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- ● Adaption und Kreativität in
- ● Afrika – Technologien und Bedeutungen in der
- ● Produktion von Ordnung und Unordnung

**Eva Riedke** (Ed.)

## **THE ORDERING POWER OF NARRATIVES**

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**Eva Riedke** (Ed.)  
**THE ORDERING POWER OF NARRATIVES**

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Working Papers of the Priority Programme 1448 of the German Research Foundation  
**Adaptation and Creativity in Africa: technologies and significations in  
the making of order and disorder**

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# I About the Working Paper Series

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## Overview to the Working Paper Series

The SPP 1448 “Adaptation and Creativity in Africa”<sup>1</sup> held its second biannual results-conference in October 2014 in Saly, Senegal. Out of the discussions at the conference three Working Paper were organised. The Priority Programme has during the course of the past four years formed three ‘clusters’ to bring together the different topics, theoretical interests and regional contexts of the individual research projects. In these three clusters, the researchers concern themselves with ‘technologies’, ‘narratives / significations’ and ‘space’ as specific ‘conceptual lenses’ through which to explore the overarching objective of the programme, namely how creative adaptations enact specific forms of institutional dis / order. Aiming to elicit fruitful discussions within, but more importantly also between these three clusters, the format of the second biannual conference in Saly, Senegal centred on the presentation of short ‘vignettes’.

The vignettes as a format promised to enable concise, insightful presentations of current empirical findings. In course of the conference, the ‘thick descriptions’ from the field were subsequently to be set in relation to the overarching framework of the Priority Programme and its key concepts *adaptation*, *creativity* and *dis / order*. Thus, the conceptual discussions were informed by rich empirical situations. Each vignette provided direct insights into the empirical material of the individual projects. This conference format was deliberately designed to circumvent all-encompassing project presentations and to facilitate a comprehensive discussion on possible conceptual and empirical avenues of the research programme.<sup>2</sup>

Conceiving vignettes as either a conceptual description of a particular situation (e. g. a meeting witnessed), a speech act (e. g. a radio show), a dispute (e. g. over the erection of a monument), the use of a technological device (e. g. a rapid malaria test), – or a combination thereof – sought to allow for the presentation of vivid portrayals from the field, to enhance the representational richness and thereby fuel inspirational discussions within and between the overarching clusters. Selected speakers, in turn, commented upon the vignettes in each session, either providing specific commentaries from the perspective of the individual clusters or more generally pointing to the manner in which these vignettes allowed for new conclusions to be drawn within the larger framework of the SPP 1448.

At the same time the format and the discussions it evoked allowed to carve out important differences and commonalities between the three clusters. For example, each cluster points to a

- 1 The Priority Programme 1448, funded through the German Research Foundation (DFG), focuses on current transformations in Africa and examines creative adaptations that enact specific forms of dis / order. Since 2010 more than 15 interdisciplinary projects – in collaboration with partner institutions worldwide – have contributed to this research agenda (for an overview of the participating institutions, researchers, and projects see [www.spp1448.de](http://www.spp1448.de)).
- 2 The junior researcher of the SPP met in the summer of 2014 to collaborative design this format. In a number of reflexive discussions and by going back and forth between what were deemed ‘classic’ presentation mode, vignettes were finally chosen as a more ‘open’ form of conference contribution.

different set of theoretical and methodological approaches to address dis/ordering practices. In this sense they sensitise the researchers to review their own empirical material in a certain way. Yet, clustering research findings does not mean to produce conceptual homogenisation – quite the contrary. Thinking dis/order through technology, signification and space opens up a discussion to draw together different objects of study, regional contexts and theoretical thinking. Thus, it is important to note that the aim of the clusters is not to rethink space, technology or significations and to provide a new comprehensive generalisation on these concepts. Rather the research findings presented in the clusters all show how these concepts can be fruitfully utilized to examine practices of order and disorder.

Finally, the discussions during the conference were marked by the then recent outbreak of Ebola in West Africa and. It was for example a painful reminder on the way global health infrastructures are often far from being functional in local settings precisely because the technologies, standards and people that these infrastructures circulate are often not creatively adapted to local contexts. In this sense the Ebola crisis gave a particular urge to the research agenda of the SPP 1448. But the close proximity of unreasonable death also put the finger on the ethical and moral dilemmas of doing research and organizing conferences in periods of distress. It heavily contested the idea that academic research can be apolitical or does not need to address current developments outside the established comfort zones. Here, the Ebola crisis helped the researchers of the SPP 1448 to review their own theoretical and empirical vantage points on contemporary challenges in African contexts.

### **About the structure of this Working Paper**

This Working Paper includes six vignettes that all draw on *narratives* as a sensitising concept. During the course of the conference, two sessions were devoted towards discussing the manner in which narratives can be conceptualised when focusing on practices of dis/order in African contexts – the vignettes appear here in the same order in which they were presented. The Working Paper starts with a brief introduction that provides an overview of recent theoretical debates that have had an influence on the on-going discussions in the priority programme. The vignettes that follow document the empirical material that was presented at the conference in Saly, Dakar. In a final section, the Working Paper comprises two commentaries on the vignettes, each providing a very specific reading of the material presented and suggesting new avenues for subsequent analyses.

## II The ordering power of narratives

### Introduction

Eva Riedke (University of Mainz)

Richard Rottenburg (University of Halle)

When focusing on creative adaptations that enact specific forms of institutional dis/order — as the priority programme has set out to do — the question remains what ‘lenses’ and analytical concepts provide a privileged perspective for understanding these processes. Within the SPP 1448, the objective has been to employ technologies and significations as ‘sensitising concepts’ (as defined by Blumer 1954). Significations, like technologies, are seen to be part of world-making processes by constituting meaning through a particular set of practices. The task of this working paper, through a presentation and subsequent discussion of six empirically grounded ‘vignettes’, is to conceptualise significations in relation to ordering practices (*in addition see the SPP working paper on ‘technology’ and ‘space’*). There are no doubt different vantage points from which to commence such an endeavour. In the following introduction, we suggest a focus on *narratives* as a fruitful entry point. This is not only to understand the ways in which meaning is produced, transformed or contested but also to formulate a conceptual framework for further generalisations about significations and the emergence of new institutional orders.

Conventionally, the realm of ideas and sense-making — which can be named differently according to the aspect one wants to emphasize: culture, semantics, web of beliefs, signification, narrative, etc. — is dealt with separately from the realm of the material world. While there is a long genealogy of contributions that have sought to challenge the separation of the material from the ideational, the recent proposal that so-called material-semiotic assemblages cannot be disentangled analytically without in fact losing the problem that one is trying to tackle, is more radical. This proposal is the consequence of the logically preceding claim that reality, like nature, is not simply “out there”, while ideas are “in here” — i.e. in the human minds representing reality more or less accurately. It is rather assumed that reality is permanently in the making, that humans are involved in the enactment of realities, and finally, that they do so not under conditions of their own choosing. An emphasis is placed on how actors and groups of actors are forced to struggle with an environment that is the sedimentation of previous actions. The core point of this claim is that the agents of those actions are not humans but heterogeneous material-semiotic assemblages (Law 2004).

If one subscribes to this view of things, it seems inconsequential to produce one Working Paper on narratives as a form of sense-making and one on technologies as a material form of ordering practices. In turn, we hope that the empirical case studies of this collection work to show that narration is used as a starting point for ethnographic inquiries that then go deeper to include material and technological dimensions. In analogy to this, we have published another Working Paper that uses technology as a starting point on the level of the material and then engages with the ideational dimensions of sense-making.

## Narratives — Mapping current strands of influence<sup>1</sup>

What does a ‘narrative lens’ allow us to see? On the one hand, this question seems to grapple with the general impetus of the post-structuralist movement, namely that meta-narratives – for instance, of emancipation and progress – have been abandoned (Lyotard 1984; Rorty 1991; Boltanski 2011)<sup>2</sup>. On the other, it is situated alongside the ontological presupposition that has remained strong in social sciences since the ‘narrative turn’ in the 1980s, namely that narratives constitute a fundamental form of ‘sense-making’ (Barthes 1977; Bruner 1986; Polkinghorne 1987). Essentially, the answer to the question may thus be that research endeavours adopting a ‘narrative lens’ must convincingly situate themselves between these two understandings. In what follows, the objective is not to provide an all-encompassing overview of old and new approaches in narrative research, but rather to map out the current strands of research and theoretical avenues that have had an influence on the SPP 1448’s conceptualisation of ‘narratives’ in the makings of order and disorder.

In an effort to highlight a series of perspectives, but also point to the complex interconnections that exist on the basis of common tacit assumptions, we draw attention to a) the basic premises that underlie an understanding of narratives as a fundamental form of sense making – particularly tracing the shift from seeing narratives as representations of experience and reality towards considering narratives as an ontological condition of social life itself; b) we take a more specific look at what is meant by a narrative interpretation of experience – considering in particular the manner in which narratives are seen to mediate our possible ways of being in the world; c) we consider how these perspectives in their sum begin to define narratives as an important conceptual and methodological tool for understanding political realities around us; and lastly, d) point out some of the implications that have developed out of post-foundational research perspectives – especially the material inscriptions of narratives as well as the constitutive influence of material and non human actors in narrative constructions.

### Narratives as a form of sense-making

While an early focus on narratives was limited to that of a particular representational method or form, subsequent research perspectives developed along predominantly two strands. Those who uphold an epistemological position investigate narratives as representations that produce meaningful orders and therewith construct a particular reality. As an analytic binary, others have conceptualised narratives as an ontological category, investigating the way narratives characterise our way of being in the world (Meretoja 2014; Somers and Gibson 1994, Somers 1994). Hereby a general distinction can be drawn between such epistemological and ontological positions in the sense that former conceive of a narrative primarily as a) “a cognitive instrument for imposing meaningful order onto human reality or experience” and that latter posit that narratives b) characterise “the human way of being in the world, that is, something constitutive

- 1 The text has greatly profited from the very inspiring discussions at the SPP 1448’s junior researchers workshop in Wermelskirchen (March 2014) and the conceptualisations inherent in the forthcoming vignettes. We are also immensely grateful to Sara de Wit for ordering our thoughts on this topic.
- 2 As Law (1998, 91) sums up what Lyotard (1984) meant by his rejection of meta-narratives; “He [Lyotard] talks about incredulity to meta-narratives, that is beliefs, forms of storytelling, that act as foundations: firm foundations upon which other more specific forms of belief and action can be built”.



of human existence” (Meretoja 2014, 89). Empirical expressions of this reframing are manifold and are marked by many more distinctions. Somers and Gibson (1994, 2), however argue that they all illustrate the overarching shift from recognising narrative as a predominantly representational form, to ascribing it an ontological significance<sup>3</sup>.

Philosophers of history, for example, have previously argued that narrative modes of representing knowledge (telling historical stories) were representational forms imposed by historians on the chaos of lived experience (Mink 1966; White 1984). More recently, however, scholars are postulating something much more substantive about narrative: namely, that social life is itself storied and that narrative is an ontological condition of social life. Their research is showing us that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that experience is constituted through narratives; that people make sense of what has happened and is happening to them by attempting to assemble or in some way to integrate these happenings within one or more narratives; and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public, and cultural narrative.

Meretoja (2014) has argued that the conceptual differentiations today between epistemological and ontological dimensions are only helpful to a certain degree, and that when ascribing to the idea that it is through narratives that we come to know, understand and make sense of the world, it is the *intertwinement* of these two dimensions that becomes significant (see also Viehöver 2012, 73). Transcending this analytic distinction helps us to understand narratives as told and narratives as lived as mutually constitutive.

Premised on a recognition of the ubiquitousness of narratives – in everyday life and in all forms of social practice – Czarniawska (2004, see also 1997, 1998) has sought to empirically illustrate the manner in which narratives can be considered as a fundamental *mode of knowing*. She builds on the works of Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1987), who both contrast a *narrative way of knowing* with a *logico-scientific mode of knowing* when drawing on basic concepts of literary theory<sup>4</sup>. “Humans are irrevocably locked into a perception of the world”, through which events are understood sequentially, i.e. parsed into a linear series of experiences usually in a chronological order and indicating some kind of causality and underlying ‘plot’ or explanation (Hazel, 2007: 2). To ascribe meaning to experiences that may otherwise appear ‘analogue’ – continuously variable and seamless – humans provide them a place in narrative constructions (ibid.). “The narrative mode of knowing consists in ordering experience with the help of a scheme assuming the intentionality of human action” (Czarniawska 2004, 7). The inherent power of a narrative as such does not reside in the differentiation of truth or falsity, but rather in forms of sequentially – in its *plot* (ibid; Roe 1994). Alternative narratives are always played out against each other, and thereby ‘power’ and ‘attractiveness’ of particular narratives are defined by an openness for negotiating meaning (Bruner 1990 cited in Czarniawska 2004, 9 – see also Czarniawska-Joerges 1995).

