex local, national and international dynamics. I think, however, that I am able to identify some of the decisive ones. When Al Hajji moved into his palace in 2006, he invited all the directors from his industries, from Europe, the US and Cameroon, to a board meeting in the palace in Ngaoundéré – instead of, as usual, in Paris. Rumors circulated about how uncomfortable the board members were, mostly the white men, when they saw how they were themselves involved in the construction of such an extravagant palace in such a terribly poor and marginal area.

A few months after the board meeting, Al Hajji was informed that he would not be able to continue as chairman of his industries in Cameroon. He was asked to sell his shares. Apparently, he had lost his influence in relation to the President and the political system. He might still be rich, but certainly not powerful anymore.

A lion merits a bigger house than a rabbit. Most people agree to that. But this is not supposed to be visible to everyone in Africa and Europe today. Al Hajji's palace represents a visualization of power relations between the West and Africa, between the President and the Muslim Northern Cameroon. While Al Hajji constructed his palace, many stories were produced about the simple but intelligent upstart in Northern Cameroon. The political authorities do not sense the danger. They do not foresee the political complications that such an immense and spectacular palace in such a poor area may provoke. Perhaps the heads of the French agro-industrial companies were not expected to be made to feel uneasy confronted by a Versailles in Ngaoundéré. Most of the money normally remains invisible in small tax havens. They do not feel happy about my project, and I am asked by diplomatic authorities from the West not to continue my work on the film.

My work as an applied visual anthropologist acting in an international open, 'public' sphere might be seen by heads of Western and Northern industrial companies as a potential threat. Perhaps it is not desirable that a film about a ten year-long construction project on an African Versailles in Cameroon should be screened in the cinemas in the West. A screening might not only make local people criticize Al Hajji. People in the West might also criticize the Western companies.

Conclusion

I have tried to show why and how changes in people's visual expression of social differences take place. These changes offer to us possibilities to uncover, describe, understand and explain the relative power of definition. By uncovering exclusion and inclusion mechanisms, one also identifies empowerment and pauperization as processes. Stepwise, we identify the systems of meaning, the time of generation, and find the experience spaces

that individual actors carry around. The experience spaces are constructed continuously through people's interactions and negotiations. In the ongoing processes of globalization, the concrete constructions and integration of social persons are under pressure from dynamics of social fields of different weight and scale. The experience spaces are connected into differently composed social identities, into repertoires of persons as cultural formation (Rudie 2008).

When the researcher tries to identify these determinants of the persons s/he finds the relative relevance of the fields of gender, nation, region, locality, religion, ethnicity, colour of skin, richness and poverty, etc., as these are expressed in people's emotions when they relate to each other. By scrutinizing minutely why people are happy, angry, hurt or ashamed, one may thus build explanations about the influence of social, economic and political dynamics on people's identities and viability as they develop in the globalizing-localizing processes.

In my search for the qualities of emergent arenas and social spheres, I focussed on the interface of global and local dynamics by following two men whose power was threatened. Where do the local powers of definition end and where do the global ones start? I have tried to answer the question about the eventual emergence of a public sphere in Africa by analytically distinguishing personal space and experience from social arenas and public spheres:

(a) First, I see the person as having an incorporated practice (inherited from generations) that is expressed in the 'experience room', the space, that the person himself/herself defines (his/her organization of his/her relation in space to others). These organizational principles are institutionalized into rules of access, of inclusion and of exclusion of others.

(b) Next, I try to identify the scenes where socially defined arenas are created by different people and that may be institutionalized, either shallowly or deeply. This concerns the definitions of rules of events and activities, actors and roles, and exclusion or inclusion of actors.

(c) There is also the sphere that is a configuration of numerous arenas that again encompasses many people's space enactment. Several events in several arenas may be taking place and articulate within a sphere in what Grønhaug calls an *eigendynamik*. A sphere is then also institutionalized as a defined place and space for events, activities regulating rights and duties (among other things, of access) to actors. The boundaries between spheres may follow the walls of the palaces, i.e. be the manifestation of the separate worlds of men and women, and their encounters. Spheres may also cross gender boundaries, or ethnic and other culturally defined boundaries.

(d) Last, a public sphere eventually implies qualities of open, equal access and participation of possible actors, as ideally in public assemblies, markets and streets.

In this article, I have relegated the notion of 'public' to an epiphenomenon – something that may be generated and that we may discover in our empirical material. I do not use 'public sphere' as an analytically defined substantial thing that can be found and that should look like what is thought of as 'public' as opposed to private in Western sociological thinking.

Against the background of the material I have presented, it is difficult for me to say whether some people in Ngaoundéré share an idea about what we think of as a 'public sphere'. I would say that some spheres of an apparently new and open kind are in the making. I find these openings of access to arenas in my characters' movements and efforts to defend their dignity and power in the face of changing surroundings in the North as well as the South. In their everyday social relations, however, I do not find clearly defined shared notions of a new public sphere in the Western sense.

My focus is not on representatives of state, bureaucratic institutions, common, 'public' places such as markets and streets. I have tried to track changes in the practices of two persons who are very closely related to tradition, all the while they are exposed to violent change that challenges their identity. A supposed 'public instance' like a taxi firm in Paris is not experienced as public to an African. All the time barriers are negotiated; between the whites and the Africans, between the leaders in the North and the South, between Sultan and subordinates and between industrialist and subordinates. New rules organizing persons, roles/identities, space, arenas, and spheres into new hierarchies are arising as a consequence of globalization and state building.

Sultan Issa Maigari had to work hard to keep a minimum of respect when the different roots of power were progressively eliminated by the state. In the local context, he partly succeeded with his project: to create new roots of power. The film project, the film team, the film about him is in itself one of these roots. His subjects in Ngaoundéré observed all this. When he visited Norway, he felt humiliated when he applied his own criteria of power and respect. Al Hajji grew up in Ngaoundéré, and when he built his economic empire, he used all the idioms of a political leadership that had been connected throughout a long time to local leadership, i.e., the one of the Sultanate. He has servants and a court. Members of his court use the traditional, physical or visual behaviours when they relate to Al Hajji. The Sultan and Al Hajji as persons of cultural formation are both 'big men' with many subjects. Their economic, political and social activities promote transformation of access rules to arenas/spheres.

My analysis has shown that they manage to create new sources of power – and how they retain the power of definition of local/global access rules. We also see how and when they lose their power of definition. And we see how Western socioeconomic dynamics, in the end through the President and RDPC, put pressure on and control their positions and possibilities. I myself as anthropologist also actively contribute to the overall transformation processes by my marginalization as a woman, my 'promotion' as white and by becoming a threat as anthropologist.

My material illustrates how the differentiation between rich and poor, or the powerful and poor, takes place. As long as Al Hajji had control of money he dominated many important local dynamics. Progressively, the visualization of power through Al Hajji's palace (and my contribution through the filming) articulated with the upcoming new elites of the marginalized Mbum community in putting pressure on his position, identity and powers of definition. The same behaviours, the Sultan's and Al Hajji's, are rooted very differently in local and global contexts. The Sultan's power is inherited and has continuously to be saved through innovative initiatives. Al Hajji enjoyed the power of an upstart. It was rooted in wealth. His position as local leader was assured through the use of traditional local idioms and progressive incorporation of new idioms very differently in the local and global contexts.

Who are the actors and what are the fields that generate their loss of power? These actors become visible because their acts provoke doubt about the systems of meaning and the idioms they use. The Governor does not kneel in front of the Sultan. He represents the state. Norwegians who have not been to Cameroon do not know how to behave towards Sultans. They do not bother either. Peter does not accept the rules of behaviour towards Al Hajji that Al Hajji's own behaviour has helped to produce locally. For the European architect, there is simply an economic interest in designing a large palace. He also considers that his working in Muslim Cameroon necessitates 'educating' a local 'arriviste' to become sufficiently civilized to be worth the architecture he, a Western architect, offers.

Peter also represents the Western societies in which Al Hajji's economic empire is anchored. Peter's disdain for Al Hajji might be one of the generators of Al Hajji's enormous palace. In order not to lose dignity, Al Hajji has to convince local people that Peter's deplorable behaviour does not create doubt about his power. He is a lion. A very big, partly Western, partly oriental, partly local palace may serve to convince the locals.

I hope to have shown how a kind of political correctness in Western academia, a concentration on research on poor people, may seem to be too narrow if one wants to understand poor people's conditions. If we work

with powerful and rich people we learn important things about poverty. In my projects I acquire an insight into the helplessness of the Sultan and of Al Hajji. I feel empathy. I also learn the perspectives of their subjects and their knowledge about the big men's efforts to cover and hide their fragility. When the less legitimate arrangements of economic and political collaboration, for example Al Hajji's many import and export monopolies, literally became visible to people in Cameroon and the West, i.e. to Al Hajji's partners in the West, efforts are made to marginalize him. Al Hajji's immense palace constitutes a visualization of the 'corrupts' (white men) corrupting of the black elites.

Our continuously shared reflections – between my informants and me – about cultural codes and about the Sultan's and Al Hajji's supportive and oppressive strategies respectively, are developed as a consequence of my filming. The reflections provoke a new knowledge for them and for me. I learn how Al Hajji tries to please the poor. I also learn to differentiate the efforts of all of them to put entirely new questions on the agenda. The local population that has not been to school just has to guess where the money comes from. At the end, Al Hajji's sayings become law. Many people believe that to deal with politics equals fetching money on Al Hajji's carpet. Al Hajji lectures daily about politics. Politics is solidarity, communality, he says. It is not salaried work. But it is in vain. Since he pays them to gather votes, they do not change their attitude to politics. Money reigns.

The use of film and people's participation in the transformation processes that my presence and filming generate expresses the applied aspect of my research methodology. My presence allows the poor people on Al Hajji's carpet to participate in dialogues with the powerful. The camera, so to speak, pushes the aspect of public sphere, the public audience, onto the people on the carpet. The research with a camera also strengthens the 'small people's' and my own opportunity to see the efforts of the powerful people to protect their own power and to define new rules in the different new local arenas.

I found dynamic changes in local Muslim milieus in Ngaoundéré town. I have looked at changes from the point of view of an anthropologist, who tried to identify how specific social, economic and religious dynamics produce new social persons as cultural formation in articulation with the inscribed and incorporated practices shaped by generation and time, and who has her own generational time, as it has developed through many visits to Ngaoundéré during 30 years.

I have tried to analyze two important local characters through time as bearers of incorporated cultural knowledge in order to scrutinize how rules of access to arenas are defined and redefined; the characters' space and redefinitions of their own space as it evolved in daily life. Herein, I have

found a series of new institutionalized open spheres with varying rules of access, different cards distributed to the players. The cards have come into being through pressures on local interactions from the processes of globalization as they are refracted through global and national economics, politics and Islam. The social persons are characterized by strongly incorporated hierarchies that the actors reinforce to keep their power. These dynamics induce them to resist the challenge from new bureaucratic and state-based hierarchies. We also see that global dynamics, here especially the economic ones, seem to consolidate new hierarchical forms of the local community and of the rules of arenas and spheres. The arenas and spheres I find may be open to many but they are not accessible to all. They are mainly open to Muslim men and male Christian political authorities.

Notes

1. I have worked since 1970 in West Africa. I did my first fieldwork in Eastern Niger in 1970, and have worked in Mali in the 1990s and in Cameroon since 1980.
2. I prefer to use open and closed, domestic/intimate instead of Habermas's 'public' and 'private' to avoid a generalised, ideal and occidental understanding when I try to explore my material from Northern Cameroon.
3. 'Lamiido' (sing.), 'lamiibe' (plur.) in Fulfulde.
4. Pullo (sing.), Fulbe (plur.) is the indigenous name of the Fulani (English) and Peul (French) ethnic group.
5. The difference between open and public: 'open' means access for many people not necessarily all; 'public' implies a theoretically democratic societal organization of access for all members of society.
6. A social space is what a social actor defines (implicitly or explicitly) as behavioural rules of his and partners' participation in interaction in a specific situation, Rudie 1974.
7. David MacDougall's ethnographic films, *Under the Men's Tree* and *Takeover* are strong visual expressions of the management by local male groups of collective interests and of how violently regional, national African, or Australian authorities reject them (MacDougall 1974 and 1980). Goody has described how literacy has led to ruptures in social networks and solidarity (Goody 1963 and 1977).
8. Jean Rouch has documented very well such processes following from industrialization and migration in West Africa in *Les Maîtres fous*. Labour migrants collectively manipulate the symbols of the colonial powers in ritual gatherings in Niamey, Niger (Rouch 1954). Their messages, however, did not have an important outreach. Clyde Mitchell describes and analyses similar processes in his article 'The Kalela Dance' (Mitchell 1956).
9. This may also be seen as tacit or explicit expression of political interests as contained in CODESRIA's call for papers on the subject here considered.

10. The exposition was also shown at the Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, Norway, in 1972, and at the National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1973.
11. See CODESRIA's call for papers, 2008, 'The scientific vocation of the researcher has been defined from one generation to another as including a commitment to a social project with transformatory potentials'.
12. Al Hajji, (origin, *haj*, Arabic) title attributed by all Muslims to men having travelled on pilgrimage to Mecca.
13. Rassemblements démocratiques des populations du Cameroun.
14. Njamdji is the name of a minor ethnic group very much stigmatized by the Fulbe.
15. Singular, jawleeru, pluriel jawleeji, local Fulfulde term.
16. Fulfulde for 'I have come out', i.e. I have become accessible.
17. Groups that are not Muslim often organize their social space and open arenas in fundamentally different ways from the Muslim population. In 1982 I found in the Joli Soir quarter of Ngaoundéré that nearly every aspect of personal everyday life is exposed on the street: washing the nearly naked body, dishes and clothes; eating, quarrelling, flirting, discussions, crises, etc. (See Eidheim 1972.) In the Muslim quarters however one only sees people walking along the streets or sitting talking (Waage 2003). Everything else happens behind the walls.
18. Debbo teaado (sing.), rewbe teaabe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
19. Sullaado (sing.), sullaabe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
20. Kaado (sing.), horbe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
21. I think here not only of modern forms of orientalism and exoticism that transform Muslim Sultans into very interesting objects, but also of the national policy of stressing the folklore aspect of traditional political leaders.
22. 'The Consequences of Literacy', Goody 1968.
23. There are very important Diasporas in Douala and Yaoundé and other cities in Southern, Central, Western and Eastern Cameroon.
24. A subgroup of the Wodaabe.
25. The late father Henri Bocquené who worked among the Mbororos of Eastern Adamaoua introduced me to him when I started fieldwork in Cameroon.
26. Jean Boutrais in a personal communication in 1999 about the severe decline in fertility rates in the village of Dibi.
27. As a result of the work of Protestant mission schools the literacy level of the Gbaya and Ndii grew from 1924. The Mbum did not convert to Christianity and only recently has conversion to Islam taken place.
28. In the 1990s the Mbum language was still the dominant language in the palace.
29. Ngaoundéré is Mbum: 'ngaou' means 'mountain', 'ndere', 'navel'.
30. Mbum title for centralized political leadership.
31. The 'jawleeji', reception halls, and the 'kiita', the courthouse where the traditional court is held several times a week.
32. The main entrance hall and male quarters in front of the mosque at the right; the female quarters with garden and trees behind.

33. Maccudo (sing.) Fulfulde: male slave.
34. From 'wurtugo', Fulfulde: to come out.
35. 'We are only decorations in the palace!' (Holtedahl 1993).
36. Arab urban gender traditions may also have been influential through Islam (see Abu Lugod, Geerts).
37. Cameroon's first president, a Pullo from Garoua.
38. From the 1920s onwards American and Norwegian Protestant missionaries started their work in Adamaoua. The French Catholic Mission was established in the 1940s.
39. Al Hajji, from Arabic 'haj', the pilgrimage to Mecca, a title eagerly sought for by Muslim men and mostly acquired by the rich traders.
40. Faada (sing.),Fulfulde, for court or government.
41. Confirmed by Mahamadou Saliou, historian and son of the Bellaka of Nganha in 2009.
42. Kiita, Fulfulde: court; tribunal traditional: French.
43. And would have had the same effect on a Bellaka.
44. Griot, French; bambaado (sing.) Fulfulde: scald.
45. Lesdi, earth, and nasaara, Fulfulde: the white man's territory.
46. The Norwegian capital.
47. Gandura, Fulfulde: male kaftan.
48. Walkiiri, Hausa and Fulfulde: Minister of international affairs.
49. Sarkin njiiwa: the elephant king (sarki, Hausa for king, njiiwa, Fulfulde: elephant). The scalds always shout 'Sarkin njiiwa! Sarkin Adamaoua!' to praise the Lamiido in Ngaoundéré. This is part of the important performances confirming the importance and power of the Sultan of Adamaoua.
50. Maiscam is the first and only intensive industrial production of corn and soya in Adamaoua. The corn is used for beer production at the national brewery, for oil for cooking, soya for oil, etc. After that Al Hajji built up a flour industry, a sugar and salt industry, and la Sacherie, in the Port of Douala. Large agricultural industrial companies in France are involved as are companies in the United States and Canada. Italian milling companies provide skilled personnel and industrial construction.
51. *Pul*aaku means shame in English. See Bocquené 1986, Labatut 1973, Dupire 1970, Riesman 1977, Stenning 1958, 1959.
52. Al Hajji repeatedly stated that he was not influenced by 'follie de grandeur'.
53. See Mary Douglas 1966.
54. See numerous articles in *Jeune Afrique*. Also Mbembe 1990, 1992, Bayart et al., 1992, Geschiere 1993, Rowlands 1993.
55. The Sultan speaks in Fulfulde about baleebe. In the francophone contexts that follows from industrialization the expression 'les noirs' is used.
56. Fulfulde: local, Muslim male coat.
57. Al Hajji uses the expression 'un Blanc', French for 'white person' (Fanon 1952).

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Towards a New Map of Africa through Rastafari 'Works'

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Abstract

This paper seeks to broaden the notion of the African Public sphere to include the historical Diaspora by highlighting the works of Mortimo Planno, cultural historian – Rastafari luminary and plenipotentiary – in closing the void between Africa and its Diaspora, through examining Planno's definition of the African public sphere, as articulated in his general writings and main text: 'The Earth Most Strangest Man', as well as travelogues articulating his discourse on Back-to-Africa. Mortimo Planno is credited as having tutored reggae icon Bob Marley and many others in the faith of Rastafari which was to emerge as a new world religion and way of life out of Jamaica. Planno, an outstanding pan-African scholar and activist, travelled to the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom and some fifteen African states, lecturing on the Movement developed in Jamaica, celebrating the Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I as God incarnate. For more than fifty years, this elder was seen as the *de facto* leader of the Rastafari movement of Kingston. The study applies Paulo Freire's theory of a 'pedagogy of liberation' to assess whether Rastafari thinkers such as Planno can be seen as facilitating a trans-Atlantic conscientisation towards remedial African national development and liberation from what Garvey (1927) described as 'mental slavery'.

Résumé

Cet article vise à élargir la notion de la sphère publique africaine pour inclure la diaspora historique à travers une mise en évidence des travaux de Mortimo Planno, historien de la culture, sommité et plénipotentiaire rastafari, en comblant le vide entre l'Afrique et sa diaspora, par l'examen de la définition par Planno de la sphère publique africaine, comme exprimée dans la plupart de ses écrits, et le texte principal, « The Earth

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Most Strangest Man », ainsi que ses récits de voyage exprimant son discours sur le Retour en Afrique. Mortimo Planno aurait formé l'icône de reggae, Bob Marley, et bien d'autres dans la foi rastafari qui devait émerger comme une nouvelle religion mondiale et un mode de vie à partir de la Jamaïque. Planno, un remarquable intellectual et militant panafricain, s'est rendu aux États-Unis d'Amérique, au Canada, au Royaume-Uni et dans une quinzaine d'États africains, pour animer des conférences sur le mouvement développé en Jamaïque, glorifiant l'Empereur d'Ethiopie, Hailé Sélassié I, comme Dieu incarnée. Pendant plus de cinquante ans, cet homme était considéré comme le leader *de facto* du mouvement rastafari de Kingston. Cette étude applique la théorie de Paulo Freire d'une « pédagogie de la libération » pour évaluer si les penseurs rastafari comme Planno peuvent être considérés comme ayant facilité une conscientisation transatlantique en vue de soutenir le développement national en Afrique et la libération de ce Garvey (1927) qualifiait d'« esclavage mental ».

Prologue

Zimbabwe
Every man got a right to decide his own destiny
And in this judgement there is no partiality
So arm in arm with arms we'll fight this little struggle
'Cause that's the only way we can overcome our little trouble

Brother you're right. You're right. You're right. You're right
You're so right
We go fight (We go fight)
We'll have to fight (We go fight)
We're gonna fight (We go fight)
Fight for our rights

Natty dread it in a Zimbabwe
Set it up in Zimbabwe
Mash it up in a Zimbabwe
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe

No more internal power struggle
We come together to overcome the little trouble
Soon we'll find out who is the revolutionary
'Cause I don't want my people to be contrary

Chorus…

Divide and rule could only tear us apart
In every man's chest there beats a heart
So soon we'll find out who is the real revolutionaries
And I don't want my people to be tricked by mercenaries

Brother you're right. You're right. You're right. You're right
You're so right
We'll have to fight (We go fight)
We're gonna fight (We go fight)
We'll have to fight (We go fight)
Fighting for our rights

Natty trash it in a Zimbabwe
Mash it up in a Zimbabwe
Set it up in a Zimbabwe
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe
Africans a liberate Zimbabwe
Natty dub it in a Zimbabwe
Set it up in Zimbabwe

Africans a liberate Zimbabwe.

Bob Marley (1979), *Zimbabwe*

Foreground: The Carry Beyond Geo-sphere, A Map of the World

> Our magnificence dominates the Three Indias, and extends to Farther India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests ... Seventy-two provinces obey us, a few of which are Christian provinces; and each its own king. And all their kings are our tributaries ... .If you can count the stars of the sky and the sands of the sea, you will be able to judge thereby the vastness of our realm and our power (Extract from a twelfth century letter authored by Prester John, reproduced in Silverberg, 1972, pp. 42-45).

Long before, there was the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, dividing the world (not so neatly) between Spain and Portugal, an Ethiopian sovereign was to have circulated word of his realm and extensive Empire. In 1165, Manuel the Emperor of Byzantium, the Emperor of the Romans received letters from one Presbyter John (also Prester John or Priest King), a Christian Emperor and King of Kings who was a direct descendant of the magi mentioned in the Gospel (that visited and presented gifts to the Christ child). The letter indicated a domain constituting a tribute empire that spanned the globe beyond the boundaries then known to the European world, expanding east and west of the uttermost end of the earth. Though significantly altered through various translations and interpolations, the letter clearly indicated the Presbyter John as unsurpassed by any other in power and wealth. The letter created such a stir in Europe that for the next five centuries, various attempts were made to establish the identity and specific location of this legendary emperor as well as to behold the wealth and command he was reputed to have over these territories and their peoples. This letter and its author – though originally at

times confused with Genghis Khan[1] – is now generally accepted to relate to the Ethiopian Sovereign and his empire, believed to have extended to Africa, Asia and into the Americas. This letter, though the subject of much debate and scepticism, provides yet another source to triangulate the theories of a pre-Columbian African presence in Central and South America as well as in South Asia, Polynesia and beyond, chronicled in the oral histories as well as in Chinese records of the twelfth century (Van Sertima 1975). It took Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492 to the Americas for Europeans to secure further evidence of the expansiveness and wealth, literally the 'other worlds' across the seas and the wealth that could be possessed by adventurers into these waters yet unknown by their explorers. This 'discovery' set in motion one of the most ambitious projects ever embarked on by mankind, to conquer the world for Christendom, the latter perhaps a euphemism for establishing and justifying the European hegemonic dominance that subsequently developed. Various strategies were put in place to facilitate that project, the chief instrument for this mission being the Spanish code known as the Requisition, which legitimated not only the conquest of the 'new world' by Spain on behalf of the Pope, but also the parcelling off or allocation of virtually most of the western hemisphere to the Spanish State (see Wynter 1995:19).