3 One must note that at the time of writing, this was still truly perceived as a ‘shift’ being established. See Somers and Gibson (1994) for a lengthier discussion.

4 Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1987) in their works contrast the narrative mode of knowing with the logico-scientific mode of knowing (*a distinction first elaborated by Lyotard, 1979*). While the narrative mode relies on sequentiality (and a *plot*) to organise experience and to indicate a form of causality, the logico-scientific mode relies on proofs of truth or falsity. According to Bruner (1986), the two modes of knowing are irreducible to one another. According to Fisher (1984, 1987 cited in Li 2014), narrative reasoning is indeed crucial to logico-scientific reasoning whereby the first subsumes the second.

Beyond a focus on narratives as a *mode of knowing*, Czarniawska (2004) also highlights as central the notion that narratives constitute a common *mode of communication*—and hereby follows Fisher’s (1984) conception of the human being as *Homo Narrans*. People tell stories to entertain, to teach and to learn, to ask for an interpretation and to give one (Czarniawska 2004, 10). According to Fischer (1987), a *narrative mode of communication* is also premised on a narrative rationality, which can be set in contrast to the conventional model of formal rationality, whereby human communication is supposed to follow the rules of ‘formal logic’ (ibid). Similar to the manner in which ethnomethodologists reconceptualised rationality (following Alfred Schütz), it implies a concern for ‘situated rationality’ whereby, “members to an organized arrangement are continually engaged in having to decide, recognize, persuade, or make evident the rational [...] of [their activities]” (Garfinkel 1967, 32). Thus, interactional order is not a matter of an externally imposed rationality, but an inherent and locally negotiated dimension of the situation itself. From this perspective, narratives are devices for making sense of social action. Tracing narratives as modes of communication does not only allow for an exploration of the way knowledge is transferred, but also enables us to unpack the scientific, moral, ethical orders that are constituted through this transfer.

### The narrative interpretation of experience

According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), what becomes discernible when tracing some of the dominant trends in the field of recent narrative research is a particular view of experience. Therein, the authors point to a specific ontology of experience inspired by pragmatist philosophy and the writings by Dewey. As Clandinin and Rosiek (ibid, 39) summarise, experience is for Dewey “the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry – narrative or otherwise – proceeds”. Inquiry of any sort, in turn, results in new relationships between individuals and their environment. To quote Dewey (1981, 251): “In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it.” Social, cultural, and institutional narratives are taken to define how individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (ibid, 43). But also following Dewey, a narrative is hereby not understood by actors simply ‘as it is’. Instead, actors “actively contextualize the narrative so that it fits in with their own organizational situations and their broader knowledge and experiences. This means that they apply their own frames of reference to assess and elaborate on the meaning of a narrative” (Dewey 1997, 199 cited in Garud et al. 2011, 593). In sum, lived experience becomes the beginning and ending points of any narrative inquiry: people are always seen as “composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, 43).

A crucial point remains, as Meretoja (2014, 101) notes, that narrative interpretation of experiences is an endless process “in which the past is constantly re-narrated in relation to the present and future, and that narrative is only one of the many modes in which we make sense of our experiences”. The process is a dynamic one, in which “countless narrative fragments form ever new constellations, engage in relations of conflict, and dialogue and are subject to endless revisions”. In the works of Ricoeur (1984; 1985; 1988) a three-stage model is proposed through which to similarly conceptualise the relation of narratives to action. Without explicating the model in any detail, particularly interesting is the idea that in the stage that Ricoeur refers to as *configuration*, actors seek recourse from an already interpreted life-world (*Handlungswelt*).

Thus, *configuration* implies a more or less creative synthesis of the heterogeneous — factors as heterogeneous as events, actors, means and goals are set in relation to each other in a dynamic, meaningful manner (Ricoeur, 1984: 65). One could also speak of a *translation process* that is necessary to transfer meaning from one context to another. Ricoeur reminds us that actors generate on the basis of a certain ‘reading’ new evaluations of time and reality that, in turn, have consequences on the world and the actions it evokes (Ricoeur 1984; 1985; 1988; Goldthorpe 2002, 86, see also Dowling 2011). In *Time and Narrative* (1984; 1985; 1988) he emphasises, that cultural webs of narratives, of which we are only partly aware of, play a role in shaping not only our sense of who we are — mediating our relation to the world — but also shape our horizon of interpretation (Meretoja 2014, 96ff).

The notion that narratives appear essential in defining possible ways of being — of displaying *existential possibilities* — very much continues to inform current trends in narrative research. In addition, the critical and reflexive capacities of actors has however been ascribed a new centrality, replacing an emphasis on actors’ dispositions with an emphasis on critical competencies. Actors are afforded the capacities to critically identify narratives “as cultural constructions which lack any self-evident natural basis” (Meretoja 2014, 103); to make ‘additions’ to narratives, to ‘reframe’ narratives (their *plot*) against the background of new experiences, and to ‘tie back’ fragments into their everyday practices (Gadinger et al. 2014, 30). Viehöver (2012) has argued that the objective of narrative analysis is, at a larger scale, to illustrate the manner in which narratives themselves are employed under conditions of uncertainty to construct and deconstruct, re-interpret and reconfigure meaningful compositions of issues, institutions and categorisations. In situations of uncertainty, grappling with concerns over ‘*what matters*’ and what ‘*should matter*’<sup>5</sup>, actors are able to critique the functioning and reproduction of the social order (Boltanski 2011, 56f; Calkins 2016). Through this notion of a dynamic ‘drawing together’ of that which is heterogeneous, narratives provide a basis for the opening up of actual and ‘possible worlds’ (Ricoeur 1991). It is not only that through narrative we come to know, understand and make sense of the world, but through narratives and narrativity, we can also identify fundamental “ways of world-making” (Goodman 1978)<sup>6</sup>. Central herein is always a conceptualisation of actors who are by no means simply subject to structural forms of misrecognition or ‘masked’ by the narrative constructions that surround them. For empirical investigations, these studies suggest that a focus on narratives also offers a new pragmatic approach for understanding critique, experiences, moralities, and emotions. The theoretical edge of this shift is to do away with an artificial conceptual sphere and to situate analytic capacities within the field and not outside of it.

5 Boltanski draws a distinction between ‘reality’ (the whatness of what is) and ‘world’ (everything that happens). ‘Reality’ is hereby nothing but a construction or a projection sustained through institutions and our interactions with others — orientated towards ascribing stability and permanence. It is the orderly structure of institutionalized arrangements. The ‘world’, in contrast, is incalculable and constantly confronts a rigid institutionalized ‘reality’. By adhering to institutional codes and narratives, actors create the boundaries of ‘reality’. Moments of uncertainty, in turn, open up possibilities for challenging these boundaries.

6 Parallels can at this stage also be drawn to the works of Victor Turner (1980, 167f) who considered the function of narratives in relation to rituals. He defined narratives as “an appropriate term for a reflexive activity which seeks to ‘know’”. His argument, as paraphrased by Mitchell (1980, 2), was on this basis that “narrative, like ritual, is not simply in opposition to the forces of disorder and chaos but is a way of bringing on disintegration and indeterminacy in the interest of unpredictable transformations in a culture or individual”.

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## Narratives and political practice

One central aspect for narrative studies has been to investigate the relations between narratives and power. These studies show how narratives justify, legitimize, and challenge political rule, the manner in which they underlie both relations of domination and relations of resistance. In consequence, a particular rich discussion on narratives and political practices has emerged, which provides a number of fruitful analytic and methodological suggestions. Seeing politics as fundamentally defined by multiple on-going narratives, a key objective has been to identify and unpack the multiple frameworks of interpretation that characterise disputes and conflicts as well as the relations of specific actors therein. Particularly from a post-structuralist perspective, an emphasis has been placed on rendering visible the contradictory nature of narratives as well as their inherent instability and fluidity. Drawing on Viehöver (2014a, 72–73; see also Gadinger et al. 2014), we can identify four central, albeit highly interrelated, dimensions of narratives set in relation to political practice: a) *performance*—narratives constitute an important medium of political communication; b) *political rule*—narratives play a central role in processes of (de)legitimizing political leadership (consider: national foundation myths, utopias, dystopias); c) *power and authority*—political actors readily seek to exert (and ultimately gain) control over circulating narratives (consider: dominant and hegemonic tales, counter narratives, conflicts of interpretations, processes of institutionalisation) and d) *Plot*—through the linkages that tie different elements into a meaningful whole, narratives feature in the configuration, production, diffusion and reception of (politically relevant and politicised) knowledge as well in as arousing (collective) emotions.

Von Trotha's (1995) notion of a 'national basic narrative' or 'basic story' (*Basiserzählung*), which he understood as a country's cultural and political institutionalized version of the past, captures these four dimensions by Viehöver (2014a) quite illustratively. Von Trotha (2004, 2) defined the basic narrative as "that construction of the history of a society and culture, which contains the dominating legitimacy construction of the past. [...]. It is the benchmark of the collective political self-image of a society". Particularly during periods of political transformation, the political uses of history—in terms of the reference to, appropriation and manipulation of the past—constitutes a form of symbolic power that is central to the establishment and legitimisation of the social and political order. While the power to define and institutionalise a particular version of the past becomes an instrument of power in the present, the establishment of alternative interpretations (counter narratives) equally constitutes a form of 'resistance'. The political currency of historical narratives, as White (1987: ix) has pointed out, is due to the fact that these are far from being a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes. As he writes, they are rather "the very stuff of a mythical view of reality, a conceptual or pseudo-conceptual 'content' which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence and charges them with the kinds of meanings more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought".

A number of studies have suggested that narratives can be analytically clustered according to their specific '*ordering functions*'. One example of this has been the identification of so called '*policy narratives*'. Drawing on key insights from this particular realm of narrative analysis may serve to illustrate the *interrelated* nature of the aforementioned dimensions of narratives in relation to political practice that have been delineated so convincingly by Viehöver (2014a). According to Roe (1994, 51–52; Radaelli 1999, 663), the function of policy narratives lies in "underwriting (that is, establishing or certifying) and stabilizing (that is, fixing or making steady) the assumptions needed for decision-making in the face of what is genuinely uncertain and complex". Roe (1994)

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emphasises the manner in which a course of action is implied: “Less hortatory and normative than ideology, policy narratives describe scenarios not so much by telling what should happen as about what will happen – according to their narrators – if the events or positions are carried out as described” (1994, 36–37; Radaelli 1999, 663). Policy narratives have a particular function. They become ever more important in situations characterised by high degrees of uncertainty, socio-technical complexity, and political polarisation. Their function is to ‘objectify’ a course of action and to translate the complexity of a policy problem amenable to action-oriented decisions (Czarniawska 1997, 12–13). Approaching narratives from such a perspective shifts the conceptual task to the description of specific qualities inscribed in narratives. Political, religious, modernization or economical narratives, to name only a few, all allow constructing analytic differences between the various forms in which narratives appear.

The focus on controversies further elucidates some of these dimensions. In the plethora of scientific and public controversies that exist, individuals and groups with differing interests establish contrasting ‘stories’ to explain or make sense of the issues at hand. According to Garvin and Eyles (1997), over time, a so-called meta-narrative develops into the dominant story or explanation of the controversy – underwriting and stabilizing particular assumptions. Significant appears not only the notion that in this process a) a series of transformations occur, translating uncertainties into political certainties (ibid), but b) also that with the development of a dominant meta-narrative and the concomitant persistence of counter-narratives, the on-going activities of actors are enabled or constrained within a given political field. Controversies offer an empirical space to trace these dynamics. Besides their conceptual value for understanding the making of meta-narratives, controversies can also be seen as methodological entry points, where knowledge, people and technologies are deconstructed and reconstructed by actors in the field themselves. The task of the observer is then to understand how narratives are constructed and how actors are given voice through the roles and characterisations they are ascribed as well as the manner in which they are positioned vis-à-vis other actors (Viehöver 2014b, 130). Tracing moments of contestation, stages of interpretative flexibility as well as processes of closure, effectively allows us to draw out networks of relations (Engelhardt and Caplan 1987; Martin and Richards 1995).