Sylvia Wynter (1995) reminds us that not all the 'natives' of the Americas were silenced in their opinion of Christopher Columbus and the project of European capture of most of the 'New World':

> [T]he Pope being the Lord of all the universe in the place of God, and he had given the lands of the Indies to the King of Castile, the Pope must have been drunk when he did it, for he gave what was not his ... The King who asked for and received this gift must have been some madman for he asked to have given to him that which belonged to others. – [The Cenu Indian's reply to the Spaniard 'local culture' conception of the legitimacy of the Papal Bull of 1492 as one which 'gave' the New World to Spain. Quoted in Wynter 1995:18.]

Wynter picks up, where the Cenu Indian left off, to extrapolate:

> Equally, the discourse of the Requisition, like the correlated discourses which legitimated the West's global expansion, was only true within the terms of the 16th century variant of the matrix Judea-Christian culture of the West, and therefore within the terms of its behavior-motivational belief system and neo-Augustinian principle of explanation (1995:20).

Hickling (2004) through his methodology of psycho-historiography supports Wynter's argument and identifies the foundational ethos and inner logic of the Columbian American Colonial project on 'delusional psychology' founded in greed (Hickling 2004:54). This delusion led to the establishment of European

outposts in the geo-sphere which came to be known as the Caribbean, a name derived from a 'cannibal' Amerindian tribe that Columbus called 'Caribs' (a corruption of 'Galibi' meaning 'brave men'), that occupied most of these islands which form an arc linking North and South America. Within one century of Columbus's voyage, there was to unfold major international battles that claimed every scrap of rock dotting the area of the Caribbean involving peoples from every corner of the world, for the then dominant powers in Europe. Within two centuries of Columbus's arrival, the emergent island outposts were appropriately labelled with European national flags, while miniscule numbers of local administrators maintained extractive links on behalf of these 'mother countries', who were now being afforded abundant riches to fuel an ambition to develop their citizenry. The activities in the Caribbean had provided not only economic wealth but had aided intellectually and philosophically, expanding research and closing knowledge gaps. It also helped significantly to develop and expand the range of language-driven skills required to administer the region in absentia, as well as their general interpretations of laws and codes, and social structures and relations derived from administering extractive networks constructed to drive European advancement. For this global network to succeed, the African majority responsible for most of the labour had to be convincingly contained, controlled and incorporated into a delusional construct through legislations and a penal system which shackled impulses to resist. Resistance still could not be totally contained as Wynter (1977 & 1995) notes, and was even prolific in islands such as Jamaica and Haiti; the latter by way of the now famous Haitian Revolution of 1791 which ended France's control of that territory almost two hundred years prior to decolonization commenced in the rest of the region (between 1962 and 1981). To the extent that the Caribbean experience has been one of African political disempowerment, Rastafari have often rendered the word 'Caribbean' as 'carry' 'beyond', to speak to the cleavage of the peoples away from African shores and their imprisonment in tiny islands far across the seas. Carry beyond is also understood and applied poetically to speak to a state of darkness and ignorance caused for lack of culture and self knowledge to exist only in a state of perpetual slavery.

The legacy and space that the Carry Beyond occupies is therefore one of strong ties with all of the dominant European countries and to some extent with Asia, the home countries of the indentured and merchant classes, but very weak and undervalued links with Africa, the majority of the labouring population's homeland. In the British West Indies, colonialism tried to ensure that there was no link between the African continent and the Caribbean that was not an extractive one, and so there was to be no reverse flow of population or investment towards Africa – that is no direct connections that would

strengthen the African connection. Africa represented labour, the West Indies represented land under European control into which many Africans were imported to work, and for so many others it could be said, and put to death. Rodney (1973) details how Europe for the past four centuries manipulated African wealth to under-develop the continent. This 'underdevelopment' was transplanted to the islands by the designation of 'slave' or the legal non-status of the African, a dominant but impotent majority. In Jamaica, Mortimo Planno, Rastafari Elder and teacher identifies (within a population pyramid headed by minorities and expanding downwards) an African society that is under denial and suppression. Planno therefore locates Jamaican and by extension the Carry Beyond as constituting the following hierarchy: 'Jews, Arawaks, Mulattos, Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Africans – all of which spells JAMAICA' (see Planno 1996). Planno's acrostic scheme for Jamaica recognizes that the core, base, backbone, substantive body of Jamaica is always built and driven by an estranged African element constituting more than ninety per cent of the population[2] but which remains silenced and unrepresented in many levels of the official society in ways not dissimilar to the earliest days of colonization when overt racism allowed unabated violence and hardship to be inflicted on the enslaved. Since Africa never achieved political hegemony within the Caribbean, at least not in the conventionally recorded histories,[3] her peoples seemingly have been negatively affected by it, and the African global family has thus suffered an irreparable disadvantage. Indeed, if the realm of the Presbyter John of the twelfth century boasted that '... there is no strife among us; our people have an abundance of wealth ... There are no liars among us',[4] by the time of the European Christian stewardship, the wealth, population and existence of these Indies (East and West) were effectively crippled and transferred away from these spaces, their populations diminished in wealth and dignity.

The African Sphere

> Think about it: everyone they tried to work those fields in the hot sun dropped like flies and then they started bringing us over from Africa. It didn't matter how many of us died as long as we lasted through a crop, because they figured on an endless supply (Greenlee, S. 1969:114-115).

The Africans on the west side of the Atlantic owe a debt to Marcus Garvey who contributed hugely to the groundwork of teaching the people about their race and its experiences. Decades before Garvey, Alexander Bedward had emerged in Kingston, Jamaica, with a racialised message about the emergence of a free African population, no longer subject to white colonial authority. Within the first three or four decades of the twentieth century, not

only was there street activism teaching of Africa (see Elkin 1972), there were also a number of published works relating to the same racialised excavations. Athyli Rogers, Fitz Ballintine Pettersberg, Leonard Howell, Amy Jacques Garvey, and J.A. Rogers worked toward an elevation of the population for an understanding of the truth of Africa. This therefore means that by the 1940s, developed cadres emerged in the Diaspora teaching Africa from religious, political and academic viewpoints, with the Rastafari as one of the latest in that trajectory of teachers. Planno introduces his research on the African sphere in his book *The Earth Most Strangest Man: The Rastafarian*, as follows:

> Ethiopia the Aincient (sic) Kingdom of Africa has made an unnoticed expansion of the Ethiopian Kingdom. From one end of the Earth to the other. Africa being inhabited by invading European Nations Has lost most of her written history to the invaders, who in turn copy and then destroy the original (Planno 1996:3).

Immediately as we are told that the Ethiopian Empire expanded the earth, Planno goes on to outline that due to invading Europeans destroying our sources, Africans have been at the mercy of second-hand copies of their history. Among the Rastafari the term 'Ethiopia' is still often used in its original sense, the Greek description of the African landmass, occupied by 'sun burnt' peoples. Mortimo Planno further explains the Rastafarian position:

> By Ethiopia I and I mean one continent, by Ethiopia I and I mean the Country Ethiopia with its capital Addis Ababa. By Ethiopia I and I mean All for One, One for all operating in this manner there can be no failure. The only true interpretation for Africa for the Africans. I and I being in captivity Has to admit, to names of those who did pass through great tribulations (Planno 1996:3).

Planno conforms to the traditional Rastafari definition of Ethiopia, but he also expands his meaning to include the historical trajectory of experiences of the African people – from the continent en masse, to the country of the Ethiopian highlands, to the captive Ethiopians beyond the shores of Africa. For this third category of Ethiopians, those who fell into captivity (and who were given Anglo-Christian names), although they are numerically and culturally dominant within their captive 'carry beyond' nations, these societies are still conceived as European satellites or outposts. This is where the work of Rastafari has been most critical in transforming the mindset of populations of these outposts to reflect the needs of the African majority as a way of helping to liberate our minds – according to Bob Marley one of our great challenges. This paper makes a case for Rastafari to be construed as an African Diasporan teacher fashioned in a pedagogical 'sphere' emerging out

of a dominant Ethiopianist and Pan-Africanist identity, deeply embedded in the diaspora. To some extent, it may be said that Ethiopianism has expressed itself as a far more active and perhaps even 'militant' force among African Diasporans, especially after the coronation of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I.[5] This was further deepened and strengthened when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, an episode that was to capture the attention of many African Diasporan 'pariah' intellectuals, for whom media coverage of Africa was received eagerly. Most West Indian scholars and thinkers at the time were focused on North America and Europe.[6] The Movement of Rastafari thus came into being at a moment when Ethiopia had opened a way for attention towards the African continent in general. This Rastafari sphere, I argue, is indispensable to an ongoing liberation conceptualization and deployment internationally, and significantly contributes to the broadening and strengthening of the African Public Sphere.

The importation of Africans and the system of slavery ended formally in most of the Americas by the close of the nineteenth century. Within a generation of the 1834 British West Indian Emancipation Act, the Africans inhabiting the region had called into question their lack of social and political status. Although legally free, it took another century after Emancipation for Africans to achieve a political voice. In 1933, five years after Marcus Garvey was deported from the United States after being imprisoned there, the Rastafari founding patriarch Leonard Howell, who was also deported from the United States, emerged in Jamaica. He preached a similar message to that of the Cenu Indian, while echoing sentiments close to that of the Presbyter John's letter, some five centuries after Columbus's design took root in the Americas. Howell preached to the people gathered in the marketplace and in the public sidewalk street assemblies[7] a message of rejection of Western hegemony and the celebration of an Ethiopianist trajectory emergent through the legendary Solomonic King who had just been crowned. Within a decade of Howell's activism preaching the Messianic interpretation of the 1930 coronation of the Ethiopian sovereign as the harbinger of Africa's redemption, a Movement was to develop in Kingston, Jamaica, which quickly spread nationally and internationally to emerge as an important voice and discursive public tradition for the Conscientisation of Africans at home and abroad.

I now seek to concretely identify the African sphere, by way of an engagement with the cosmological outlook developed by the Rastafari of Jamaica, and particularly as identified by one of the Movement's first and most long serving plenipotentiaries and teachers, Mortimo Planno. Rastafari in this paper is defined as an Ethiopianist-centred worldview and Movement, venerating the life and character of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia as

the prophesied Redeemer King of Creation. Rastafari can also be defined as the principal teacher of liberation – or as Howell designated himself, teacher of 'famed wisdom'.[8] From these two definitions emerges an argument for the Rastafari as a teacher of an African liberation worldview. This places the Rastafari as a quintessential force in incubating progress among marginalized Afro-centric[9] brothers and sisters globally. This point also helps to define Rastafari as a Pan-African diasporic medium especially in the light of the universality of the conditions that Africans have suffered. Boyce Davies affords an appropriate summation of the African condition:

> For many years the status of African Diaspora peoples in various nation-states has entailed as recognition that they are always a 'deportable subject'.[10] Additionally, Africans often did not have access to the basic rights accorded citizens in many locations prior to civil rights and other anti-colonial movements. The ongoing denial of rights speaks most strongly to what the concept of 'citizenship' in the United States [and the Americas] has meant for black people. As a direct result, this sense of statelessness can have the effect of creating not only a sense of alienation from the nation-state but also *an international African identity in the diaspora* (Boyce Davies & M'Bow, 2007:19, my emphasis).

The notion of a 'deportable subject' coupled with the idea of 'an international African identity in the diaspora', provides me with an entry point for a more poignant introduction of the inner logic, role and place of the Rastafari Movement within the African diaspora. Whereas it took just the label of 'slave' to transform an African into a subhuman, it has taken almost two centuries of extreme violence and bloodshed to begin to reverse the scars of the slave legacy from the population so affected. Boyce Davies et al. further highlight the fact that the African in the West has had even today to mediate the societies of their birth from the position of 'denial of citizenship rights (Constitutional rights)...' These authors further highlight the fact that in the cases where citizenship or constitutional rights are secured, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment become loop-holes within the state apparatus to deny citizenship. In the African American context, this has been best demonstrated by the over-representation of black males in the prisons, disproportionate numbers in the frontline armed services, high mortality in confrontations with civil law enforcement, and consequently high numbers in the penal institutions (especially among males under thirty-five years of age).[11]

The African public sphere cannot therefore only be a continental enclosure[12] but must also facilitate significant populations of Africans abroad, whose histories, circumstances and consciousness unify them with those Africans at home. Marcus Garvey recognized that there was a need for a

global African consciousness, dialogue and networking, and through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) this objective was being advanced. Unfortunately however, the organization was unable to evolve and grow after the demise of Garvey, its chief architect. The Rastafari which followed Garveyism was well poised to expand the reach of Garvey largely due to its religio-political framework, which connected to the combined pedagogical needs of religious rearmament and political activism, being a modernizing syncretic fusion. Rastafari movement through a diasporan bricolage of Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism, Garveyism, Hinduism as well as Christian eschatology has developed a system of reasoning, with an impressive international resonance, and has moved towards the development of a liberatory praxis which would see improvement for the African citizenry internationally. I would further note that, the Movement operates more like a counter public sphere where, through an insidious and discursive process of reasoning, provides the basis for teaching a common culture or assist in framing, the icons, images, symbols, mores and general way of being that ultimately inform 'an international African identity in the diaspora'. My argument now turns more specifically to the Rastafari definition of the African Sphere, and more specifically the African Public Sphere, as seen and impacted through the works and ideas of Mortimo Planno.

Basis of Wisdom: Mortimo Planno's Open Yard

> We are volunteer Ethiopians
> Agitating for our Rights
> And We'll never stop fight
> Until we brake (sic) down Babylon Wall. (Planno 1996:7)

> The impact we [Rastafarians] have is that of a pressure group who have forced certain pressures on the establishment ... that they have to give African countries recognition and move towards having better relation with African countries. (Planno 1979)

Mortimo Planno was born in Cuba in 1929 to May Parker, a Jamaican, and Miguel Planno a Cuban tobacconist. In the early 1930s, Planno's parents moved to Jamaica and he recalls that by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, when he was ten, he had developed and begun to articulate a strict anti-colonial consciousness which saw him siding with the Germans against the British colonial overlords. By the age of 30, Planno was a known community leader and activist whom the University of the West Indies would consult with in studying and recommending that the Rastafari be considered a legitimate movement in pursuit of achievable goals and that the government be of assistance (see Smith et al. 1960). Planno was

a Rastafari leader who was given to writing letters, many of which he directed to the 'Powers and Principalities', in pursuit of justice for the disenfranchised and the poor and in particular the Rastafari struggles within contemporary society. The 1960 Report was generated from one such Planno letter, resulting in the dispatch of a fact finding Mission to Africa (April 1961) to access the willingness of Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria to receive the Jamaican Rastafari and the larger Back-to-Africa interest group. Planno was placed on the Mission as a leading representative of the Rastafari community. The Mission first had audience with the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I in Addis Ababa, who assured them that Ethiopia could accommodate all the Africans from the West Indies who desired to return (see Planno et al. 1961). After Ethiopia, the Mission was received in Nigeria by the Governor General, Nnamdi Azikiwe; later in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the delegates were received respectively by Kwame Nkrumah, William Tubman and Milton Margai (see Planno et al. 1961). Though there were no specific promises of repatriation, the Mission transmitted to the Rastafari a sense of action as well hope that was only halted when the national government changed and the agenda of 'migration' to Africa (as it was described) became a casualty of the new administration's focus (see Planno 1996 & Nettleford 1972).

After Planno's return from the Mission to Africa he became more legitimately seen as the leading Rastafari among a largely unorganized cadre of disaffected urban dwellers. Planno mounted public protests, held street meetings, kept concerts and theatrical performances – all geared at animating the consciousness and 'overstanding'[13] of Africa. Planno even introduced the teaching of Amharic in Trench Town, Kingston. Additionally, he became one of the first internationally acknowledged spokespersons for the Movement and toured the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, representing Back-to-Africa to the West Indian Diasporas. After the Emperor's visit to Jamaica in 1966, his position was affirmed further as a significant Rastafari leader, the one who saved the day when the machineries of state protocol failed, being unable to contain the tens of thousands who had come to see this truly legendary ruler. The flaming torches, the palm branch-bearers, drum players; spectators – who had all come to hail their King of Kings – thronged the plane on the tarmac. It took the Emperor's intervention by way of his request that Planno be called upon to settle the multitudes and allow for his deplaning. Eyewitnesses generally agree that the scene was extremely tense. Onlookers imagined total disaster with fire, explosions and stampedes, and an impending national disgrace and international disaster. The stage was set for Planno's skills to be exercised. Planno – not a part of the official

welcome party – had to be summoned by loudspeaker. After a brief salutation to the Emperor, he proceeded to restore calm. In the words of a witness, Brother Dyer, an elder whom Planno inspired into the faith of Rastafari and who later walked to Ethiopia from Spain, 'Planno opened his mouth and began to teach them about their history'. Planno recalls starting with the Psalm that he believed he was seeing – unfolding before him at that time and he spoke thus:

> Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the lord, and against his anointed, saying, let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh... (Psalm 2: 1-4).

Planno's ability to avert disaster due to the failure of protocol saved the day and prevented international embarrassment. He earned the title of 'Prime Minister for the day'[14] in the local newspaper. The arrival of the Emperor had been dreamt of and desired ever since the doctrine emerged in the 1930s. For those three days, Jamaica had become Ethiopia according to Planno's analysis, as the Emperor's reception by the people was to be matched only by the love and enthusiasm shown him by Ethiopian nationals. The visit vindicated the Rastafari faith, while intensifying the desire for Ethiopia. After this moment in Jamaican history, accounted as the most memorable state visit,[15] Planno became a magnet for the West Kingston community (the Rastafari in particular) until his residence became established as one of the first prominent inner-city (Trench Town) sites for creative discussions. Individuals began to converge on Planno's eighteenth fifth Open Yard as he called it — to 'reason' and solidify critical opinions. Planno's space perhaps operated as an alternative (that was African centre) dialogical public sphere within the margins of the society. To this extent, Planno's Open Yard perhaps operated more as a 'counter-public' sphere. Its agenda was subversive, particularly that aspect which looked outwards to Africa – as Africa was still remote with respect to the national agenda and well outside of the public sphere's concerns.[16] Within Planno's sphere, there was an outstanding appeal, among Rastafari brethren: musicians, jugglers (informally employed), sporting personalities, academics, artistes and other individuals converging on Planno's space to share in the reasoning. He explained the method as such:

> [A]s we get the opportunity we use it, use it fi carry one foot forward. Every time an opportunity open the door we go through that door and call down Africa pon dem. Marcus Garvey learn from Mohammed Ali that the people of the Caribbean want to learn more about Africa. And him Marcus Garvey did not have the language to tell it to the people. Him didn't really have that

> approach. The Rastaman for instance have a better approach than him in telling the people about back-to-Africa ... to explain to you who can't read – what British write – how 'you going to suffer through your own desire' (Planno 1998).

Planno provides an indirect critique of Garvey's 'bourgeois' strategies for conscientising and developing an African sphere within the Diaspora by highlighting the state of being of the mass of the populace at the time of Garvey's UNIA. Further, Planno suggests that the 'Rastaman' become the translator of Garveyism to these masses, many of whom were illiterate. In his lecture, 'Polite Violence' Planno helps to bridge the gap between the contribution of Marcus Garvey and that of the Movement of Rastafari. Though emerging from the early 1930s, it was only in the post-second world war period that the Rastafari movement started to lobby explicitly for the official authorities to engage Africa as a real and actual part of the majority of the population's culture and way of life. With the emergence of a West Indian university located at Mona in Jamaica (in 1948), the newly formed United Nations forum for the expression of international disputes, and the widespread decolonization discussions, Back-to-Africa as a pathway for some of the society was also seeking some representation. Garvey's work had slowed after the 1930s, and more so after his passing: the Rastafari movement stepped into this void to 'tell the people about Back-to-Africa'. Planno even composed songs to provide his audiences with instructions. He started and ended his gathering with such singing, 'Tell out King Rasta doctrine around the whole world...'

Capitalizing on the doctrine of Ethiopianism as seen through the religious and later intellectual movement of the early to mid-nineteenth century, Rastafari by the 1950s had developed a grassroots version of this ideology and had given it a religio-political flavour, this religious fervour, arguably a less evident element of Garveyism. Philosophically, this component added to the basic Back-to-Africa framework of self-reliance, a spiritual anchor through the focus on the Emperor and Ethiopia. Ethiopia's primacy within Rastafari owed not only to its long un-colonised history but also based on its international profile since the battle of Adwa in 1896, when a decisive victory over the Italian invaders unleashed a renewed hope in the African ability to overcome seemingly ubiquitous oppression. With the international prominence of the Emperor Haile Selassie I, after his coronation as well as the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1941), there was no absence of active discussion and scrutiny of this region by Africans everywhere. In Jamaica, at the outbreak of the war, there was a large protest meeting in Kingston at which some 1,400 Jamaicans signed a petition asking the British Crown to grant permission for Jamaicans

to enlist in the Ethiopian Army.[17] The war in Ethiopia also strengthened the chiliastic readings that the Movement placed on that country as manifesting the Revelations: the final battle with the beast, (representing/repeating the story of the Romans with Christ, now the Italians through Mussolini, sanctioned by the Pope, the anti-Christ), which was trying to destroy the Messiah, Emperor Haile Selassie I.[18] Leonard Howell, in his first message at the inception of the Movement, advised the people to turn their attention to the newly crowned Black Emperor and study his laws and constitution, as he was their true redeemer, not the white British King. The appearance of the Ethiopian Emperor on the throne became that moment of truth fulfilling the promise of the Messiah. Howell, like Planno, did not expect to have this interpretation delivered by anyone from 'official' society – an official society that the Rastafari soothsayers were to later represent as 'Babylon' or 'the system', as false preachers and teachers.

The activism that the Movement embarked on resulted in a shoring up of the knowledge of and desire for Africa within the population in general which at that time had very little true awareness of the continent. Africa was affirmed, studied and monitored. The news of Africa in the press was re-interpreted by Rastas. For example, though reported as a problem in Kenya, the Rastafari immediately identified with the struggle of the Mau Mau in the 1950s and by some accounts were inspired by this group to develop the aesthetic of dreadlocks (see Chevannes 1998). The period of decolonization became infused with discussion of the restoration of linkages with Africa through 'repatriation' (or migration) of Back-to-Africa advocates. The decade between 1958 and 1968 therefore saw a groundswell of the idea of Back-to-Africa in Jamaica through the work of the Rastafari, who by this time had begun to organize different associations that looked at the best ways of manifesting Africa. In 1958, as a result of the first international Rastafari convention called in Back-o-Wall, Kingston, a telegram was sent to Queen Elizabeth II stating, 'We the descendants of Ancient Ethiopia call upon you for our repatriation...' Several months later the Rastafari camp in Back-o-Wall was destroyed by police and its leader arrested and imprisoned. The convention, or 'Grounation', as it was called, was held on the anniversary of the Ethiopian victory at the Battle of Adwoa (March 1, 1896). It lasted twenty-one days and had the desired effect of making the Rastafari (within the British Commonwealth) visible as an organization of African and Back-to-Africa minded members of the society. The wider society felt intimidated by the brethren and relations deteriorated between the Government and the public towards the Rastafari movement (van Dijk 1993:117-118).

After this Grounation in Kingston, the Rastafari became a far more articulate and visible anomaly in society. The cultivation of dreadlocks became

widespread as initiates became part of an embodied identity, and used the body as a site of resistance. This feature has been present from the outset and over the years has been elaborated further. The embrace of the Ethiopian national colours has also been a part of this signification, as is the cultivation of merely a beard, sometimes instead of dreadlocks. The display of pins and buttons with the Ethiopian sovereigns, Ghanaian flag, as well as Marcus Garvey and colours of the UNIA also feature in this embodied practice. As a result of the Rastafari critique of the wider society, symbolized by this visual presentation, the Movement became what Planno describes as a 'fascination for the society, journalists ... tourists'.[19] Coupled with a doctrine that focused on 'the dark continent of Africa', the strange, anachronistic ideas of the Rastafari became a regular part of the media's obsession, until eventually the print media also became an outlet for the 'truth about the Movement to be revealed'. For example, on the issue of the Rastafari right to hold the philosophy of Ethiopia, Planno wrote in a letter to the Editor of *The Daily Gleaner* quoting the UN Declaration on Human Rights:

> Mr. Editor, under article 15 (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality, (11) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived [of] his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality… The Rastafarian Movement made representation to government for a nationality change. To many people the Rastas are making trouble, when they ask for a nationality change… *Daily Gleaner*, December 19, 1963:12).