### **Materiality, non-human actors and networks**

Li (2014: 80) illustrates the manner in which narrative-based approaches can effectively be combined with perspectives from actor network theory (ANT). ANT posits that in order to understand how entities are inscribed with meaning “the recruiting and aligning of heterogeneous elements and interests” need to be rendered visible. Narratives, while working on different levels, allow us to trace how ‘agency’ is constituted, and related thereto, how narratives persuading and legitimating on behalf of particular, competing accounts of reality (or futures) also serve to configure ‘power relations’ in the field (Viehöver 2014a, 73–74). The idea that narratives mediate the relationships between actors in a given field, can briefly be sketched out with reference to two structuralist-inspired frameworks. Firstly, Greimas (1987), building on Vladimir Propp’s morphology of folktales and Levi Strauss’ study of myths, proposed that narratives *cast* the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of actions. Narratives, he argued, could be broken down analytically in terms of ‘actants’— “idealized, abstract generic story elements that lack specific character, detail, facticity or agency until they are operationalized within a storytelling plot” (Li 2014, 83f). These *actants*, as conceived by Greimas (1987), can be humans, but also objects, institutions or a general form of abstraction, that together, through their associations,

constitute a complex network. Narratives, as for instance that of climate change, can hereby be seen as setting *actants* in a particular relation to one another<sup>7</sup>.

In relation thereto, a second perspective emphasises that recognition must also be paid to the role of hegemonic actors (or *actants*) therein. Sødeberg (2003) draws a distinction between ‘sensemaking’ and ‘sensegiving’. Sensemaking’ is taken to encompass processes that construct and reconstruct meaning. These can be seen as efforts geared towards making sense of actions, events and objects, or of explaining the relationships between them. Sensegiving, in turn, is different and describes the active attempts to influence the sensemaking processes of others. This is then referring to those practices that try to influence perception and interpretation by presenting a preferred definition of reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, 442 cited in Sødeberg 2003). While structuralist in its ontological assumptions, both frameworks enable explorations, from a social constructivist’ perspective, of the “institutional forms of action and interaction”. They describe the “identities, capabilities and projects” with which actors are infused through narratives (Robichaud 2003, 38). Both approaches shift the attention towards understanding the qualities of relations between different actors. In these relations, so they argue, a valuable vantage point is generated to describe how action is determined, how networks are configured or how dis / order is produced.

A number of recent studies have critically engaged with structural approaches by arguing that networks (or structures) are always fluid, relational and therewith contingent. The main point of this scholarly debate is to show that in order to maintain the complexity of the empirical world – i.e. to relate to the multitude of differences, entanglements and foldings – it is impossible to identify a fixed or stable foundation that explains everything. As Marchart (2007, 2) has put it: “The ontological weakening of ground does not lead to the assumption of the total absence of all grounds, but rather to the assumption of the impossibility of a *final* ground’ (emphasis in original)”. Due to the absence of an ultimate justification (*Letztbegründung*) these approaches are often coined as post-foundational. Central to them is that they find constitutive and empirical tangible elements not by pointing to single actors or by discovering super-structures but rather by offering analytic tools that grasp action, power, or society in dispersed spaces and multiple times. There seems to be a tendency of post-foundational approaches to escape in abstractions with their own conceptual vocabulary and with few attempts to ground them in empirical findings. However, for the analysis of narratives these approaches open yet another space for investigation.

Barthes (1977, 79) argues that a “narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories”. Hereby he makes clear that ‘narratives’ must essentially be understood as constituting far more than spoken or written text. Efforts to implicate the centrality of ‘material inscriptions’ for the ordering power of narratives continue to assume ever-new trajectories<sup>8</sup>. Finding expression in a post-foundational research agenda, these have included a) an engagement with the “symbolic and mnemonic potency of objects” – defining objects as things to tell stories *with* or *about* or to narrate meaning *through* as well as b) the constitutive influence of non-human

7 It is interesting to note that early writings of Actor Network Theory preferred the term actant in order to overcome the human connotation of actor. However, some interpreted this wrongly as an analytic distinction between human and non-human actors. Therefore recent scholarly work associated to ANT is therefore only using the term actor for all entities that act, or to which activity is granted by others (Latour 1996).

8 While a recognition of the constitutive influence of non-human actors – including technologies and material objects – has been firmly established in the social sciences, an application of its underlying assumptions in the field of narrative analysis have been less frequently implicated – exceptions include Humphries and Smith (2014); as well as Joerges and Czarniawska (1998) and Latour (1991).

actors, technologies and material objects as producers and participators in narrative construction (Humphries and Smith 2014). Latter implies an analytical approach in which objects are considered more than mere props *within*, containers *for* or passive backdrops *to*, but are in contrast, approached as non-human actors with the capacity to do something (ibid; Latour 2007). In consequence, these approaches turn our attention not only to the multiple ways narratives can exist but also to the multiple worlds they enact.

The following vignettes each in one way or another, speak to the briefly summarised conceptual frameworks outlined in this introduction. The strength of these empirical explorations is not seen to lie in their conceptual homogeneity. Instead, the heterogeneity and openness of the vignettes is intended to offer room for a broader discussion on narratives, significations and the production of order and disorder in African contexts. We prompt you, as the reader of this text, to develop your own readings of the empirical situations presented here. With this introduction, we would like to encourage you to share your thoughts, critique, comments, additions or suggestions with the authors of this Working Paper.

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### III Vignettes

## 1 'The Cocaine Saga': secrecy, visibility and the truth of politics and the economy in Sierra Leone

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**Act one: Under the palm tree, Makeni January 2012 — Of African Minerals and (un) humanitarian business.**

Together with Maberr<sup>1</sup> and Pius I'm sitting in the scarce shade of an oil-palm tree, drinking Momo's freshly tapped palmwine. As every Sunday, Pius has attended the mass with his wife and has joined us afterwards. Yet there is not much of the church's solemnity to be sensed in Pius anymore. Furiously he comments Sierra Leone's national politics. Maberr has provoked him for having lost a huge sum of money given to him by his wife. Instead of paying his tuition fees, Pius had 'invested' the money with the *Wealth Builders*, an investment company allegedly promoted by the president of Sierra Leone, which turned out to be a fraudulent scam. In Pius' eyes the government should protect its citizens from fraud, instead it complies in criminal activities as every government before. He lists people who had financed the president's election campaign now sitting in prison. Though, he adds, the majority has left the country due to connections into highest political ranks. Pius mentions the favourable license conditions and tax exemptions granted to mining companies in exchange for the construction of several 'presidential mansions' around and outside of the country. As many others in Makeni, Pius suspects the mining companies of not only carrying iron ore to the port, but also diamonds and gold. Some weeks before a *debul*, a bush spirit, had haunted the region. As many people in Makeni, Pius reads this as an alert for the immoral mining activities which had unearthed the spirit. Yet, instead of stopping the activities, as many people had asked for, the President had sent powerful experts to catch the *debul* and to ensure the continuation of mining.<sup>2</sup> Selling the country to foreigners, the president had become the richest man in Africa in only four years of presidency. Pius' voice cracks with anger:

1 All names are pseudonyms.

2 Due to the limits in length for this vignette, I cannot elaborate on this particular narrative of the *debul* haunting the materially, morally and socially wounded landscape. People identified "free-masons" — or "free-mansions" as they often called them, linking them and their invisible powers to the unfathomable riches of the national elite — as the extraordinary powerful experts trying to appease the *debul*. The narrative is part of people's negotiations of and discussions about power, value and morality in northern Sierra Leone, as I investigate into in my doctoral dissertation.

"*African Minerals*<sup>3</sup>, the 'Timber Saga' [...] and you remember the 'Cocaine Saga'? Foreigners can land with tons of cocaine. When they found the cocaine in [the airport], the brother of the minister of transport was involved. The minister had to step down. But he only went for medical treatment to the diaspora. Now he is back as a presidential advisor. The plane they used, it was a Red Cross plane. Now they say, it was fake. How can I believe them? They are fake politicians! The Red Cross did this before. [...] During the war they landed in Kabala or Mayagba, bringing weapons which the rebels paid with diamonds. White men, rebels, the president, everybody made big money. [...] Now the NGOs go away, but the companies come. [...] Last month police confiscated a container of *African Minerals*. They bring cocaine and go with our minerals. [...] A big blow for the president, after the 'Timber Saga'. He brought them in. But nothing will happen. [...] You see those moneymen now building their mansions? Like here in Makoro. Nobody knows what exactly is going on there. People disappear when they do their rituals. One thing is sure, we, the people, we pay the price" (Fieldnotes, Makeni, January 2012).

Stories about secret mansions and human sacrifices for acquiring political power are ubiquitous in these days, but Pius' remarks about NGOs and the *Red Cross* being involved in dubious activities arouse my curiosity. Since I came first to Sierra Leone, I have heard various war stories about Ukrainian mercenaries, about soldiers, vehicles and aircrafts bearing insignias of 'humanitarian' organizations, yet acting 'inhumane' or profit-oriented. It is for the first time, though, that somebody so comprehensively and explicitly claims historical continuity with war-time trickery and exploitation when accounting for today's criminal activities. These accounts of present criminal activities, these 'sagas', go beyond people's everyday experience with violence and exploitation. They involve huge amounts of money and highly illustrious individuals – stretching people's imagination to its limits. Pius' stories might sound excessive, yet they reflect the travesties of Sierra Leone's present economy and politics. They share commonalities with other narratives in which different people claim to penetrate surfaces of dissimulation to unveil the underlying secrets behind people's endeavours to enrich themselves.

## **Act two: In the INTERPOL office, Freetown December 2011 — The (un)intelligibility of Red Cross drug flights.**

I never took people serious when they warned me about the cold that *harmattan* would bring from the Sahara in December. The chilly breeze I'm feeling now, hits me thus rather unprepared and I'm thankful for the hot *Nescafé* David has offered me in his Freetown office of the INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization) *National Central Bureau*.<sup>4</sup> Dressed in a black suit, David only feels comfortable with the air conditioning turned to the maximum. Sitting in a heavy leather arm-chair, he carefully sips his coffee from a cup bearing the banner of 'Manchester United FC'. Only his head looks out from behind

- 3 *African Minerals Limited* exploits iron ore deposits in northern Sierra Leone. The unprocessed gravel containing iron ore is mainly shipped to China. Employing a considerable number of people and investing in different visible infrastructure projects, many people in Makeni assessed though the company's impact on the socio-economic landscape far more positively than Pius. Although links between *African Minerals* and drug trafficking could never been substantiated, rumours persisted among people in Makeni.
- 4 David is a fictitious person assembled from the various officers I talked with in national law enforcement agencies. These people did neither exclusively work for INTERPOL and the Sierra Leone Police in general. I opted to defamiliarize identities to protect my informants which talked about highly sensitive issues.

a notebook and a desktop computer, and the files piling up on his desk. While explaining to me the rationales, the successes and the failures of TOCU, he is constantly interrupted by phone calls and people bumping in. “Sorry, man, there is this operation going on, and I have to coordinate”, David apologizes. “It’s at the port, we have intelligence about drugs in a container”.

As will learn during my research, ‘intelligence-led’ and ‘centrally co-ordinated’ operations are the two guiding principles and *raison d’être* of Sierra Leone’s INTERPOL branch, cited in every document produced by and about the agency. Accordingly, David emphasizes the lack of coordination in the past leading to failures in the fight against organised crime. In his story of the day, the mere availability of intelligence, which is gathered by various agencies is a minor problem, subordinate to the lack of coordination<sup>5</sup>:

The year before, a helicopter had landed on one of the most prominent hospitals in Freetown, provoking hysteria, confusion and rumours among people witnessing the landing, but also among law enforcement personnel. A newspaper article reported:

*“Panic gripped the environs of the Choithram Memorial Hospital yesterday when a white Helicopter landed without the knowledge of the authorities of the hospital. [...] Past experience that bothered on clandestine Helicopter landing at the Choithram Memorial Hospital with alleged consignment of cocaine revisited the minds of the people. By then, word had gone round the City of Freetown that Chief Tony, as usual has landed a consignment of suspicious material” (Standard Times 2010).*

In David’s understanding of proper coordination and standards of procedures, the aviation authority should have been informed about the landing of the helicopter. They should then have passed the information onto the *Office of National Security*, which would have given a clearing: A white Puma, D-HAXR, registered in Germany – formerly flying for the *Bundesgrenzschutz*, then for the *United Nations*, and now for the *West African Rescue Association* –; an emergency flight carrying medical drugs to the hospital. Yet the information got stuck somewhere. Local police was called, journalists rushed to the hospital, and everybody spread her own version of the landing of the huge white helicopter, resembling a UN, Red Cross or NGO helicopter. David concludes his account:

“We learned in the end that the helicopter carried medicine for a foreigner who had been bitten by a rabid dog. But the people around saw that something was offloaded [...] and it could easily have been something like cocaine. [...] All this happened because of the lapsing coordination” (Fieldnotes, Freetown, December 2011). Over the coming months I met David several times in Freetown. For some weeks I lived in his house, where we indulged in our passion for tennis and football, yet also discussed his job and its challenges. When I ask him one day in a bar in central Freetown about the rumours of containers arriving up-country, packed with excavators, generators, and narcotics which are repacked for further shipment, he admits TOCU’s difficulty to generate intelligence about the flows of drugs.