Planno's Back-to-Africa advocacy for the Rasta brethren kept Africa alive generally, with his clamouring for repatriation. The discussions being promoted became interpreted by the wider society as a need for greater understanding of Africa. Roy Augier, one of the authors of the now famous *Report on the Rastafari Movement in Kingston* indicated that the Rastafari phenomenon created a space for the insertion of the study of Africa within the curriculum as well as the placement of African pre-Columbian history within the University of the West Indies curriculum and that of the secondary school system. Walter Rodney, according to Augier, was handpicked to provide this contribution to the University (personal communication, June 2008). The obsession of the Rastafari with 'the unresolved legacy of colonialism' had helped to remind the wider society that its major cosmological and demographic locus was Africa and assisted in legitimating the claim of the African presence in Jamaica and the West Indies (hitherto denied). This coincided with the period of 'Black Power'. However, its expression in Jamaica occurred most clearly through the engagement of Rastafari with Africa. Throughout the remainder of the 1960s, especially after the visit of the Emperor in 1966, various attempts were made to pursue repatriation,

including the attempts of Planno's Rastafari Movement Association to fund the repatriation of nine families to Ethiopia. When it became apparent that the efforts were not yielding appropriate rewards, largely due to lack of financing, reggae became the chief source of engagement for the next generation of Rastafari activism through conscious reggae and other means. This atmosphere which was to partially emerge from Planno's Open Yard in Trench Town became the point of convergence for radical university students and researchers, musicians, athletes and Rastafari brothers and sisters.

Between the end of the 1960s and the death of Bob Marley in 1981, just over a decade, the Rastafari of Jamaica developed a medium to speak to the world, proselytize its new faith and elevate the discussion of Africa everywhere. This medium or media was reggae music – defined by some as the King's (Ethiopian Emperor's) music. From its inception, reggae was associated with the Rastafari movement and it is perhaps not surprising that it was easily imbued with the sentiments of the Movement's doctrine and vision. Rastafari's Ethiopianism became more embedded in the music which included sentiments of repatriation, but also expressed solidarity with suffering Africans, not only in Jamaica but also on the continent of Africa. Artists also chose to use African names, African chants, themes, clothing and ritual practices within their creative works as a part of the reclamation of the human self and continent they had lost.

Rastafari: Building African 'consciousness', Remapping the Earth

> A people without a nation that they can really call their own is a people without a soul. Africa is our nation and is in spiritual and physical bondage because her leaders are turning to outside forces for solutions to African problems when everything Africa needs is within her. When African righteous people come together the world will come together. This is our divine destiny. – HIM Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia.

Bob Marley received a formal invitation to attend the independence ceremonies of the new nation of Zimbabwe on April 17, 1980. The previous year, when Marley first publicly performed the song 'Zimbabwe' in Boston at the now famous Amandla concert (so-called for the phrase 'Amandla Ngawetu', 'Power to the People'), where his performance raised a quarter of a million US dollars[20] for African liberation, he paused during the performance and made the following speech:

> The Third World struggling ... and we must come together for Zimbabwe ... Women and children shall fight this revolution ... we can be free, we want go home to we yard ... Rastafari know that ... Don't let propaganda lead you astray, false rumors and false propaganda. Haile Selassie I the Almighty!! ...

> Zimbabwe must be free by 1983, Jah seh, Africa must be free ... So everyone have a right to decide his own destiny ... Put your feet in the dust ....A people without knowledge of their past is no better than a tree without roots... We smoke herb so we get one meditation, and they don't wan' fe see us in unity, C'mon children!! Yeah!!!. I couldn't mek a speech, I could mek a speech, but I'm gonna tell ya that I'm gonna fight for my rights. I'm a Rasta man and we are Rasta people. Consciousness cover the earth ... Hey sisters!! Awake from your sleepless slumber, emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind, yunno what I'm saying? Babylon burning!! Its vibration mek the whole world stop. Burning!! No more force. A free the people!! Yunno something? We're gonna do it ... with a nuclear bomb! Wake up and live! Rastafari, the Almighty God!! With no apology!! ... o, it's time for us to be free!!! (Davis 2006:215).

Planno, regarded as Marley's tutor-mentor, describes Bob Marley as akin to a Rastafari Bishop, given his power and authority to move across the world as a chief emissary of the faith (see Planno 1998). Through the music which he used as a teaching tool, Marley expounded the philosophies of the ages that he had come to know through the consciousness of the Rastafari. Marley's method was infused by his abilities as a 'total' performer. He often appeared as though in trance, transporting his audiences to a higher consciousness through rhythm and thought-provoking verses. Davis (1984) viewed them as a crucial force in a liberatory praxis 'toward human unity and dignity' (p. 216). Planno's and Davis's assessments of Marley help to place the artist within a framework more akin to a 'theological' worker, and Marley's own testimony of faith in the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie and the Rastafari movement help to support this claim.

Applying Freire (2000), one can contextualize the role of the Rastafari within the African sphere, and in particular within the Diaspora. Freire examined the importance of dialogue in the process of human consciousness-building and recognized that there is no 'true word' that is not at the same time a praxis. He further indicates that 'to speak a true word is to transform the world' (2000:87). Emerging from its word-based philosophy of a redeemer King, Rastafarians developed a praxis to transform the world. For this transformation of the world to occur, 'spirit media'[21] like Marley are able to achieve a genuine dialogue within his works which convinces his audience of his (divine) inspiration as well as their own ability to command the same. Freire argues, however, that dialogue cannot exist if there is no profound sense of 'love' for the world and for people.

> Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the

> dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. – Freire 2000, p. 89.

Through the dialogical process of 'reasoning', Rastafari evolved a cogent philosophy and interpretation of the African Diasporan experience: according to Planno (personal communication, 2002), 'we get the people more wise'. The principles of the public reasonings were taken into the studios of Kingston by the Rasta brethrens and the result was a new music genre and a new breed of teachers on the Pan-African situation. Bob Marley was to emerge by the early 1970s as a leading exponent of this purposeful sound. Reggae music, as this sound has come to be known, has been defined by Rastafari as 'the King's music', and to a great extent the contents and overarching concerns of the genre have come to embody the African reality and ambition. By 1980, approximately a decade after his international debut, Bob Marley had become the most famous Pan-African anti-colonial champion, in a truly revolutionary and uplifting way, so much so that he had made a significant impression on the various liberation movements in Africa, and Southern Africa in particular (see Campbell 2007).

Summary and Conclusions

What is therefore this new map of Africa? How is it to be envisioned, harnessed and administered? Africa has perhaps suffered from a diminution in its political scope and geographical range by not engaging in a philosophy of hegemonic dominance or an explicitly imperialist worldview. Despite this, her peoples have become a key Diasporan phenomenon, numerically large and exercising potent cultural influence internationally. Within this constituency, the Rastafari have emerged on a mission of conscientisation for the masses about the need for progress and liberation. Through the veil of Ethiopianism, the Rastafari have historicized the African diasporan experience from a perspective that has critiqued the overarching paradigm and provided the tool for its transformation. To this extent, the Rastafari have fashioned and upheld and continued to administer an African sphere that has allowed for the development of a citizen of Africa, a Pan-African community, existing at the level of a transnational being. This feature of the Rastafari has been fashioned and developed over the years by successive generations of elders of the faith, from Howell to Planno to Bob Marley and beyond. It is generally misunderstood and undervalued – nonetheless in spite of this, it has found resonance among oppressed peoples universally. To this extent, the Rastafari have helped to create Africa abroad, and deepen its significance, particularly

for many of those who were transplanted, stateless and homeless – plucked from their homeland under duress and great pain. This new map of Africa is therefore still a very old map about an empowering state of 'consciousness' perhaps best and most succinctly expressed by Garvey himself as 'Africa for the Africans both at home and abroad', which for many has meant fashioning and refashioning Africa consistently in those spheres we have occupied and dominated by our works.

Notes

1. See Silverberg (1972, pp. 73-86).
2. The population of the British West Indies along with the non-British CARICOM states (i.e., Haiti and Suriname) fifteen small island states, have a total population of approximately 15 million inhabitants, ninety percent of whom are of African decent, with yet another five percent (on average) of mixed descent (African and European/Asian). Information sourced from US Central Intelligence Agency, country profile see https.//www.cia.gov.library/publications/theworld-fact-book/geos (retrieved September 9, 2008). Nettleford (2007) describes the region as 'where Africa, Europe and Asia met on Amerindian soil'.
3. If however mindful of Ivan Van Sertima's thesis – that the African presence predates that of the Europeans in the region by centuries – their hegemonic significance is borne out by the monuments (Olmec Negroid heads) erected to them in the Central American region.
4. Silverberg (1972, p. 73).
5. See King, K.J. (1978) as well as James, W. (1998) for comprehensive discussions of Ethiopianism within the African Diaspora and its manifestations in theWest as well as within the African continent in the early decades of the twentieth century.
6. See Edmonds (2003).
7. See Lee (2003) and Hill (2001) for discussion of Howell and the early Rastafari leadership. Elkins (1977) provides a discussion of 'Street Preachers' in Jamaica from the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. The streets can be viewed as a genuine 'theatre for debate' and discursive deliberations, or what Rastafari lexicon would call a space for 'reasoning', or what obtains in the literature as 'public sphere', especially for the marginal most – without resources to secure favour of policy makers or media. To this extent this forum of street ideational activism or 'reasoning' operates more akin to a 'counter-public' (see Fraser 1990) as it would be a critique of the bourgeois notion of public sphere expressed by Habermas (1989).
8. See Hill (2001).
9. Critics of Rastafari would perhaps highlight the Movement as more attractive to the andro-centric point of view along with being Afro-centric.

10. See Carole Boyce Davies, 'Deportable Subjects: US Immigration Laws and the criminalizing of Communism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100: 4 (2001).
11. In this regard see Angela Davis's extensive discussions on the USA's Prison Industrial Complex: http://www.time.com/time/community/transcripts/chattr092298.html.
12. See Bankie (2003) who debates the context of Pan Africanism or Continentalism.
13. 'Overstanding' is a Rastafari coinage to explain having knowledge of something, this is seen as more logical than the word 'understanding'.
14. See report in the *Daily Gleaner*, April 23, 1961. Also located in ARI project.
15. Eye witnesses say that this visit is unequalled in the history of Jamaica as far as national response - perhaps only rivalled by the visit of Nelson Mandela in recent times. Other African leaders who have made state visits to Jamaica are: William Tubman (1954); Kenneth Kaunda (1966); Julius Nyerere (1974); Chief Leabua Jonathan (1974); Samora Machel (1977); Nelson Mandela (1991); Gerry Rawlings (1996); Robert Mugabe (1996); Olusegun Obasanjo (2002 & 2005); Thabo Mbeki (2003); Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete (2009).
16. See Fraser (1992) who engages the idea of the counter-public.
17. See Van Dijk, 1993, p. 94
18. Ibid.
19. Planno (1998) 'Polite Violence'.
20. See Davis (2006, pp. 211-215).
21. The Rastafari most sacred ritual, the 'Nyahbinghi', is a syncretic practice which has emerged in Jamaica over the last seventy years, drawing from the Eastern African tradition of colonial resistance through recourse to a spirit medium commanded by 'Queen Nyahbinghi'. This medium was perceived as the reason for the successful defence of the territory. Until her capture in the 1920s, she had the ability to inspire warriors to victory (see Hopkins, 1971). By some accounts Marley commanded such powers, and was thus recognized as a medium himself. Talamon (1994) refers to Marley as 'spirit dancer'; Chevannes (1999), as the 'apotheosis of Rastafari hero'. Marley is now considered a very powerful and unique African teacher and messenger.

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The Emergence of Public Spheres in Colonial Cameroon: The Case of Palm Wine Drinking Joints as *lieux de sociabilité* in Bamenda Township

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Abstract

Although Habermas might not have had Africa in mind when he propounded his public sphere theory, we still find his basic premise useful in capturing the public sphere scenario in Africa where people like to periodically congregate in various sites to socialize and indulge in political discourse while drinking. Using the case of colonial Bamenda township, this study examines the emergence and functioning of palm wine drinking joints as public spaces par excellence. These palm wine joints were comparable to European coffee shops and salons which were areas where various people could gather and discuss matters that concerned them. The palm wine joints were informal public spaces that emerged to respond to urbanization and cosmopolitanism, and stood out as one of the distinctive *lieux de sociabilité*. They were accessible to people of all classes and served as centres for drinking traditional liquor, gathering and spreading news and rumours, discussing politics and social issues, playing and dancing the 'bottle dance', and transiting to the 'red streets' to visit damsels after sucking in alcohol. The study relied on interviews and archival material as data for this article.

Résumé

Bien que Habermas n'avait surement pas en tête l'Afrique lorsqu'il avançait sa théorie de la sphère publique, nous trouvons toujours son hypothèse de base utile pour reproduire le scénario de la sphère publique africaine où les gens aiment se rassembler périodiquement dans différents sites pour socialiser et s'adonner au discours politique tout en buvant. Prenant le cas de la commune coloniale de Bamenda, l'étude

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examine l'émergence et le fonctionnement des bistrots à vin de palme comme des espaces publics par excellence. Ces bistrots à vin de palme étaient comparables aux boutiques et salons de café européens qui étaient des endroits où diverses personnes pouvaient se rassembler et discuter des questions qui les concernaient. Les bistrots à vin de palme étaient des espaces publics informels qui ont émergé pour répondre à l'urbanisation et au cosmopolitisme, et se sont distingués comme étant l'un des *Lieux de sociabilité* par excellence. Ils étaient accessibles aux personnes de toutes classes et ont servi de centres de consommation de boissons alcoolisées traditionnelles, de collecte et de diffusion de nouvelles et de rumeurs, de discussion sur des questions politiques et sociales, de jeux et de « danse de la bouteille », et de transit vers les « rues rouges » pour rendre visite aux demoiselles après avoir bu l'alcool. L'étude s'est fondée sur des entrevues et des documents d'archives comme base de données de cet article.

Introduction

Most contemporary conceptualizations of the public sphere are based on the ideas expressed in Jürgen Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Although Habermas's concept of public space has been subjected to multiple criticisms, reviews and interpretations by other scholars (cf. Hohendahl 2001; Freundlieb, Hudson and Rundell 2004) this author still finds his basic premise useful in capturing the public sphere scenario in Africa, represented by the periodic congregation of people in various sites to socialize and indulge in discourses, not necessarily orderly discourses, but any interaction whereby the interested public engages each other while relaxing in various ways including drinking, playing cards, eating or dancing.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere encompasses a variety of meanings, including social sites or arenas where meanings are articulated, distributed, and negotiated, as well as the collective body constituted by, and in this process, 'the public'. Thus, any area in social life where people congregate and freely discuss and identify societal problems and, through that discussion influence political action, constitutes the public sphere.

In the public sphere, social and political discussion and participation are enacted through the medium of talking, debating, entertainment and relaxation. From this complex web of interactions, public opinion is formed and refined in an informal way. Conceptually, the public sphere is distinct from the state because activities in the public sphere include the production and circulation of discourses that can be critical of the state. It is a counter-public to the state. The basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered

by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere as an alternative voice. President Ahmadou Ahidjo's one-party state in Cameroon was very sensitive to public opinion, and critical political statements emanating from the public sphere in the shape of bars and 'chicken parlours' were often monitored by the secret police and their authors sometimes paid dearly for them. The Ahidjo government viewed the public sphere as the thermometer of societal thinking as well as centres of subversion which had to be monitored by the state security apparatus.

This paper sets out to examine the emergence and functioning of palm wine drinking joints in twentieth century colonial Bamenda Township as public spheres par excellence à la Habermas. These palm wine joints were comparable to the Banta Bas or open spaces under baobab trees in The Gambia where men congregate on a daily basis to discuss and debate for hours and drink tea. Other comparable public spheres are European coffee shops and salons which were areas where various people gathered and discussed matters that concerned them. The public sphere was well established in various locations, including coffee shops and salons, areas of society where various people could gather and discuss matters that concerned them. The coffee houses in London were centres of art and literary criticism, which gradually widened to include even economic and political disputes as matters of discussion. Palm wine drinking joints in Bamenda Township, and Gambian Banta Bas, fall in this same category of public spheres and they also served as places of artistic creation, public opinion moulds, dangerous opposition politics, gossips, sinful behaviour or moral degeneration.

It is argued that the palm wine drinking joints represented public 'spaces and arenas' – together with the structures, processes, social actors and actresses and cultures associated with or built into them. The joints stood out as a distinctive *lieu de sociabilité* in Bamenda Township, specialized in the sale of native liquor, particularly palm wine, during the day and at nightfall with the weekends as the peak periods. As a public sphere, the palm wine drinking joints developed and functioned as regular meeting and discursive places for men and women; and such places became news and rumour generating machine, and a mandatory passage for men heading for the brothels. The palm wine drinking joints were also public spaces for the appropriation and reproduction of modernity through the bottle dance, an alternative form of high life music, and the centre for the discussion of the politics of independence.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part provides a background and deals with theoretical issues related to Jürgen Habermas's public sphere concept and its applicability to the African context, with reference to Bamenda

Township. The second part looks at the historical context of the development of palm wine joints as public spheres and discusses how these joints functioned in terms of the sociability of the actors and actresses. The third part examines how the public sphere served as sites for the appropriation and reproduction of modernity and political discourses. The problem of the governance of the palm wine joint is examined. The last part is the conclusion.

Writing this paper was partly facilitated by the fact that the author lived the dynamics of palm wine joints in Bamenda Township. He therefore made a collection of stories from his drinking mates. He also relied on interviews he had collected during research in the area in the 1980s. As a historian, resort was made to the archives for some salient information. This paper is therefore an introduction to the wider theme of public spheres as *lieux de sociabilité dans la longue durée*.

Conceptualising and Contextualising the Public Sphere

The public sphere refers to areas in social life where people congregate and freely discuss and identify societal problems and, through such discussion, influence public opinion and, inadvertently, politics. It is the sphere of private people who come together to constitute a public and engage in debates over general issues in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The public sphere is therefore a discursive space where private individuals or groups meet to relax and discuss matters of mutual interest and where possible, to reach a common judgement, which may be encomiums for, or a mild or scathing critique of, a political regime. It is in such physical spaces that political participation is enacted through the medium of talk and where public opinion is moulded (Benhabib 1992; Warner 1992).

The 'public sphere' mediates between the 'private sphere' or ordinary citizens (or the civil society in the narrower sense) and the 'sphere of public authority'. Whereas the sphere of public authority represents the state or the realm of the ruling class and the state security apparatus including soldiers, gendarmes and police, the public sphere crosses over both these realms and, through the instrument of public opinion, the state is sensitised to the concerns of its citizenry.

The public sphere is conceptually distinct from the state in that it is the site for the production and circulation of discourses that can be critical of or hostile to the state and may not be seen as an arm of the state. It is also different from the official economy in that it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, 'a theatre for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling'. These fine distinctions between 'state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic discussions' are essential

to democratic theory and governance. The public sphere is a regulatory institution against the authority of the state.

The study of the public sphere therefore hinges on participatory democracy from the angle of the influence of public opinion on government policy or how public opinion influences or regulates government action. The basic contention of the public sphere theory is that political action is influenced by the public sphere and the only legitimate governments are those who are sensitive to public opinion (Warner 1992, 2002). Experiences from the African political scene might not comply fittingly with the concept of political legitimacy and sensitivity to public opinion. Rather, the political sensitivity of African governments is to issues which might provoke their ouster, and that is where its importance lies.

Public sphere theory is admirably captured in Haine's (1996) *The World of the Paris Cafe: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914*. The Paris cafes, like palm wine drinking joints, were privately owned places open to the public for relaxation and they fall into the category of public spheres. The cafes had a remarkable presence in the political, social, cultural, and intellectual life of eighteenth and nineteenth century Paris. In French cafes, people freely expressed their opinions and any new work, or a book or a musical composition had to be endorsed in these places by its public to get its legitimacy. Such public spheres not only created a forum for self-expression, but in fact had become a platform for airing opinions and agendas for public discussion and endorsement. Cafes therefore stood as informal institutions that 'bridged the distance between public and private life, leisure and work, the individual and the family'. They also 'provided a unique space in which the tensions arising from such juxtapositions could be articulated' (Haine 1996:236).

The Paris cafes were important public spheres in French history owing to their importance as incubators of the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that killed and buried the monarchy for good. At secondary and high school, we used to be taught how the ideas of the philosophers, which contributed to the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, circulated in the Paris cafes. Haine treats the role of the cafe in the revolutionary eruptions of 1789-1794, 1830, 1848 and 1870-1871 and argues that cafe sociability helped to create and spread new ideas during periods of free expression. During the times of repression following these revolutions, cafes served as shelters and as places where the working classes could express themselves by insulting government officials and the police.

The palm wine leisure joints in Bamenda Township in Cameroon stood out as an equivalent of French cafes in some respects with an equally interesting historical role in impacting on public opinion and the political orientation of

Cameroon's path to independence. Palm wine is a multi-purpose socialization liquor, which Cameroonians, like other West and Central Africans who own palm trees, enjoy drinking, particularly during the evenings, and is used for libation, bride price and soothsaying, among other things. Palm wine drinking joints therefore bring people together. Tradition requires that all notables must sit and drink palm wine with the Chief (King) of the village on special days as a sign of fidelity, homage and togetherness.[1] In the Township, the typical village evening scene of togetherness and relaxation was recreated around palm wine joints, the only difference being that the clientele was cosmopolitan and the palm wine had to be paid for with money.

The palm wine leisure joint was a distinct African model of the public sphere in the sense that the class component of its constituents was not important. This model of the public sphere placed little premium on social differences or privileges. They were sites for the people of all backgrounds. This public sphere was therefore classless in the Nyererian sense of the word (see Nyerere 1967) unlike the Paris cafes. In a period when newspapers were near-absent and were only of limited elitist value, information dissemination and the formation of public opinion operated effectively within the medium of such palm wine houses during relaxation and entertainment moments. Even with the advent and popularisation of the radio, particularly in the postcolony, the palm wine joints remained effective news, information and opinion sites. These leisure joints represented 'spaces and arenas' – together with the structures, processes, social actors and actresses and cultures associated with or built into them – that bear on the daily lives of the Township population, and which are of organic concern to them by virtue of their individual and collective membership of the urban community.

In the palm wine leisure joints, traditional liquor was the dominant form of alcohol for Africans during British colonial rule in the Cameroons. Although the consumption of palm wine was ubiquitous in West and Central African villages, its importance took another dimension when the tradition was transported and reproduced in the Townships[2] for essentially commercial purposes. These palm wine joints came to mark a permanent aspect of an all-encompassing social life in Bamenda Township. The consumption of alcohol in these joints was not an end in itself but went beyond the attainment of happiness as painted by Willis.[3]

Historical Context of the Development of the Public Sphere in Colonial Bamenda Township

African Townships have exhibited different categories of public spheres as venues where people congregate frequently.[4] When such places are accessible to all classes and the principal activity there is consuming alcohol and

playing music,[5] they become extremely important as focal points for leisure and entertainment.

The growth of Bamenda Township was also accompanied by the emergence and proliferation of public spheres including traditional bars where native palm wine was sold, on-license and off-licence bars where European-style bottled beer, grape wines and spirits were sold, and night clubs, mosques, churches and brothels. The palm wine joints stood out as one of the distinctive public spheres that developed in the Township and specialized over the years in the sale of native liquor, particularly palm wine, during the day and at nightfall.

Bamenda Township developed hand-in-hand with palm wine leisure joints as the town created an enabling environment for the location of such business venues. Bamenda is a crossroads town and all the inhabitants of Cameroon's North West Region have to pass through the town before getting to their various destinations. The town owes its origin to colonialism and inveterate Hausa traders. Following the German annexation of Cameroon in 1884 and its ultimate conquest and subjugation, Bamenda was selected as the German administrative headquarters for the entire Bamenda region, now the North West Province, and the German administration embarked upon building a Fort to serve as the German Governor's administrative offices (Awasom 2003).

The German presence created relative peace and security in Bamenda and the Hausa in Northern Nigeria, who are traditionally traders, took advantage of the propitious atmosphere to migrate to Bamenda, starting in 1903. They initially camped around the German Fort at the Bamenda up station before being displaced to the Mankon-Bamenda vicinity downtown. There, the Hausa created a new quarter, which they named Abakpa, and the place came to be known as Abakpa-Bamenda Township. The Hausa immigrants are therefore the real genesis of the Bamenda Township (Awasom 2003).