*“But we can gain insights by comparisons with other countries such as Guinea-Bissau. The countries are so similar. Cocaine is there. So why should it not happen here? [...] There*

5 INTERPOL and other national law enforcement and security agencies rely on various sources providing intelligence. Whereas David stresses the problems of coordination, another problem is given by the difficulty of generating intelligence and getting access to available intelligence which is often retained by international agencies which are meant to collaborate with national agencies.

*are signs which you can read and which tell you, if something is suspicious. [...] To bring the truth to light, you have to be clever and know to read hidden patterns. You make your analysis and interpretation based on the evidences and experiences you have. I like to learn from other experiences, I read assessment papers from other countries. And we have our own experience with the past. I told you about transports under wrong flags. Or the flags are authentic, but the load is different to the specification. [...] But we are always one step behind. You remember the helicopter, which carried medicine? We arrived late, because there was confusion. Somebody made confusion. We are not sure, if there was not something else. [...] Like with the container where we found some cocaine. There must have been much more. Perhaps they trans-shipped it at the key or on the sea, we don't know. [...] We have clues from the past in which certain people played a very unfortunate role" (Fieldnotes, Freetown, December 2011).*

In his daily work, David relies thus on his personal translations of information he gathers from various sources, spanning through time and space. He combines or coordinates these disparate evidences to meaningful and convincing truths about criminal activities. For this he delves into the unknown and invisible. He breaks through the sometimes illusively transparent, sometimes opaque surface, bringing to light and making graspable the actual truth underneath, struggling though with its constant elusiveness.

### **Act 3: In the arm-chair, Konstanz 2014 — Delving into secrecy and visibility.**

Ordinary people see themselves similarly confronted with the visible impacts of flows of people, goods and capital moving into and out of the country, but also into gated communities and fenced-off production sites where these flows undergo secret transformations which escape people's gaze and perception. With their narratives, as for example the 'Cocaine Saga', the 'Timber Saga' or the saga-in-the-making about *African Minerals*, people make the hidden and secret activities visible and understandable, trying to approach and better cope with the forces that they will never be allowed to touch. Secrecy and visibility, and their dialectical tension are familiar tropes in Sierra Leone where secret societies and secret knowledge characterize local and national politics. Secret societies spectacularly perform their secret knowledge of powerful secret transformations. Diviners, hunters and warriors enter the dark — the night and the bush — for appropriating forces for the visible rejuvenation of themselves and the community. Current juxtapositions of visibility and secrecy therefore touch upon local cosmologies and actualise "predisposed public opinions" (Ferre 2012). Different rumours thus spread about the involvement of the government, NGOs, the *Red Cross* or transnational companies in disquieting secret activities which have very visible and often violent impacts on the country and common people's lives. These institutions become the target of rumours exactly because of their bifurcated existence: on the one hand, their everyday activities are highly visible and supposedly well-known; on the other hand, they engage in a highly secret sphere of crucial and inscrutable negotiations and productions from which they extract their unfathomable power.<sup>6</sup>

6 Due to spatio-temporal restrictions for this presentation, I abstained here from explicitly embedding issues of rumours, in/visibility, in/explicability, suspicion and occult economies into (anthropological) theoretical debates. See e.g. Ashforth 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2002; Geschiere 1997; West and Sanders 2003; White 2000, 2001.

David has a university degree and went through extensive training abroad, which, as he says, “enlightened” him. He has left his village and its traditions behind, joined a Pentecostal church and claims to believe only in “scientifically provable evidences”, contrary to many of his fellow citizens trapped in “superstitious beliefs” in rumours. He can rely on intelligence generated by various agencies and has access to internet to gather information. Yet, at the same time, access to certain information is foreclosed for David by institutional and infrastructural obstacles. He has to rely on his experience, his wits and ability to interpret and construct a whole out of pieces. In their narrative constructions of and claims to truth about current criminal or immoral activities, law enforcement officers and ordinary people similarly rest upon pieces of past experiences and specific ‘cultural’ knowledge of secrecy and visibility. Eluding irrefutable verification, these narratives might further veil the hidden ‘truth’. As much, however, it makes them appealing for tentatively approximating and acting on the invisible ‘truth’.

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## 2 The impact of planning legislation and informal arrangements in Dar es Salaam

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### Introduction

Dar es Salaam in Tanzania is among the fastest growing cities in Africa, with over 70% of the city consisting of informal settlements. For urban residents and the poor in particular, a residential plot also represents income-generating opportunities and essential livelihood assets. However, many of these income-generating activities can be supported or hindered by planning regulations and / or neighbours' activities. On the one hand, overly rigid standards, like exclusively residential zoning, can have a restrictive impact on the livelihood strategies of urban settlers. On the other hand, the absence or the non-application of formal regulation in settlements can also hinder income-generating activities due to e. g. restricted accessibility when densities increase or when land uses are contested. Secondly, the absence of regulations can also have a negative impact on livelihoods as a consequence of the resulting unhealthy living conditions. The aim of this vignette is to sketch out how formal planning regulations are applied; what kind of development processes are deployed; how the evoked transformations impact the livelihood strategies of residents; and which land-use conflicts typically take place due to a lack of development control. The case studies cover both planned and informally developed areas.

### Example 1: Good will and proactive avoidance of conflicts

This building has attracted my interest for a long time. Surrounded by old single-storey constructions, there is one multi-storey building made of steel and glass in the planned settlement of Sinza. It looks like it comes from another world. What is the story behind it? First, I asked neighbours: *"It is now a new function hall. There was one open hall before. But the old hall produced a lot of solid wastes and liquid wastes,"* a neighbour explained. *"The waste came onto the streets but now with the new building the problem is solved,"* another added. *"Also there was a lot of noise from the hall during the functions and it disturbed us at night time,"* another resident complained, and a shopkeeper from the other side of the road stated: *"Cars of the people visiting the hall parked up to my front door. Sometimes they broke the walls of my house so it was really a problem."*



Fig. 1: Redevelopment of a function hall to avoid conflicts with neighbours.

The owner of the large function hall realised that his business could only run smoothly if the neighbours did not complain. He therefore reconstructed his premises to accommodate parking on the ground floor and an air-conditioned soundproofed hall on the first floor. *“Yes, we faced problems with neighbours due to noise pollution from our former open hall. We were forced by them to reconstruct a soundproof hall.”* Although this involved high investment costs for the entire construction, it nevertheless made sense to him, since he will no longer face complaints from the neighbours and can run the business without problems. Officially the planning authorities never asked the owner to make changes. He did so proactively to ensure a good relationship to the neighbours. The direct complaints of the neighbours to the owner worked well without involving governmental officials.

### Example 2: Limited power of local authorities

Another example from Sandali, an informal settlement in Dar es Salaam, however, displays a different picture. In Sandali, most areas are covered by white sand and the space between the buildings is kept clean. Children play in the area, trees provide shade, women pick up water from the standpipes, and some shops and small scale workshops serve the settlement. The recent upgrading of the settlement with an open storm water system has improved the living conditions of the residents. They greet me in a friendly manner and are welcoming. Only one place looks different: the sand is muddy and dirty, nearly black, a bad smell is in the air and the workers do not greet me but rather look away or even show signs of hostility. Here, a workshop for used oil recycling is operating in a residential backyard. The workers are covered in the black oil that stands in huge barrels. The surrounding residents have complained about the pollution caused by this dangerous activity: *“Our area looks very dirty due to dirty oil produced by our neighbours. It also produces a bad smell which is disturbing us all the time.”* But the complaints



Fig. 2: Used oil recycling workshop in the informal settlement of Sandali.

did not produce any reaction from the operators. So the neighbours went to their local administration. The sub-ward leader replied: *“I am not able to stop these activities since the operators are only tenants, and the landlord is living outside the settlement and therefore not accessible to me.”* Only after termination of the current valid rental contract would he be able to direct new activities on the plot, was his excuse. This case shows the limitation of local regulatory systems with limited power to execute rules when economic activities of potentially greater influence are involved and when the issue extends beyond the mandate or power of the officer.

### Example 3: Commercial activities in public open spaces

From the backyard oil workshop in Sandali, I turned back to Sinza. There is a planned open space inside Sinza. It was planned in the 1980s as the green heart of the neighbourhood. Huge trees



provide shade and the temperature is comfortable. However, it is not the green area for leisure activities as intended. It is now used for commercial activities such as repair workshops and canteens for labourers. The area is full of waste and the material of the workshops, construction and repairs are going on, the place is busy and loud. In one corner an open-air canteen is preparing lunch for the workers.

The fieldwork revealed that neither the residents, nor the operators, nor the local authorities were fully informed about regulations that existed to protect the open green space. However, the operators were aware of the fragile legal status of their presence. They had received only a temporary permit issued by the local authorities to use the space. They know about the disturbances they cause and try to avoid open confrontation with their neighbours. They have started informal negotiations and made agreements to ensure co-existence with the surrounding residents. “No, we have no certificate for land-use changes. We got authority to change the use from the local government but only a temporary permit,” one worker stated and a resident added: “During the day when they come to collect with lorries, they make a lot of noise, but it is for a short time and usually we are informed, so it is fine with us.”

The operators of businesses and workshops are aware of the disturbances they cause (such as deliveries which block entrances for a period of time) and recognise the need to negotiate arrangements with the neighbours. Such a response, however, cannot be seen in the case of the night bars in the very same area, as discussed below.



Fig. 3 and 4: Workshops and canteen on a planned open space.

#### Example 4: Commercial activities: Night bars versus residents, music versus the need to sleep

Along the main road in Sinza, the well-planned neighbourhood with mainly residential houses changes its appearance significantly. Residential houses give way to shops and bars, the road reserve and space along the storm-water drain are used as a beer garden. From afternoon to long after midnight, the bars are full of guests, mainly from outside Sinza. “Sinza is the beer garden of the entire city,” an old resident complained. “Just behind me there is a bar which most of the time plays music up to midnight, so you can’t do anything at night.”

“We have problems here especially with the noise which comes from the bars around here at night. I heard that the local government stopped them playing music without soundproofing, they stopped once but then they started again.”

These outdoor bars, which are mainly frequented by guests from outside Sinza and which are also owned by people from outside Sinza, cause problems for the residents due to noise at night, unpleasant smells and the uncontrolled parking of cars. In the case of one bar, adjoining settlers



Fig. 5: Disturbing commercial activity: A bar with loud music after midnight.

won a court case on noise reduction; however, it was only successful for a short time and soon music was heard again after midnight. *“We have tried to report them, they stopped only for a few months but now the problem is the same.”*

The manager of the bar, furthermore, is rather ignorant about complaints from the neighbours: *“There are always problems when you run a business like this.”* The neighbours seem to be less powerful than the operators of the bar, while the workers on the open space are willing to cooperate with the residents and try to avoid conflicts.

## Conclusions

The fieldwork revealed that disturbances caused by conflicting land uses, both in planned and informal settlements, are mostly related to noise from bars and music halls, less problems are caused by commercial activities like workshops or repair workshops. The main reason for this is that the latter operate during the daytime when residents are out at work, while the former also operate at night and weekends.

Both planned and informally developed settlements undergo numerous transformations such as densifications and increases in commercial activities. This leads to problems in the settlements, mainly related to uncontrolled changes of land use. Some of the uses have a negative impact on neighbours (e. g. bars) while small corner shops or small-scale workshops have little or no significant negative impact.

The examples above also reveal that there is hardly any sensitivity or adherence to planning regulations and land-use categories among the residents, local leaders and operators. Most interlocutors stated that they lack knowledge about planning legislations and the potentially positive or negative impacts of regulations. It seems that residents, like many local leaders, understand planning only as focusing on changes of land use at the plot level and not as dealing with public interests or neighbours' rights. A resident from Sinza stated: *“If regulations are followed they are good, but people don't follow. That's why you find more complaints to the government. Also the government hasn't provided enough education concerning those regulations.”* Thus, it is at the individual decision-making level where compliance with existing plans or general regulations fails. Permission to build, extend or change the use of a building is issued by local leaders and is often based on the political influence of the applicant, in many cases in disregard of public interests. So conflicting land uses easily emerge.

Titus Musoga, from the National Land Commission, Nairobi, Kenya summarised the situation of urban planning: *“The perception of (urban planning) laws is that they only apply to the former colonial core city and not to the recent post-colonial expansions. Land-use regulations are perceived to be only applicable in the colonial city since they are a colonial construct.”*

### 3 Antagonising 'past times' – A King Shaka statue in Durban

Eva Riedke (University of Mainz)

#### King shaka international airport

Before South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup 2010, a new airport was built 35 km north of Durban's city centre in order to handle the expected rush in tourist numbers. The new airport was named after King Shaka, the founder of the Zulu Kingdom, and a larger-than-life bronze statue was commissioned to commemorate the name-giver.

The finished statue depicted King Shaka standing amongst two Nguni cows in a contemplative pose, his shield and spear resting against a mound on the ground. According to the artist, Andries Botha, this specific pose and representation deliberately sought to question and challenge the clichéd interpretations of King Shaka as a "blood thirsty dictator" and "noble savage", representing him in his piece as a "complex and nuanced philosopher King" (see Fig. 1).

Erected between the arrivals terminal and the pick-up zone, the statue was unveiled in May 2010 as part of the airport's official opening ceremony. President Jacob Zuma delivered a speech at the unveiling, in the presence of King Goodwill Zwelithini (the reigning Zulu Monarch), Mongusuthu Buthelezi (President of the oppositional Inkatha Freedom Party), Zweli Mkhize (then Premier of KwaZulu-Natal), and a series other official dignitaries (see Fig. 2). Zuma addressed the audience in his inaugural speech:

*"Your Majesty, Distinguished guests,  
The sculpture of King Shaka that dominates the public park deserves a special mention. This is not only because of its majestic presence, but also because of the interpretation of the essence of the founder of the Zulu nation. For too long, we have allowed the historical image of King Shaka to be viewed within the colonial mindset. King Shaka was a strategic thinker, able to position the African philosophy around the idea of nationhood. [...] The airport is therefore very appropriately named after this master strategist and pioneer"*  
(Zuma, 2013, emphasis added).

A few weeks after the ribbon-cutting ceremony, news unexpectedly reached the airport that the statue must immediately be removed<sup>1</sup>. The representation of King Shaka was reported to have incited disapproval from the Zulu royal family. Spokespersons of the King said the features made the Zulu King "look more like a herd boy rather than a warrior" (The Mercury, 2010).

Even though King Goodwill Zwelithini had been present during the formal unveiling, a speaker of the Royal Household returned a few days later to the airport to question the inter-

1 The statue was commissioned by King Shaka International Airport, which together with the Dube Trade Port, constitutes a public-private collaboration (see also Robbins, 2015). Based on interviews with the artist and a representative of the Dube Trade Port, the statue project – from its early stages – included consultations with numerous stakeholders. Once the statue was installed and discontent over the statue was voiced, the consultation process (and alleged negligence therein) became one of the central objects of debate.

pretation of the artist. The spokesperson for the King told journalists “King Shaka would never look like a young boy looking after cattle. He is the King of the Zulus!” (The Independent 2010). The statue was quickly removed from the site, with the two cows however left standing. A series of newspaper headlines followed in the coming days. In a press briefing with Premier Zweli Mkhize, the announcement was then made that a new statue would be commissioned, one that would more accurately capture the “heroic qualities and legacies” of Shaka.

In late 2011, the Premier’s Office announced that Peter Hall, another of (KZN) KwaZulu-Natal’s internationally acclaimed artists, had been chosen to complete a new statue, this time depicting the King standing on a raised plinth, elevated, his spear held high and adorned by a towering blue crane feather – a symbol reserved for Zulu royalty. This depiction of Shaka as proposed by Hall, resembles strongly a drawing made by the European settler, Lieutenant James King, and published in his diary in 1836 (see Fig. 3).

Andries Botha had critically considered this very illustration of King Shaka by James King as the basis for the clichéd readings of King Shaka and yet now it became the blueprint for the newly proposed statue. What might therefore appear as a rather surprising demand by the present monarch, namely to reconceptualise the statue in agreement with an inherited, white-settler ‘portrayal’ of Shaka, can also be framed as a deliberate politicisation of the statue as part of the King’s struggle for political legitimacy.

The politicisation was on the one hand about a) the King simply making himself be heard as well as b) through his critique, questioning or objecting to the dominant role played by the ANC in defining the dominant, legitimacy constructions of the past.

For this interpretation, it is important to consider that since the early 1970s, King Zwelithini has largely been stripped off his executive political powers and has acted as a largely symbolic, yet undeniably significant, political figure (Waetjen and Maré 2008). In the face of these critical debates about his function and role, Zwelithini’s successful call to remove the King Shaka statue once again highlighted his political assertiveness and made evident that he continues to be a powerful agent when it comes to defining the meanings of present-day ‘Zuluness’. Surprising however is in this case the ease with which the King was able to ensure the removal of the statue.

For instance, as the caucus leader of the oppositional *Democratic Alliance* in Durban, expressing his bewilderment and discontent, said to me:

*“The Zulu King, he is not my King – lets be perfectly honest! He doesn’t earn a single cent himself, he is paid for entirely by the citizens of KZN and his finances are always in a complete disarray”.*

He asks me with a tone of irony:

*“So if he says ‘I don’t like the statue!’ then the process is simply ‘Take it down!’?”*

Others I interviewed, in turn, highlighted that it was precisely the fact that the King had stepped forth on such a seemingly mundane issue – in other words, ‘a statue’ in comparison to more pressing political matters – that largely ensured that his intervention received sufficient recognition.

Themba Shibase, who is an art lecturer at Durban’s University of Technology explains it slightly differently to me:

*“The work was commissioned by the provincial government, yet uShaka is the heritage of the Zulu nation and the Zulu Monarch. [...] Obviously you can't allow Zulu history, Zulu culture and so forth to be assimilated by provincial government because then people start doubting 'what is your role?'”*

Themba Shibase also tells me of a very symbolic act that occurred, and which had remained uncaught by media reports: Andries Botha had made long feathers in bronze that he had given in a beautiful wooden casing during the inauguration – one for the Premier, one for the President, one for the King. Immediately when the Royal House made the call to have the statue removed, the Premier immediately returned the gift that he had already accepted. Here he highlights:

*“The reason being, anything that has to do with Shaka, obviously needs to be ok'ed by the King! If you cross the King, even though he does not have that much political power, if he denounces you as a relevant person to the Zulus, it could end your career. [...] So that is how much these politicians are playing cautious around upsetting the Zulu monarchy, or not upsetting him. They are very cautious. They will jump to the tune of the King.”*

So in essence, if we just take these two commentaries (and indeed there are many more) Zwelithini's removal of the statue served to assert his role as the most “authentic guardian” of “Zulu culture” because

*a) he responded directly to what Zuma had said in his speech, namely that the statue was about commemorating “the essence of the founder of the Zulu nation”, but*

*b) also because he directly appealed to the ‘Zuluness’ of those who had endorsed the commissioning of the statue—in this case the Premier of the Province, Zweli Mkhize, and President Jacob Zuma<sup>2</sup>.*

*c) and thirdly, because the King, by referring back to President Zuma's speech,—and Zuma's emphasis on the “majestic presence” of the statue and its location (see emphasis added in quote above)—was able to draw on the very physical presence, the materiality of the statue to make his claim. An important “re-signification” was hereby carried out through reference to aesthetics.*

## Conclusion

Drawing these different dimensions of the case together, Zwelithini called for the statues' removal on the grounds that it did not represent King Shaka in a regal manner and for being commissioned without consultation with the Royal Household. The ease with which this inter-

2 For context: particularly since Jacob Zuma's election as ANC President in the in the 2007 Polokwane race against Thabo Mbeki, appeals to ‘Zuluness’ have gained new political significance in South Africa. Zuma had, in his first election as president – and to a lesser degree also in the course of his 2013 re-election – based his campaign on the claim to undiluted Zulu heritage, neatly encapsulated in the “100% Zulu boy” t-shirt slogans that thousands of his supporters wore.

vention was achieved was in part due to the popular resonance of Zulu nationalist discourse within the ANC since Jacob Zuma's rise to power.

The fact that the King Shaka statue in Durban was taken down and then remodelled is in some respects illustrative of an overlying policy to 'Africanise' South Africa's symbolic landscape and to inscribe narratives of the past previously written out of the official historical record.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Zwelithini's intervention has also served to question the dominance of the ANC in the official memorialisation of the past [*die alleinige Definitionsmacht*].

So the new King Shaka statue that is to be commissioned will not significantly alter the meaning of what is to be remembered, but highlights who is ordering what to be remembered, and who opposes it.

Focusing on the various significations that occur around this statue, the case study also points to the construction of political arenas wherein, in turn, struggles over power and political legitimacy unfold in the present wherein current notions of political order are played out.



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3 For a series of interesting insights on this topic see Marschall (2009).

## 4 Crude Talking: The politics of naming, blaming and claiming in Oil-Age Niger

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The scholarly debate about oil is characterized by the resource curse thesis according to which the production of oil would lead to economic decline, the emergence of authoritarian regimes, violent conflicts, corruption and environmental pollution. If we think about oil, we might see pictures of oil catastrophes like Deepwater Horizon, of birds covered in oil, oil-contaminated water, burning oil fields, rebels in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, American soldiers invading Iraq or oil riches displayed in Dubai-style architecture. Although these are all realities of oil, the most important dimension of oil in the early phase of an oil state like Niger and that falls out of these pictures is oil talk<sup>1</sup>: People meet, sit together and talk about the country's oil future. In talking about oil they actively partake in the making of oil as a social and political reality in their country. In this talk images, ideas and models of oil play a crucial role because they travel and have to be translated in the context of their destination (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996; Behrends, Park, and Rottenburg 2014).

The following sets out to explore a telling example of precisely such oil talk. It is a radio debate about the future prospects of the Nigerien oil refinery that was organized on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2011 by Lawan Boukar, a radio moderator of a private radio station called *Radio Anfani* in Zinder, the second biggest city in Niger situated in the East. The invited guests were Mahamandou Dan Buzuwa from the political party Moden FA Lumana that is a member of the government, Adoullahim Balarabé alias BABI from CDS Rahama that is a member of the political opposition but who is at the same time town councillor of Zinder and Aboubacar Mounkaila alias Dan Dubai<sup>2</sup> from the civil society association *Mouvement Populaire pour la Pérennisation des Actions du Développement* (MPPAD).

Lawan Boukar: "In a few days we will proceed with the inauguration of Zinder's oil refinery. How is the civil society fighting for Zinder to benefit from its refinery?"

Dan Dubai: "At the moment we can't speak about benefits. Let us first of all talk about the health of the people. [...]. Do you know that the water that will be used in the refinery will be sent to us for drinking? Who will come to treat this water so as not to be detrimental to our health? [...*second*], the oil refinery should not only serve one political clique. We have understood that they [*the government*] have politicized the case [*in distributing directorial posts at the refinery to party members of the majority...third*,] where do they discharge their waste? [...*fourth*,] the fire brigade is forced to camp near villages around the refinery. We need to equip them with all necessities. [...*fifth*,] where is the major hospital that they promised us? [...] What is important is not the refinery's inauguration. We really want to know where all this is what

1 The expression 'oil talk' comes from Arthur Mason 'as a way of encapsulating the now vast field of writing on oil and the discursive carbon world of which it is part' and was used by Michael Watts in a review essay on two recently published oil books {Watts 2013 #2177:1013}. However, I use it here as a close description of reality that characterizes the early phase of an oil state.

2 Dan Dubai is Hausa language and means 'Son of Dubai'.

we asked for. [...] if they [*the government*] really won't change their behavior, you have to know that Niger will really face the same problems as do other [*oil exporting*] countries in the world."

Lawan Boukar: "Abdoulrahin Balarabe, you occupy a position of responsibility in Zinder. Last week, the town council and the regional council in a joint declaration rejected the nomination of certain personalities at the top of SORAZ [*Société de raffinage de Zinder*]. What is your position regarding this case?"

Abdoulrahin Balarabe: "I will tell you what pushed us to publish this statement [...]. We count a lot on this refinery because we think it will reduce our unemployment. We have so many young unemployed people in Zinder who don't do anything. [...] This is what made us furious when we heard about the nominations [*no one from Zinder region*] and forced us to do everything possible to correct this decision."