The Bamenda Township provided opportunities which attracted other ethnic groups into the area. The tax records in 1934 indicated over 5000 taxable males and a mixed bag of ethnic groups comprising the indigenous Mankon, Bali, Bamum, Bamileke, Igbos, Fulani, Banso, Meta and a host of isolated ones.[6] Essentially, the increasing population of Bamenda was fast becoming heterogeneous. Like other townships in Africa, Bamenda was a place for business and highlife, and the palm wine joints were a major spot of attraction and festivity after a hard day's work.

The palm wine leisure joints developed in Bamenda Township from the private initiative of women who followed the emerging town to cater for the needs of its cosmopolitan population. Mama Ngum is credited to have commenced the first palm wine joint in a haphazard manner in the parlour of

her sun-dried brick house. The success of her business paved the way for other women to enter the trade by building their own sun-dried brick houses to serve as palm wine joints. In the 1930s and 1940s, the palm wine joints were located exclusively at the north-eastern crossroads area of the Township. The joints were littered along the same street about some 200 metres east of the Hausa Abakpa quarters.[7]

Before the introduction and popularization of modern lager beer in Cameroon, local liquor, including palm wine[8] and corn beer reigned supreme. Palm wine consumption at palm wine joints is what gave Bamenda Township an atmosphere of regular festivity, although of different tempos. As Madoeuf notes:

> Indeed a town is viewed as the expression of the wish to be together, it is through the feast that this wish is confirmed. Also, the feast is the expression of what Michael Maffesoli calls 'social viscosity', this strange impulse that prompts people to attach themselves to each other (Madoeuf 2005:68).

Local liquor, including palm wine and corn beer, was responsible for pulling people to these *lieux de sociabilité* in the township. People tended to relax over calabashes of palm wine to kill the evening hours and tell old stories.

Corn beer was also sold at palm wine joints. It is manufactured from fermented corn from which two varieties are extracted. The first is called 'shah' and is whitish in colour. The second, called 'nkan', is brownish like Coca-Cola and is extracted from fried maize. The two varieties of corn beer have the capacity of getting somebody thoroughly drunk. Corn beer was also sold at palm wine joints to cater for the needs of certain customers who preferred it but the principal activity of the joints was the drinking of alcohol which opened the chapter to other social activities.

Mode of Relaxation, Gender and the Drinking Pattern in the Joints

The palm wine drinking joints were rendezvous sites meant for entertainment and relaxation and were run exclusively by women. The explanation for the monopoly of the trade by women is that food also had to be provided in the palm wine joints to serve as a foundation before the commencement of drinking and women customarily cook for their families in Africa. Since food was an important complement to drinking, women tended to combine selling cooked food and palm wine. Men restricted themselves to transporting the palm wine to town and selling it to their female customers who took over the responsibility of retailing them in their respective joints. So, while men specialized as tappers and suppliers of palm wine, women tended to concentrate on selling the liquor. A social network was therefore established in the palm wine industry from the male producers and distributors to the

female buyers and retailers. The interfaces between the rural palm wine sellers and the urban buyers were sites for a preliminary type of discourse and the dissemination of information.

The palm wine leisure joints were real rendezvous and socialization spots in Bamenda Township, the most populous town in colonial British Southern Cameroon. Although drinking palm wine was a daily evening activity of the people, weekends and pay time at the end of the month were the busiest moments at the joints. How was drinking generally organized by customers of palm wine leisure joints?

Drinking in the palm wine joints did not take place in a haphazard manner. Within the unique space of the palm wine drinking joints, the people developed a distinctive subculture with its own order, structure and rituals. The world of the public sphere, as Hauser (1999:69) notes, consists of cultural norms and common meanings from which interaction takes place. The people in palm wine joints followed a specific communal pattern of drinking that was dictated by African traditional etiquette in the villages. The calabash or bottle of palm wine that was purchased was poured into the cup of each member present in the joint, usually starting with the oldest or a title holder. Each member present in the joint took his turn to buy a round of palm wine when the one being consumed was exhausted. If an individual was broke, he could continue to drink for free in the belief that when his economic situation improved, he would also buy for others. Anybody who arrived in a palm wine joint and bought a bottle of palm wine had to serve his neighbour first as a way of starting a conversation. Although an individual could buy a bottle or gourd of palm wine liquor, the common rule was that he had to share with others who in turn would also buy for him and continue the sharing process. Generosity and sharing, and not individuality and selfishness, was the rule at palm wine leisure joints.

Each time a calabash of palm wine was emptied by the group, the dregs of the palm wine would be poured into the cup of the identifiable elders in the group as custom and tradition dictated. Men took the dregs in the belief that it augmented and improved their sperm content and sexual potency. The drinking cups were usually fabricated from the horn of a cow or dwarf cattle, and in only rare cases were modern drinking glasses used. Kola nuts often accompanied the drinking of palm wine and were bought and shared as a sign of solidarity.

There is a popular Cameroonian saying which states that the truth lies in the cup which means that when people booze, they tend to speak out their minds more freely without any restrictions. Drinking goes hand in hand with discussion. Hauser (1999:64, 69-70) notes that public spheres usually formed

around certain issues that were deliberated on and the discussion would reproduce itself across a spectrum of interested publics who do not necessarily know each other and might be meeting each other for the first time. People would converse freely but with respect for their customs and tradition in mind with reference to age hierarchies and traditional titles. Such social differences were easily noticeable from the way an individual appeared and was dressed, the cap an individual wore and the way the cap was decorated. That notwithstanding, people in palm wine joints generally mixed freely and spoke their minds without any restrictions. No matter how heated debates became, fighting or assault was not culturally tolerated.

Palm wine leisure joints operated in the day and night. After doing business in the day, most people would pass through the palm wine joint and have a bottle of palm wine and cooked food. Daytime business was business as usual without much colour. Sometimes children could be seen assisting their mothers in selling.

Nightfall was usually a period of peer group gathering at the palm wine joints. Night business was another story because it was pretty busy and only adults were its main actors. The palm wine leisure joints were generally considered wayward milieus in the night because of the presence of men and a handful of lady sellers who mixed drinking with the use of obscene language. The near-decent women sellers would retort to men's obscene utterances in sexy innuendos while the shameless ones would call a spade a spade, or the penis the penis, to the pleasure and laughter of the men. The more embarrassing a woman was with her usage of sexy language, the more notorious she became and the more customers she would attract, who would come for a tease. Palm wine leisure joints were therefore places par excellence for the formulation of new sexual vocabularies. 'Decent' women therefore preferred to stay away from palm wine leisure joints after night fall for fear of being blacklisted as wayward.

The palm wine that was sold at nightfall was called 'over night'. It means it had been allowed to ferment for about two days and therefore had a high percentage of alcohol that would make heavy consumers drunk. Men preferred the fermented palm wine because of its high alcohol content, which would easily get them 'high' and in a mood for singing. Men who had business with the 'red lights street' preferred highly fermented palm wine.

Palm Wine Leisure Joints as a Stop-over to Red Light Streets

The palm wine leisure joints served as a stop-over to the red light streets in Bamenda Township, popularly known as Bayangi Quarters. The red light street was littered with brothels dominated by the Bayangi women from Cameroon's South West Region (Fomin 2004). Men would pass some time

at the palm wine joint, drinking highly fermented palm wine, singing suggestive sexual songs and consuming 'traditional Viagra', composed of bitter kola nuts and special chewable roots. Bitter kola nuts used to be sold exclusively at palm wine leisure joints, the reason being that they were meant for sex. But the popularity of the bitter kola and its alleged medical potency in cleansing the body's system displaced the nuts from palm wine joints to market places.

When a man requested a package of traditional Viagra in an indiscreet manner while drinking palm wine, it usually provoked thunderous laughter for it was clear to all where such a man was heading to. After taking the traditional Viagra, it would be pushed down with some gulps of fermented palm wine in readiness for action. If a female artist or commercial sex worker smelled palm wine on a man' lips, the assumption was that the man must have taken traditional Viagra; consequently, such a customer would be expected to pay a higher fee since he would likely spend an unusually long period with the artist on the bed and would break her down. Some female artists deliberately refused to have anything to do with men who were suspected to have taken traditional Viagra because such men would substantially reduce the number of customers the artists would have had that night since Viagra consumers were alleged long rangers.

Women artists from the red streets sometimes went to the palm wine leisure joints to assist the female wine sellers for free in selling their commodities. The artists were often most welcomed since their presence, and sometimes their sexy dress styles, made the palm wine leisure joint attractive to customers. Women who were new arrivals also had an interest to go to the leisure joints in the evenings to advertise themselves and possibly catch a customer instead of just sitting indoors. Palm wine leisure joints were not only venues for drinking and meeting people but also places for music and politics.

The Appropriation and Reproduction of Modernity and Political Discourses in the Joints

Whereas coffee houses in London were centres of art and literary criticism, palm wine joints were also milieus for the appropriation and reproduction of modernity in the form of popular music. If there is anything for which the indigenous Mankon people of Bamenda Township are known, it is the bottle dance. Bottle dance stars such as John Menang, Richard Nguti, Ni Ken and Depipson (Nyamnjoh and Fokwang 2005:261) have been popularised by the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). What is hardly known is that this genre of music developed in palm wine drinking joints. Initially, the palm wine consumers would sing and dance their traditional music when they had taken

much palm wine.[9] With the spread of popular music in the form of high life, the urbanites quickly appropriated it and gave it a completely new twist.

The development of popular high life music in Cameroon dates back to colonial times and is closely related to urbanisation. Popular highlife music that was being played in Ghana and Nigeria[10] reached the Cameroon urban centres, thanks to powerful radio transmitters and individuals from these centres of high life music (Nyamnjoh and Fokwang 2005:254). High life music was also played in a popular nightclub in Bamenda Township called Waterside Bar. But such nightclubs were elitist and exclusive.

In the palm wine leisure joints, the popular music played in modern bars was appropriated in another way by the people bent of demonstrating their up-to-date-ness with modernity. In the absence of guitars at the initial stages in the 1930s and 1940s, these modernists had to improvise music with bottles as the main instrument. Guitars were later acquired and were used alongside the bottles. The palm wine musicians sang a modified version of the popular music to communicate critical messages that caricatured the colonial elite, particularly their snobbishness and claims to superiority and their habits of monopolising all the beautiful women. With the introduction of political parties, hired bottle dance musicians often entertained people drinking by playing pro-government songs. The entertainer used a metal object to hit the bottle while another played the guitar and sang away. Then ladies and gentlemen would be invited to engage each other on the floor and they would dance according to the command of the lead singer. The bottle dance display on a grand scale was reserved for special weekends, special occasions and pay time. But during the week, isolated musicians would sing and play their guitars, accompanied by the bottle sounds just to please people in the leisure joints.

As the bottle dance grew in importance, it was displaced from the palm wine joints to the Township community hall on selected Saturdays reserved for the big dance for reasons of space. The women palm wine sellers would be organised on such occasions to supply wine to keep the occasion going. But the palm wine leisure joints remained the place for the production of bottle dance. Today, there are several Bamenda Township musicians who have specialised in playing a modernised version of the bottle dance whose origins can be traced to the palm wine joints.

Palm wine joints served as informal media centres in a society where newspapers were extremely difficult to come by until the early 1960s. Frequenting the palm wine leisure joints was a regular practice of urbanites, not just for drinking but for the simple reason that they had to meet there to be informed about the latest socio-political events in town. There was always a story teller, a philosopher king, or a distinguished individual who would engage people in conversation on a variety of topics or simply entertain

people with stories. Keeping away from palm wine joints meant missing a lot in town and appearing really backward. The best source of information on the latest in town was therefore the version from the palm wine joints.

Politicians had to socialize with the people in the palm wine joints in the evenings. They would order and pay for rounds of palm wine to customers as a prelude to being given the floor to make political statements in favour of their political programmes.

Prince Ndefru, the President of the Township palm wine joints, grew in popularity as the people's arbitrator. He was therefore openly wooed by politicians with the formation of the first two political parties in the Southern Cameroons in 1953, the Kamerun National Congress (KNC) of E.M.L. Endeley and the Kamerun People's Party (KPP) of M.N. Mbile (Chem-Langhee 2005).