Lawan Boukar: "Thank you Abdoulrahin Balarabe, before we continue, Malam Mahamadou Dan Buzuwa what is your position in regard to all this?"

Mahamadou Dan Buzuwa: "There are many countries in the world that count on their oil refineries, because they profit a lot from the refinery's financial revenues. [...]. We, the people from Zinder, have the heavy burden of responsibility and we have to stand above it [*ethnic and regional loyalty*] and to be sincere. [...] we want someone who is capable of what he is doing. It is the person's capacity that we are looking for and not his origin. We don't care about where he is coming from. [...] we want that the whole of Niger profits of its oil in a most absolute state of peacefulness. You are aware that once you find oil, how white people say, there is a 'curse' because it is always a source of conflict."

In this radio debate, Dan Dubai from the civil society association MPPAD anticipated and paternalistically ascribed negative effects of oil production in Zinder before the first barrel of oil had even been produced. He cited water and environmental pollution, the absence of health infrastructures, bad living and working conditions for workers and accused the newly elected government authorities of bad governance, political patronage and marginalizing the region of Zinder with respect to possible oil benefits. Here, we have to know that Dan Dubai is a rich businessman who earned his money as a broker in the Dubai oil business. After living many years in Dubai, he returned to Niger in 2007 when Mamadou Tandja was still President of Niger. Dan Dubai is regarded in Niger as the founding father of *Tazartché*<sup>3</sup> – a political campaign of former President Mamadou Tandja to change the constitution in order to allow him to remain in office beyond the constitutional two-term limit. For this campaign Dan Dubai founded the civil society association MPPAD in order to speak in the name of the Nigerien population for Tandja to remain in office. He also became a member of MNSD *Nassara*, the political party of Mamadou Tandja. It seems obvious that Dan Dubai would have had recompensed after the successful constitutional change in 2009 with either a foothold in the Nigerien oil business or a position in the Nigerien government if Tandja had not been removed from office only some month later in a military coup led by Colonel Salou Djibo in 2010. The military coup, however, left Dan Dubai empty handed. After Colonel Salou Djibo organized new elections in 2011 that saw former opposition leader Mahamadou Issoufou come to power, Dan Dubai became a member of the political opposition whereas rich businessmen who supported the electoral campaign of Issoufou have by now formed the oligopoly of the Nigerien oil and transport business. Dan Dubai's statement in the radio debate has thus to be seen as a political project to question the legitimacy of the government.

3 *Tazartché* is Hausa language and means 'continuation'.



Abdoulrahin Balarabe from the political opposition and at the same time town councillor of Zinder first of all aspired Zinder's development prospects due to new employment opportunities in the oil sector that could reduce youth unemployment but equally worried about regional and political marginalization in that the jobs would only be given to people from Niamey and members of the government. Here, we have to know that at the time of the press release that is mentioned in the radio debate, the construction phase of the oil refinery was nearly completed and the refinery ready for inauguration. In the operational phase of oil production, unskilled workers are no longer needed. They were heavily recruited as roustabouts in the construction phase, but at the time of the press release, their situation was already characterized by mass layoffs. Instead of unskilled workers, only about 300 highly qualified university graduates in petro-chemistry and mechanics are needed for maintenance, surveillance and refining in the operational phase. The link between the nomination of directors at SORAZ and youth unemployment in Zinder seems farfetched. The distribution of directorial positions is a matter of political affiliation. Claiming these posts for the population of Zinder means that it is first of all the locally elected representatives (*élus locaux*) that is to say those of themselves that are member of the government who will be rewarded with these positions. However, by extending their fate to the common destiny of the whole population of Zinder region, they were able to *name* the distribution of directorial positions as a collective injurious experience. The *naming* of these grievances *blamed* the government in power in the name of Zinder's population to mask the *claiming* of individual gains as regional ones.

Mahamadou Dan Buzuwa from the government explicitly referred to the 'resource curse' to demand the population to remain calm in order to let the oil production turn into a blessing. Here we have to know that Colonel Salou Djibo justified the military coup against Mahamadou Tandja in 2010 with a return to 'good governance' and 'democracy'. When Mahamadou Issoufou had come to power one year later in political elections he drew heavily on the model of the resource curse in his inaugural speech. Building on the idea that 'bad governance' is the root cause of resource conflicts, he tried to ensure an international audience his commitment to 'good governance' and 'transparency' in the resource sector in order to avoid the resource curse to become a reality. In the radio debate, Mahamadou Dan Buzuwa thus referred to this conception of the resource curse in order to question the legitimacy of his political opponents by implicitly accusing the ethnic and regional populism of the political opposition and the civil society for being responsible if the 'curse' indeed comes true.

The emergence of a multi-party system in Niger in the early 1990s enabled the oil talk to take place in a setting of political competition. It is this setting of political competition in multi-party systems (often called 'democracy') in which speech acts of *naming*, *blaming* and *claiming* (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980–1981) are part of 'democratic' moves. As Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (*ibid.*) argue, disputes develop through three stages: it is first a perceived injurious experience (*naming*) that is attributed to the fault of another (*blaming*) to then ask for some remedy (*claiming*). Here, *naming* oil related grievances aim at *blaming* the political opponent in order to *claim* political legitimacy. It is striking how important the notion of the resource curse has become to these 'democratic' moves. It either serves to delegitimize the political position of the government by accusing them of letting the resource curse become a reality or to legitimize the government in power by accusing the political opposition of the very production of the curse itself.

It is important to not only scrutinize the content but also the form that oil talk takes. In my example it is a debate broadcasted on a private radio channel in Zinder. The radio landscape of Niger is characterized by international, state-owned as well as many different private radio stations. The international radio stations like *Radio France Internationale* (RFI), *British Broad-*

*casting Corporation* (BBC), *Voice of America* (VOA), *Deutsche Welle* and *Xinhua*, diffuse international ideas of oil like the resource curse. Whereas the state-owned channel diffuses the official position of the government, the private radio stations have become a very important resource in Niger's political arena after their appearance in the 1990s. They allow political actors to release press statements or to organize radio debates for small amounts of money. The radio thus not only diffuses significations of oil, but has itself become a crucial element for the way political negotiations and power struggles proceed. These significations are part and parcel of the new reality of oil that is being constructed. That is to say the oil talk is part of a cosmopolitan setting in which political players produce narratives about oil in Niger by translating travelling ideas like the resource curse to the particular situation of Niger becoming an oil producing state. Significations of oil thus circulate as the forms that political players use in their narrations to make political claims. As politics in general are inherently about conflicts (Schlichte 2012) and multi-party systems in particular about the negotiation of disputes in the public political sphere, it seems that political narratives are structured according to the three stages of *naming*, *blaming* and *claiming*.

However, it seems that political actors use travelling ideas in a very selective way that suits their political programs. In other words, travelling ideas are creatively adapted by local political actors in a particular context of political competition in a multi-party system in which the narration of a new oil reality is politically structured according to the players' political scripts. It is thus the political players' scripts that shape the very enactment of practices of *naming*, *blaming*, and *claiming* on the public political stage. The political scripts, in turn, are ordered according to the actors' positioning within particular political constellations and power games. Therefore, I transfer the concept of *naming*, *blaming* and *claiming* in legal disputes (as employed by Felstiner et al. 1980–1981) into a political setting and reformulate it to speak of *politics of naming*, *blaming* and *claiming* in order to emphasize that political disputes emerge not simply out of an injurious experience such as environmental pollution that then translates into further stages of blaming and claiming as Felstiner *et al.* would have it. Instead politically named grievances are anticipated, invented, paternalistically ascribed and expressed – they are staged, transformed or discarded to serve the players' political agenda. Whereas the expropriated rural population around the oil refinery and the unskilled oil workers are too marginalized to voice their oil related grievances in the public political game, we saw how in the context of political disputes around oil in Zinder various political players like politicians, businessmen and civil society activists act as paternalistic representatives who stage significations of oil in the name of the subaltern (Spivak 1988). One may, in sum, argue whether in a multi-party setting that is characterized by a crude logic of political competition oil talk does not become crude talking.

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## 5 Narrating the good (global health) citizen in Rwanda

Norman Schräpel (University of Halle, Germany)

Some time in early August 2013, Felicien, the head of a local health program of the NGO I was working with, invited me to a meeting an hour south of Kigali. He did not tell me what the event was all about, but when I arrived at the health center, I knew something was going on. Music was playing out of two speakers that were located next to a white pavilion, specially erected for the event. Small wooden benches for about one hundred people were placed in front of it letting the scene look like a stage in a theater. The guests of the meeting were young mothers and their children, all dressed up. The meeting had not started yet, so I asked some of the mothers what was going on. Many were smiling and told me that they are here for the party and that they were told that the children would get a certificate. After a while, I figured out that the event was part of the government's PMTCT program (Preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV) that started in 2009. The program is a global health initiative that aims at preventing HIV transmission from mother to child during pregnancy and after. This includes providing antiretroviral therapy (to decrease the viral load in the mother), the organization of regular sensitizing meetings, teaching sessions, HIV testing and a continuous monitoring of the women. My research assistant explained to me: "The local authorities will come, they are honoring them. This is quite something for the mothers."

The meeting started much too late. A nurse from the health center commenced the event and introduced himself as the MC (master of ceremony). He started by greeting each guest of honor individually and thereby introduced him or her to the waiting mothers and children<sup>1</sup>. This extremely formalized part of the event is familiar to most "villagers" (abaturage)<sup>2</sup> and institutionalized in Rwanda in various forms. The sequence of speakers, the polite language, or the staging of authority are highly ordered and follow a protocol that is reoccurring at all official events. After this introduction, the MC explained the purpose of the meeting:

*"Today is about an activity of rewarding you, to appreciate that you were following that program until today. Therefore it is like umuganura (Rwanda National Harvest Day) and others will also see it and become interested and follow that program".*

### The one who survived the night, are the ones who can testify

The head of the health center, Gaspard, who was also the host of the event, held the first speech. Gaspard is known in the community, not only because he is a man of authority but also because he is easily accessible for people from the community and often in close relation to patients of

1 This included also the foreign people at the meeting: two volunteers from the US, working with the NGO, and myself.  
2 Abaturage can be translated as citizen, native or villager, from *gutura* "to live at". It is commonly used to refer to "the more simple people, living in rural areas". In the context of the event the speakers used it when referring to "people".

the health center. In his speech, he started by appreciating the achievements of the mothers but also quickly added another dimension to that:

*“So I think today is a day of appreciation because we achieved of what was expected. I think the people that followed our advice have to be honored. There are others who were irresponsible. Those we have to blame. [...] They abandoned this program. [...] if you meet someone like this, who didn’t allow their children to have a chance to be healthy, than you tell them that they did wrong [...] You will be the first to advise them because it is you who know the importance of PMTCT. It is you who have to help us [nurses] to teach them [...] and then they can get a prize like you get today. Do you accept this?”*

Some confirmed with a low-voiced *yego* (yes). Shortly after Gaspard’s speech, a mother was called to the front to give a testimony<sup>3</sup> about her participation in the program. She reported about her infection with HIV, about the fear to infect other members in her family and in particular the fears she had to infect her unborn child. The biggest part of her testimony was a summary of how PMTCT works, stating again when children have to be tested for the virus and how to breastfeed or not. The mother finished the account of her experiences with appreciations to the public institutions and the NGO. When the MC took over the protocol again he concluded the mother’s testimony by recognizing: “We are together with you, because as they say ‘*ribara uwariraye*’ (The one who survived the night, are the ones who can testify). The proverb makes a direct reference to the genocide<sup>4</sup>. By quoting this proverb in the context of the PMTCT event, the MC not only seeks to bring back memories of the genocide, he also re-assures the severity of HIV and thirdly, creates hope of survival.

Two more speeches followed after this. The head of the NGO’s health program talked about the history of PMTCT in the sector and assured that “different NGOs started to work together in order to make [our sector] exemplary” and to assure that there will be no new infections by the year 2015. Shortly after, his voice suddenly took up a warning tone and he explained:

*“[M]idway [through the program] we met a challenge by people from outside [immigrants] who did not know about the program. Even though she [the mother that dropped out] knew that she has that problem [HIV], she feared to say it. She only came to us when she was seven months pregnant. That is a big problem! [...] We got a disturbance (agatotsi) of someone who gave birth of an infected child, which is very shocking for us. We actually should be on zero percent now.”*

In the last speech by a representative from the district office, detailed numbers were quoted. 117 women started the PMTCT program and 97 completed it. The head of the NGO’s health program reassured that the dropouts are due to the migration of people but also that some mothers “just refused” to participate. The speech of the local representative aimed at adding a dimension onto the narrative, by worsening the prospect of those mothers who did not participate:

3 Testimonies as a technology of reporting were institutionalized in the reconciliation process after the 1994 genocide. Perpetrators and victims of the genocide spoke out in often carefully curated testimonies to provide ‘first-hand’ experiences that are supposed to represent an authentic view from an affected person..

4 The proverb represents a line in the lyrics of a popular commemoration song by Kizito Mihigo in 2012 but it also refers to the survivors of the genocide that were often hiding anxiously during nights and when surviving, being the only ones that were able to tell what they had witnessed.

*“[T]hose [mothers] who have refused to follow the program are in truth already dead. [...] There are a lot of initiatives that have been created in the country to provide drugs and other help to you. But they refused just to understand this. [...] we could be sitting here with them and their children.”*

The mothers were ostensibly getting nervous. They had heard these kinds of warnings many times and were more enthusiastic about the sodas and cakes that were about to be distributed. The local representative recognized this and quickly finished his speech: “I want to thank you again because these children, even if they are yours, they are also the country’s children. You helped the country indeed, clap for you again and continue to be heroes.”

### **Certified heroes**

With the end of the last speech, the “party” started. Music started to play and each woman received a soda and a piece of cake. The children, who were obviously not so enthusiastic about the speeches, got excited about the sweet treat. It already got dark and some of the mothers became nervous because they had a long walk ahead of them. But finally, just some minutes after everybody was served, the certificates were given out with the name of the child on it and ‘the proof’ that the PMTC program was successfully completed. Therewith – to borrow the terminology introduced in one of the speeches – the children became certified “heroes”. The children, that were all less than five years, gave their newly gained certificate little attention. The mothers however seemed all proud. And even if the event was perhaps not a jovial party, it was a special occasion for most of the women. What it means to be a good citizen was defined in the speeches and gave the expensive looking sheet of paper – with its color-printed logos and the name of their child on it – a particular meaning, a form of “belonging”. The certificates were loaded with significations and testified that the women and their children were among the best “performers” in the country. To be sure, this does not mean that the mothers simply obeyed everything that they were told to do – quite the contrary. Being part of the PMTCT program, also meant to contest, disaffirm, and question a lot of the statements that appear in the narration of the speeches (this would, however, be subject for another paper). But during this ceremony in early August 2013, almost all of them were proud to be audited as good citizens. In this sense, the event staged the official version of what counts as good or bad. Not enough, the mothers were equipped during the ceremony with spreading the word in their community and therewith “disciplining” those who will need to participate in the program in the near future. The event thus formalized a particular normative order (that of a good global health citizen) and functioned to circulate a particular set of knowledge. In addition, it also strengthened the position of those in control. The redundant reference of letting the women know that the authorities are aware of who is not performing well makes clear that people (or bad citizens) cannot hide. At one point, one of the speakers reminds the women “And again we have to be updated. There is a book at the health center, I can see people who come for testing”. The women are well aware of this.

To understand the significations created at the PMTCT event in Rwanda, I am here solely focusing on the narratives produced in the speeches (much more could be said beyond this vignette). One dominant narration is about the performance of people. The mothers and their children that completed the program are lauded and praised as heroes in their community. Those women that refused, or dropped out, are publicly blamed. Failure is identified as an exception located outside the existing order and denounced aggressively. At the same time, the

praised mothers and their children are asked to become ambassadors for the PMTCT program (and in this sense of global health), which delegates some form of (state) authority to them. With their certificates they are expected to “educate their neighbors, friends, and community” and therewith introduces a form of self-auditing. The analysis of such narratives help not only to understand how PMTCT is institutionalized in Rwanda, but also how significations acquire a political form, which work to define what counts as a good or bad citizen.

## 6 The Role of “Corruption” as a Sense-Making Narrative of the Cameroonian State

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*« Nous nous devons en effet de continuer à bâtir une République exemplaire en luttant contre la corruption, en consolidant la démocratie. »*

(Paul Biya 03.11.2011)

Performing research on the question “How is the Cameroonian state perceived by its subjects and represented by its political class?” implies research on narratives, which are related to broader imaginations and practices. One of the most pervasive narratives focuses on the topic of corruption. The following vignette shows how different actors imagine it as a central theme in critical assessments of (“fragile”, “deficient” or even “failing”) stateness. As the case study on various representations of the Cameroonian state has demonstrated, manifold actors within and beyond Africa provide a particular image of the state which is manifested within the (re) construction of particular narratives. The donor community, the World Bank, researchers and civil society take part in the creation of this narrative in the same manner as the ruling elites do. Many people who live in Cameroon, both at the top of the societal pyramid – including representatives of the state, the head of the state, Paul Biya himself – and far away from the exercise of political power – including journalists, artists and authors – negotiate and contribute to the configuration of the narrative of corruption in significant ways. Thus, corruption as a narrative is negotiated from different actors in different ways in order to legitimize (or delegitimize) ordering practices and legitimize (or delegitimize) a particular image of the state.

In the following two speeches, given by Paul Biya it will be introduced in which he used the concept of corruption as one main issue to promote his understanding of the state. In this context, the use of “corruption” has to be considered as a narrative which is interwoven and (re) constructed through different actors, contexts and intentions. The correlation of corruption and the state within these two speeches is based on the international evaluation of “good governance” and the rating of corrupted states all over the world (transparency international). Based on international categorization, the concept of corruption represents one main challenging indicator for the assessment of the functions and practices of (African) states. Since corruption is far away from the general assumptions how a state ought to be, it represents a particular narrative on a “global scale”. This is adapted, translated and re-constructed from



particular actors within a particular context related to the perception and ideal image of a state model. For instance, the concept of "good governance" is apparently related to corruption. State practices were measured and assessed under the assumption that good governance implies the abolition of corruption. Furthermore, this relation (state – corruption) is also discussed within the Cameroonian society. As interviews among intellectuals in Cameroon have shown, people have a particular imagination regarding the correlation of state and corruption. This holds true at nearly every level of the society and in different social spheres. Consequently, Paul Biya used this narrative to promote his own idea of a state model and to legitimize the state that he represents.

In this vignette, it will be given brief insights as to how the narrative of corruption is re-negotiated by the speaker. Then it will be demonstrated how he re-interprets constructs the meaning of the past and present through the narrative of corruption, which, in turn, is also defined by his perception of who he is addressing with his speech.

The first speech which will be presented is the annual speech at the end of the year given on 31 December 2011<sup>1</sup>, which is the year that Biya was reelected president of the Cameroonian state for the next 7 years. This speech addressed the population of Cameroon and was distributed via radio and television. Besides the retrospection from a political perspective of 2011, Biya provides a programmatic outlook for the forthcoming year. In the context of his reelection, he accentuates the legality of the results and appreciates the confidence of the whole population. In this regard, it is evident that the president reacts to the assumption that there are skeptical voices suggesting a manipulation of the election's outcome. In the following, he points to the highly problematic development of the Cameroonian economy and promotes his program "Nouvelle dynamique" tempting for an economic improvement. By emphasizing the required economic recovery, he stipulates what according to him are the causes of economic stagnation. With the question of "What was missing until today to achieve a stimulation of our economy?" he begins his description of well-known factors:

*«Je pense que, dans le passé, l'action gouvernementale a souffert d'un déficit d'esprit d'entreprise et que l'administration a péché par immobilisme. Nous devons venir à bout de cette inertie qui nous a fait tant de mal. Autre ennemi sournois et redoutable, la corruption. Elle est non seulement coupable de prélever une part importante de la fortune publique, mais également responsable du retard dans la réalisation des projets indispensables au redressement économique de notre pays.»*

The previous government and administration (which he describes as "reactionary") would be responsible for the present situation. Following his depiction, corruption is to him one of the main symptoms of this crisis. Corruption is personalized as the "enemy" and depicted as a "plague," and by these means he dramatizes corruption as the main obstacle regarding development and prosperity. Within the public state sector, corruption emerged as a principle pattern for the behavior of civil servants and which has to be abolished immediately. Hence, the president and the political class (in his speech, he uses "we") created particular institutions, such as a special tribunal, to pursue and punish persons who are suspected of being involved in corruption.

1 P. Biya (2011) : „Message du Chef de l'Etat à la Nation à l'occasion de la fin d'année 2011 et du Nouvel An 2012“.

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*« J'ai dit à plusieurs reprises que nous continuerons sans relâche le combat contre ce fléau [corruption, J.K.]. La création du Tribunal Criminel Spécial, dont on peut attendre une accélération des procédures en cours et, on peut l'espérer, le reversement des sommes détournées, illustre notre détermination en la matière. »*

In this regard, the state, respectively, the president and the government, is legitimized to control and abolish the state of corruption and to regulate the economy. Concerning the use of the narrative around the topic “corruption,” it is crucial to highlight the well-constructed distinctions between the administration and the head of the state and the political class of the government. Against the background of the role of the president as the head of the central state which is coincident with the organization of the administration sector, he is able to separate the relation (administration – head of the state) for his purpose. In this speech, Paul Biya disconnects the civil servants from the head of the state what enables him to declare what is required to implement the proper state practices while he is responsible for an idealized performance of the state. Therefore, he creates a context that enables the use and the reproduction of the circulating narrative “corruption” to legitimize his leadership and the state he represents. In this regard, it is assumed that Biya reacts to a plurality of narratives provided by different actors such as the international community when bilateral cooperation policy is connected to the general suspicion of corruption and / or the impositions of the Structural Adjustment Program which is highly linked to the definition of “good governance” (abolition of corruption as one main character of good governance). In addition, the Cameroonian perspectives are expressed in media materials and the evaluation of objectified data's such as the global corruption index and academic analysis provide a particular narrative of corruption and thus contribute to the re-construction of these in terms of the use of Paul Biya. Consequently, the narrative of corruption is circulating through different time and spaces and is subject to what we could call dialectic processes of the narrative(s). In this context, the circulation across global scale – Cameroonian society – the head of the state, appears being visible and provokes the re-construction of the narrative corruption.

Furthermore, the distinction between the former governments, as one cause of the recent situation, merits a moment of attention: against the background of the presidency of Paul Biya lasting since 1982, it seems inappropriate to contest the former government. His reference is not necessarily the government during the presidency of A. Ahidjo (1962–1982), but he disconnects general claims and critics from any concrete periodization. These claims and critics are not part of his discourse only, but they are manifest in discourses of the media, of the civil society, and they are part of what is referenced as international standards of good governance, as it is promoted by the International Monetary Fund / Worldbank and the Convention of the OECD. Biya appropriates what others may use against his authoritarian rulership and uses it to “reforming” and consolidate his (ordering) practices when he proposed the creation of new institutions like specialized tribunals against corruption.

With the help of the first speech in this paper it was demonstrated that “corruption” can be seen as a circulating narrative which is used and re-constructed by Paul Biya in a particular context to reframe the current situation of the Cameroonian state. This process also reveals within another speech given by Paul Biya which will be introduced in the following.

After his adjuration, Paul Biya gave a speech in front of the Cameroonian National Assembly when he was reelected in 2011<sup>2</sup>. After he expressed gratitude for the reelection and the confidence of the delegates, he emphasized the legality of the election and the results as the symbol of a

2 See exemplary M. Szeftel, (2000) „Clientelism, Corruption, and Catastrophe“, in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 85, 429.

successfully implemented democracy. Concerning the election and his legitimacy, he reacts again to rumors dispelled in the Cameroonian and international media as well as to the population's perception of his manipulated reelection. Following his speech, he confesses that challenges exist for the present government. These challenges would be characterized by personal behaviors that jeopardize the democratic principle of the society.