During political campaigns preceding the United Nations plebiscites on the independence of the British Cameroons, which was contingent on joining either Nigeria or the French Cameroons, the various political protagonists used the palm wine joints to sell their programmes and discredit their rivals through rumours. The pro-Francophone Cameroon politicians spread rumours about the impending dangers of voting to join Nigeria by alleging that Igbo men were raping native women on a daily basis and compelling native people to buy their goods at exorbitant prices. Nigeria was presented as 'an ocean' that would drown the small British Cameroons in the case where it opted to join Nigeria while the aggressive Igbo traders would not give Cameroonians any breathing space in the economy. As for the pro-Nigerian politicians, rumours were spread to exaggerate the state of civil war between the anti-French guerrillas and the Ahidjo government in a bid to scare people from voting to join the Francophone Cameroon Republic. Francophone Cameroon was presented as a chaotic and lawless society where civil liberties did not exist and where the gendarmes continuously terrorised the population. Palm wine joints therefore served as propaganda and rumour-generating centres. Politicians hired bottle dance musicians to propagate their political manifestoes through their music. It was therefore a matter of paying the piper and calling the tune in palm wine joints.

The Public Sphere and the Question of Governance

As the palm wine joints grew in importance and popularity, the indiscipline and harassment arising from such places from the hands of hoodlums necessitated the establishment of a governance structure. The British colonial administration in the Cameroons was particularly thin on the ground, given that the Cameroons was more of an appendix of Nigeria and Britain was

more concerned with its Nigerian colony than with the Trust territory of the Cameroons. The women palm wine sellers at the joints wanted the township administration under the British-appointed Hausa Chief, the Sarikin Hausawa, to be more active in the affairs of the palm wine joints. The Hausa Chief was reluctant to involve himself in palm wine matters because of his Muslim religion. The women quickly resorted to Prince Ndefru, a native of Mankon-Bamenda Township, who was a big patron of the palm wine joints, to oversee their administration.

Ndefru accepted the presidency of the palm wine joints in the Township and all conflicts related to the operation of the joints were brought to him for arbitration.[11] For instance, Prince Ndefru's council of arbitrators policed the palm wine joints, and handled cases of fighting or refusal to pay for drinks consumed. The local government, the Ngemba Native Authority, came to recognise Ndefru's role in the palm wine joints and with the colonial administration, they enlisted his services in collecting taxes therefrom.[12] Although women were the principal proprietors of the joints, the organisational chart was composed exclusively of urban males under the leadership of Prince Ndefru. The Prince was popular among the palm wine women dealers given his imposing position as a native of Bamenda. Essentially, Prince Ndefru was catapulted to an enviable position of President of the palm wine joints in the Township because the British-appointed Hausa chief turned down the offer.

The emergence of Prince Ndefru as the President of the palm wine joints in the Township resulted in strained relations with the Hausa immigrant community. The Hausa community was uncomfortable with the activities of the palm wine joints because of political, religious and security reasons. The British-appointed Chief of the Township, the Sarkin Hausawa, complained bitterly to the British colonial administration that Prince Ndefru was undermining his authority by interfering in tax collection matters in the urban area. He complained that it was unacceptable for the palm wine joints to operate within the residential areas of the Hausa Muslims in the Township. Apart from dealing with alcohol which was offensive to Muslims, the palm wine joints were presented as unsafe places where hoodlums operated freely at night and gambling, fighting, prostitution were part of the palm wine business. The Sarikin Hausa requested the British to ban the sale of palm wine around Muslim Hausa quarters and to expel all women around the palm wine joints who were not involved in any visible gainful activity.[13]

The native peoples felt the Sarikin Hausawa had gone too far. Palm wine joints were their business in their native land and immigrants had no right to determine which business they should do. Moreover, palm wine was a cultural aspect of their lives. The British refused to displace the palm wine joints,

which was the business of the native peoples and a source of taxable revenue for the local administration.

The conflict of authority between Prince Ndefru and the Sarikin Hausawa was resolved within the context of local government reforms. In 1949, the British initiated local government reforms which transformed the Native Authority system into a modern local government system. This reform package included the democratisation of local governments to allow the inclusion of educated elements, and the representatives of various ethnic and interest groups, including women, in the Township. The reforms culminated into the establishment of a new local government known as the Mankon Subordinate Native Authority Council or the Mankon Urban Council in 1954 as the governing body of the Township.[14] The membership of the urban council was all-embracing and comprised the women palm wine sellers, Prince Ndefru, the Sarikin Hausawa and other representatives of interest groups in the Township.

The Councillors were divided into committees responsible for various domains including health, sanitation, education, finance, customary affairs and land issues. Women of the palm wine joints now had a voice under the local government reforms as their representatives could also sit in council. Perhaps the greatest victim of the reforms was the Sarikin Hausawa. His influence was considerably neutralized since the Hausa immigrants were a minority in the council and decisions had to be taken democratically and collegially. The dream of stamping out palm wine joints in Abakpa Bamenda Township died its natural death, as the Muslim minority could not take any decision against the majority indigenous and cosmopolitan non-Muslims of the Township.

Conclusion and Epilogue

This study set out to explore the emergence of the public sphere in colonial Bamenda Township. Dovetailing Habermas's theory of the public sphere which used European salons and cafes as discursive arenas, this study has revealed how the palm wine leisure joints in colonial Bamenda Township were equally public spheres par excellence where men and women regularly congregated. These public spheres were leisure joints performing multiple functions and were part and parcel of the urbanization process in twentieth century Cameroon.

The palm wine leisure joints as public spheres were accessible to everybody irrespective of class. Men drank palm wine and shared kola nuts at the palm wine leisure joints regularly as a normal way of life in the urban context, which was a reproduction of similar practices in the villages. But in town, the company at the palm wine joints was usually a mixed bag of ethnicities

and native liquor in the joints had to be bought and was not on free offer as often happened in the countryside. These leisure joints were not only centres for drinking, but also for entertainment, news, rumours, politicking and dating, particularly artists of the red streets. The leisure joints were also places where high life music was transformed into bottle dance music which served not only for entertainment purposes but also as instruments of political propaganda and a critique of society. At the penultimate stage of the British Cameroon's independence, contingent on a merger with either Francophone Cameroon or Nigeria, palm wine joints became the centre stage of independence politics.

The palm wine joints actually gave the Township colour and vibration, and they soon developed governance structures to arbitrate and oversee their smooth functioning. The local government reforms that the British initiated in 1949 culminated in the integration of the governing structure of the palm wine leisure joints and the women palm wine dealers.

The palm wine joints as public spheres were subjected to changes in terms of location and importance in the postcolony. The leisure joints were initially located exclusively at the northeast crossroads area of the town and palm wines supplies came almost exclusively from the native Mankon people. The forces of change broke this monopoly. As Bamenda Township expanded, swallowing neighbouring towns like Nkwen and Mendakwe through the process of conurbation, the northeast crossroads leisure joint was challenged by the mushrooming of other rival joints, which continued to operate the same way.

The changing economic fortunes of Cameroon in the 1970s, reflected in the boom in the prices of agricultural exports and the advent of petrol, witnessed the popularization of beer drinking in bars, on-licenses and off-licenses ('les ventes emportés') by the emerging middle class. In other words, alternative public spheres emerged with a completely different culture that competed effectively with palm wine drinking joints.

Palm wine drinking joints, as public spheres, might not enjoy their old monopoly; but they have come to stay as permanent places in the Township with a special clientele who find fulfilment in them. The ordinary folk remain its first and faithful clientele and continue to give it colour by the old stories they tell of the yesteryears. If the ordinary folk cannot afford beer from the modern breweries, they can still get 'high' in the palm wine joints where they drink away the trials of a hectic day and tell the stories of old or make their own news.

Notes

1. The British exiled Fai Ndzenzef, an important notable in colonial Nso in Cameroon's North West Province, partly because he had stopped drinking palm wine with the King of Nso in his palace and it was suspected he was up to making trouble and breaching the peace (cf. Awasom, Nicodemus Fru, 'The British Invention of Tradition and the Fai Ndzenzef Affair', Occasional Paper, University of The Gambia, 2006).
2. The town, as opposed to the countryside or rural environment, has its distinctive characteristics typified by its cosmopolitanism and the preponderance of secondary and tertiary activities. Towns in Africa have an old history and their growth is always related to the colonial presence, population movements and trade, among other factors (Cf. Hirsch and Fauvelle, 2004: 9-34).
3. Willis (p.265) states that the sole purpose of consuming alcohol by individuals was to achieve happiness. The brewing and consumption of alcohol is done in a bid to achieve this happiness.
4. Mosques, churches, and football stadiums, among others, are examples of such places that have been studied (cf. Cantome, Cleo, 'The contemporary mosque phenomenon as lieux de sociabilité: gender, identity and space', Fancello, Sandra, 'Du village au temple: les assemblée pentacôtiste comme espace de sociabilité en milieu urbain africain', Benjelid, Abed, 'Le stade de football: un formidable lieu de sociabilité et integration des jeunes de la périphérie pauvre de l'Oran, Algerie').
5. For interesting sidelines on drinking and music venues in urban centres in Africa see Fourchard, Laurent, Sheben, 'Sociabilité et pouvoir en Afrique du Sud au XXe siècle', Collins, John, 'A century of changing locations of Ghanaian commercial Popular Entertainment Venues'.
6. National Archives Buea, Cameroon, Annual Report for the year ending 31 December 1935.
7. Interviews with informant 1, Bayong, John, aged 55. Businessman and the son of a title holder from Mankon who told old stories about the palm wine joints of his traditional Mankon. Buea, Cameroon January 3-5, 2000; Informant 2, Awasom Stephen Anye, 75. Father of author and a stylish bottle dancer. His memory about palm wine joints were always fresh. Stories collected from him between 1980-1985 and 1998-2000 in Mankon-Bamenda; Informant 3, Pa Monikang, Alexander, 74 years. Native of Mankon and an excellent oral historian. A genuine lover of palm wine joints who tells his story in a musical fashion, particularly about the bottle dance and the red street queens Stories collected from him between 1980-1985 and 1998-2000; Informant 4, Ndenge, Alphonse, aged 78. Notable from Mankon and a retired educationist. Interviewed between 1980-1985 and during Summer holidays of 1999; Informant 5, Alhadji Usman, Bah, Hausa trader in Mankon town, son of the Sarikin Hausawa, aged 60. He was interviewed with six other Hausa people in February 1984 during collection of data for my Doctoral thesis for the University of Yaounde 1.

8. Palm wine is extracted from palm trees, raffia palms and to a limited extent, dead palms. It is obtained by tapping sap from a variety of palm trees, which produce different types of palm wine.
9. Interview with informants 1-5.
10. For interesting sidelines on highlife music in Ghana see Collins, 'A century of changing locations of Ghanaian Commercial Popular Entertainment Venues'.
11. See Informants 1-512 Provincial Archives Bamenda/Cameroon, Pa/Bda 10027, 1949.
12. Provincial Archives Bamenda, Cameroon, Pa/Bda 10027, 1949.
13. Nicodemus Fru Awasom, 'The Vicissitudes of twentieth-century Mankon Kings in Cameroon's Changing Social Order', in Wim van Binsbergen, ed., *The Dynamics of Power and the Rule of Law*, Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2003, pp.108-111.
14. Provincial Archives, Bamenda, File No. Ba/1934/b, Mankon Subordinate Native Authority.

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Interviews

Informant 1, John Bayong, aged 55. He is a businessman and the son of a title holder from Mankon who told him old stories about the palm wine joints of his traditional Mankon (interview with author on January 3- 5 in Buea/Cameroon, 2000).

Informant 2, Stephen Anye Awasom, 75. Father of author and a stylish bottle dancer. His memories of palm wine joints were always fresh. He tells the stories graphically, sings and dances away about palm wine joints which are losing the original significance (Stories collected from him between 1980 and 1985 and 1998-2000).

Informant 3, Pa Alexander Monikang, 74 years. Native of Mankon and an excellent oral historian. A genuine lover of palm wine joints who tells his story in a musical fashion, particularly about the bottle dance and the red street queens. (Stories collected from him between 1980 and 1985 and 1998-2000).

Informant 4, Alphonse Ndenge, aged 78. Notable from Mankon and a retired educationist. (Author interviewed him between 1980 and 1985 and during Summer holidays of 1999).

Informant 5, Alhadji Usman, Hausa trader in Mankon town, son of the Sarikin Hausawa, aged 60. He was interviewed with six other Hausa people in February 1984 during collection of data for my Doctoral thesis for the University of Yaounde 1.