*« Mais je dois dire que les comportements individuels ne sont pas toujours en harmonie avec la solidarité qui devrait être la marque d'une société démocratique. Trop souvent, l'intérêt personnel prend le pas sur l'intérêt général. Cet état d'esprit est à l'origine de ces dérives sociales que sont la fraude, la corruption, voire la délinquance. »*

In this regard, personal behaviors are highly connected to corruption and fraud within the Cameroonian society. Corruption is presented as a lack of solidarity, and it is revealed as the main obstacle to establish social equality. Even if the president is not repeatedly using the term corruption, the proposition of "criminal acting" and "lack of solidarity through acting" refer to the topic of corruption. Actors of corruption are not defined as a particular group, but rather the whole population of Cameroon is implicated as being entangled within corruption. Through corruption, the public morale declined due to poverty, inequality and unemployment, and to abolish it is the main propose of the state representatives:

*« Même si le chômage, la pauvreté et les inégalités peuvent expliquer en partie le déclin de la morale publique, nous devons réagir avec encore plus de fermeté contre ces comportements délictueux. »*

According to the accounts of Paul Biya, the individual behaviors referring to corruption constitute a dimension where the president and the audience (which he addresses with his speech) are not involved. It is disconnected from the political class and thus provides objectivity and legitimacy to evaluate the present situation. Current debates in Cameroonian medias in which the narrative of corruption is highly connected to the political class were not considered. Thus, the representatives (the political class) constitute the moral counterpart and are therefore in a position of political and social leadership to reconstruct public morale and protect democratic principles. It is noteworthy that, in this speech; the narrative of corruption is framed by an idea of democratic global standards and the current situation is presented in a different way than in the first speech. Here, the narrative is embedded in an ordering system in which the representatives of the state and their practices of power are legitimized in the name of democracy. The theme of corruption allows the president and the political class to exercise leadership in a society that is dominated by corruption as a result of poverty.

In conclusion, what this vignette tried to show is that Biya ingeniously employs a narrative, which could be used against his rule in order to achieve new legitimacy for his leadership. With the help of the two speeches of Biya, we are able to reveal the pattern that Biya creates through the narrative of corruption: The political class and the head of the state (P. Biya) constitute the higher political morality and from this point of departure arises the privilege to guide and rule. In this regard, the narrative of corruption provides the context to construct legitimacy for the leadership of the head of the state and the political class as well as the promotion of a particular interpretation of the role of the state. In a larger context, these examples demonstrate how the good governance discourse encounters the capability of rulers in African context to acquire a critical review and reformulate them creatively for their own advantage.

## IV Commentaries

### The presence of the State

Klaus Schlichte (University of Bremen)

All four vignettes deliver interesting and stimulating observations, which the authors themselves already elevated to a level of interpretation. In these brief remarks, I just want to highlight a few associations that I had while reading through them. I will connect this with a number of hints to works and concepts that might be useful for our further discussions and reflection on how our projects speak to each other.

**Michael Bürge's** contribution is about the emergence of informal discussions on the "sagas" of corruption in the context of Sierra Leone. Despite the often awkward impression that rumors and gossip might create, they certainly play an important role in how public life is constituted and how politics are perceived and evaluated. The work of Comi Toulabor on derision in Togo or of Alexei Yurchak on the irony in late Soviet socialism are interesting points of comparison here: Gossip and rumors can be seen as deviation, as a kind of opposition in the private or only semi-private realm. Nevertheless, their effects are much less easy to discern. Doesn't the story about the criminal background of some politicians instill respect as well?

Apart from this aspect of political sociology, there is a lesson to be learned about globalization here as well. It seems as if the stories and discussions are attempts to come to terms with an ever more dynamic world in which all kinds of logics overlap and are increasingly internationalized. How shall we understand the relationships between economic flows and political rule? Isn't the perplexity with which economists and political scientists look at the financial crisis since 2008 just another side of the same medal? It is probably an exaggeration to state that the discussions Michael Bürge is describing should be seen as rationalizations, but they are certainly attempts to rationalize, and be it in the form of a narrative, what is going on in the lives of those participating in the discussion, even if these stories contain elements of magic belief.

**Eva Riedke's** vignette is a political story. Who has the right to give names to things? This is both a question of "officialization" and of representation. I was reminded here of Pierre Bourdieu's work on the state and its capacity to attribute labels and titles. Thinking of Eva's contribution in that direction, the most apparent aspect of her observation is the contest between two forms of authority, or claimed authorities. Both claim to speak on behalf of something, the claim to represent something that is bigger and more important than the person who is speaking. This is the aspect of representation which is a core problem of modern democracies (Manow 2006), as we all know, since it is not so easy to understand how a single person should be able to speak on behalf of thousands without constantly consulting with them. Some magic belief is clearly inherent to that idea.

The other aspect I see in her observation is the question of officialization: If the state says this is this, it does so with the pretense that this is now true in an official manner. This is, in a way, another quite remarkable thing: What is “the official”? In the case presented here, this is clearly contested. The right to determine the piece of art that should symbolize Shaka Zulu is questioned by the current “King”. What are the entitlements here? From state theory we know that the state wants to be the supreme producer of semantics. It was the work of lawyers to make all of us believe that the legal expression is the supreme one. Here, for me, it is not so clear what the line of conflict is: Is it between a state, incorporated here by the central government, and a local powerholder? Is it within the state since the King could be seen as a state agent as well? The case is furthermore replete with all kind of religious acts and ideas, so as such it is an invitation to look closer to the relation between political and religious beliefs and narrative structures on the African continent.

**Janine Kläge’s** vignette has a similar message I find. I want to highlight two things as well. First is the inherent paradox in what President Biya says: He is complaining about “corruption” which is by definition a problem of public administration. At the time, he is the head of the executive in his country for meanwhile 32 years. If there is a problem of corruption in Cameroon, he is politically responsible for it. Apparently, this contradiction does not matter. Although it is so obvious, the President does look at it that way, or he prefers not to deal with it. We don’t know what the reaction to his discourse is. I assume there will be some derision in the public. But still, the fact that a public speech can just gloss over such an apparent contradiction is interesting. It means that we should not think of symbolic order as being something totally coherent and stable. The content might be quite heterogeneous and awkward. It might still work.

The second remark on this vignette is about the creativity involved in the speech. “Good governance” is used, according to Janine’s observations, as part of the smoke-screen that political speech is in this case. Although its intention was to foster a rationalization of political rule and administration we see it used here for the justification of what is usually seen as the problem. There seems to be quite some semantic leeway in using this and probably other terms. Why is that so? Does this apply to all political language? Can everything be twisted? Can we think of a political language or symbolism that is less easy to be manipulated or “adapted”? This again hits the question of “meaning” and its production.

Like Eva Riedke’s case, Janine Kläge’s is remindful of a distinction Ernst Cassirer introduced in the 1940s between the politician as “homo faber” and as “homo magus”. While the first is the factual “achiever”, the politician which leaves a mark by being the efficient political entrepreneur, the second is much more enigmatic: he – or she – is a wizard – or a witch – as here power is produced not so much by achieving visible change but by having particular qualities, especially with the non-mundane world. Comi Toulabor’s work mentioned above is of relevance here as well.

In order to understand how narratives and political power are connected, it is also helpful, though, not to forget the zero-hypothesis: It might be that there is no such production, that political rule is based just on pragmatic expectations, on habits, on indifference, as Etienne La Boétie ([1574] 1980) has argued in his work on tyranny. A further exploration of the political role of narratives should therefore not to readily assume that narratives matter.

**Wolfgang Scholz’** vignette is about differences in local political steering or problem-fixing in urban neighborhoods. It is in particular showing how much legal and factual dimensions of a

“problem” matter for its potential regulation. Among the clippings from African social realities this is perhaps the one that shows most clearly that what we study in the SPP is by no means exclusively “African”, if such a thing exists.

Problems around urban quarters around the effects of night-life occur in any major Western city as well, from the Marais in Paris to Berlin-Friedrichshain or Tel Aviv. From a political science perspective the differences are of course interesting in how neighbors, local administration and business sort these conflicts out – or fail in doing so. Such an at first sight a-political subject could lead to insights about the micropolitics of states and administration of which we still have so little.

Interestingly in all such cities the conflict is phrased in very similar dichotomies – calmness and purity against noise and dirt. Apart from pragmatic reasons, the complaints are also indicators of how a good life is imagined, a subject that, it seems to me, is largely understudied for African contexts. The short vignette is also interesting with regard to the narratives that seem to be inherent in planning – what future is imagined here, what is imagined to be problematic and how are shortcomings, failures and success explained once the plan is implemented? In that regard, this vignette from one of the younger projects in the Priority Program is the most promising.

**Norman Schraepel’s** contribution to me looks very Foucauldian. What we see here is at first sight a kind of total subjectivation, total “assujettissement”. The woman and even the little children become objects of a game, a “mise en scène”, and they actively take part in it by receiving gifts and certificates. Again, the state is the agency that “officializes” and grants symbolic capital by distributing certificates.

The meaning that is produced here seems to result from a kind of productive symbiosis: On the one hand, while state officials “officialize” deeds as “heroic” they make a certain forms of behavior more precious than others. Those who are honored buy into the scheme. Just by accepting the glorification, they simultaneously accept the supreme power of the state to decide about what is to be glorified and what isn’t. This is the state as “system of classification” (Bourdieu 2012), and the acceptance of this power is what we call legitimacy (cf. Schlichte 2012).

On the other hand, there is something else going on here. One could argue that mothers – and, perhaps, even those children, accepting certificates and goodies, participate in their own subjugation as they accept the gift and enter a relationship by doing this.<sup>1</sup> But it could as well be that this subjugation is at the same time an entitlement. By handing out orders and (Order), symbolic capital is produced on the side of the receiver as well, and she or he does not remain unaffected by it. From the history of states as symbolic orders we might assume that the gratification of titles in Rwanda as well will have further state effects – while enhancing the state’s legitimacy as a symbol producer, the gratification turns subjects into bearers of titles of which the ultimate expression is the idea of citizenship – a subject with duties, certainly, but a bearer of rights as well.

Interesting in this vignette as well is the structure of the story, of the official version. It is remindful what the Russian formalists, in particular Vladimir Propp (cf. Forrester 2012) said about folktales: There are always the same essential elements in these tales in order to create meaning: there is the brave hero, the helper, the obstacle, the attempt of seduction, the holy grail and so forth. The anti-HIV ceremony and its accompanying speeches, it seems, create a similar narrative, and it is perhaps its character of a story, of a plot, that is actually producing

1 See Mauss’ (1966 [1925]) famous thoughts about the emergence of ties and moral duties by giving and accepting gifts. These fundamental ideas seem to be still underexploited for the analysis of political relationships. See however Radtke/Schlichte (2005).

the meaning here. By smacking things together as a story, as a tale, they become meaningful. But is this really an example of what the Russian formalists said about folktales? Does the plot that is presented here have the same structure?

**Jannik Schritt's** vignette is about "oil talk" and his main observation is that this is not necessarily about communicative reason, but more about politics again, about contesting positions by using images about oil production and oil industry and the effects it has. "Naming and blaming" are part of what is called "epideixis" in Aristotle's rhetoric, and it is quite interesting that we see it at work in international politics as well (cf. Grigat 2014).

Naming and blaming are speech acts in a game in which actors in the political field refer to the oil industry in order to improve their relative position in political competition. What Jannik hits upon here is a common thread in all four vignettes: there are *acts* of communication, and the circumstances, the situations, the structures in which things are done with words matter for their effects.

This again is in my reading a lesson in political sociology. Legitimacy is what creates the difference between power and domination (cf. Schlichte 2012). What we see in the conflict here are endless attempts to question the legitimacy of opponents with words. In these practices, everything you can do with words is used in order to produce meaning, to convince, to entice an audience to follow the speaker. The power of speech, however, does not automatically translate into authority. The conflict about meaning and signification is a conflict about the legitimacy of positions, and at the same time it produces some order within the conflict. A more general question with regard to the Priority Program's main goals might be: When is the order emerging in a conflict translated into an order of conflicts? The underlying idea of that question is that this is ultimately what we see when we look at the production of constitutions or parliaments: they are orders of conflicts to the extent that they describe institutions which are able to process conflicts. Do we see here institutions emerging or are they already there?

Two general remarks on the vignettes in a comparative perspective, one on the "Africaness" of what we see here, and another one on the quite remarkable role of the state:

- a) Here like in the other vignettes we see how manifold the contents are that are addressed. They have a historicity, sure, and in that sense they are local. But in all stories, in all semantics we see a long global history at work at the same time. Be it the European settler who produced the image of Shaka Zulu, be it the use of "good governance" as a buzzword, be it the certificate handed over to the young heroes or the globalized images of what oil production does: the semantics are quite internationalized.
- b) Despite its alleged disfunctionality, the state in Africa is quite active, it is "at work" (Bierschenk / Olivier de Sardan 2014) in producing what it is producing elsewhere as well: meaning (*Bedeutung*). Like anywhere else, however, these productions are not uncontested. But this doesn't mean that they don't have effects. I find this observation quite important as it contradicts an image of African contexts that stress decay, crisis, and anomy. Even the African state shows a remarkable presence. Its admirers will not make the same experience like the audience of Elvis Presley's concerts who were sent home with the sentence "Elvis has just left the building".

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