



ANTHROPOLOGY, CHANGE, AND DEVELOPMENT

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Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation How to Make Sense of Change

Edited by
Yasmine Berriane
Annuska Derks
Aymon Kreil
Dorothea Lüddeckens

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Mainstream development studies have tended to neglect important aspects of experience in developing countries that fall outside the conventional preserve of development intervention. These neglected phenomena include consumption, modernity, and mobility and ambivalent experiences such as uncertainty, mistrust, jealousy, envy, love, emotion, hope, religious and spiritual belief, personhood and other experiences throughout the lifecourse. They have most closely been addressed through critical ethnography in the context of contemporary developing societies. We invite volumes that focus on the value of ethnography of these contemporary experiences of development (as change), not only to address these neglected phenomena, but also to enrich social science thinking about development.

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Aymon Kreil · Dorothea Lüddeckens
Editors

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Anthropology, Change, and Development

ISBN 978-3-030-65066-7

ISBN 978-3-030-65067-4 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

This edited volume is the result of several years of exchange and collaboration that took mainly place—between 2014 and 2017—within the working group “Norms and Social Order(s)” of the University Research Priority Program (URPP) Asia and Europe, an interdisciplinary research structure that was funded by the University of Zurich from 2006 to 2017. We would therefore like to first thank the University of Zurich for making this exchange possible and for supporting and funding a doctoral seminar on epistemological and methodological challenges of the study of change (Fall 2015), and the international workshop “Snapshots of Change: Assessing Social Transformation in Qualitative Research” (Zurich, 23–24 October 2015), which was sponsored by the URPP Asia and Europe, the UZH-Graduate Campus, the Zürcher Universitätsverein (ZUNIV), and the Wilhelm Jerg Legat Foundation. A grant by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) further enabled us to publish this volume open access.

This volume was first conceived in 2015 during the abovementioned international workshop. We are therefore also much indebted to Melek

Saral and Thiruni Kelegama, our two co-organizers, and to all the participants and colleagues who provided valuable insights both during this event and during the years that followed. The editorial board and the anonymous reviewers at Palgrave Macmillan provided detailed and most helpful suggestions for revisions of all chapters. We owe also much gratitude to Sally Sutton and Rivka Eisner, who went out of their way, to correct and proofread all the chapters.

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1

Making Sense of Change: Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation—An Introduction

Yasmine Berriane, Annuska Derks, Aymon Kreil,
and Dorothea Lüddeckens

For centuries, social scientists, historians, and philosophers have tried to describe, account for, and predict change. Despite these efforts, questions about how changes in society come about, the trajectories and forms that they take, and the consequences they have remain unresolved (Vago

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*, Anthropology, Change, and Development,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_1

1999). It may be obvious that, to make sense of change, it is necessary to go beyond a chronology of events or sweeping laws of evolution. We need to critically assess the ways in which we analyze change as researchers, relying on theory and/or our personal expectations, and pay attention to how people live through, experience, desire, create, and challenge change. But how can we, at the same time, gain a *longue durée* perspective on societal transformation and give a truthful account of the ways our different interlocutors describe, name, perceive, and understand the changes they are living through and the kinds of futures they expect (Pels 2015; Stephan and Flaherty 2019)? This question is all the more central since the study of societal transformation necessarily entails taking into account broader structuring dynamics which are hard to understand through immersion in the field alone (Burawoy 2009).

Qualitative researchers, who usually do not engage in longitudinal and statistical analyses of change, have to make sense of fragments of people's perceptions and representations of change at a particular moment in time. To assess change in the making as part of larger trends in society would ideally involve remaining within the same research site for decades, at least. Unfortunately, social science researchers studying social and political transformations are rarely able to conduct such long-term studies. Due to time constraints, material limitations, and academic obligations, fieldwork is often limited to a relatively short space of time—and even a year or two is too short to assess social transformation on the spot. Qualitative researchers studying change are therefore bound by the space, time, and duration of their inquiry.

Focusing on methodological questions, with contributions from a selection of authors, this volume invites us to think more closely about how we face these challenges as social scientists reliant on qualitative methods of inquiry. The chapters collected here aim to provide scholars who are studying societies in transformation with diverse methodological tools and analytical frameworks. While combining diverse methods of investigation, the contributors show—in close detail—how an ethnographic approach to their object of inquiry enables them to provide particular, in-depth descriptions of the processes and understandings of change as it is lived and experienced by people (Ingold 2017). By privileging ethnography, the authors tackle various key methodological

questions. How do objects, spaces, memories, networks, rituals, and discourses about the present and the past inform us about change? What are the limits of these units of analysis and what challenges do the researchers using them face? How can we deal with these limits and challenges? Moreover, how do we deal with our interlocutors' understandings of change, and how do we connect these to the various theories of change at our disposal?

Each chapter of this book is therefore based on concrete case studies from various parts of the world which involve a diversity of fields, analytical approaches, and types of data. By paying attention to both the complexities of their respective fieldwork sites and to the dominant meta-narratives generally used to account for change, the contributors to this volume explore the intricacies of combining etic and emic perspectives on change, a question on which each offers their own methodological response.

Ethnography and Change: A Key Social Science Issue

Since at least the nineteenth century most disciplines in the social sciences have oscillated between what we could qualify as historicist trends, trying to explain contemporary situations through the influence of past events, and nomologic trends seeking regularities that transcend geographical and historical differences to establish universal scientific laws. Auguste Comte and Saint-Simon were founders of the nomological trend in the social sciences, notably through their influence on Émile Durkheim in sociology and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown in anthropology (Durkheim 1925; Heilbron 1990; Rafie 1972). Historicism, on the other hand, rejects the idea of universal laws and insists on the uniqueness of each historical development along the lines of Friedrich Schlegel's initial coinage of the term (on the different uses of the notion of historicism see Chakrabarty 2000, 22–23; Iggers 1995).

These two approaches represent the two poles of a continuum rather than absolute opposites. Most researchers combine historicist and nomologic schemes of explanation in their work. Emphasis on the weight of

the past most often has as a correlate the formulation of universal laws of evolution, and a focus on permanent rules of social life does not necessarily mean ruling out history as an explanation for the present state of societies. In early sociology, Herbert Spencer's attempts to establish the rules of the rise and decline of civilizations and Émile Durkheim's efforts to discover the permanent sociological conditions behind the cohesion of societies are examples of the fluctuation between diachronic and synchronic schemes of explanation in the burgeoning social sciences of their time.

In anthropology, however, the debate took a specific shape linked to the rise of ethnographic fieldwork as the core method of the discipline in the beginning of the twentieth century. When anthropology emerged as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, evolutionists set "the agenda for the study of humanity moving through time" (Ervin 2015, 2). They sought to explain change in terms of universal laws of human development, looking for the survival of ancient stages of evolution in non-European societies to support their theories. Diffusionist ethnologists, on the other hand, focused on the spread of cultural items such as artifacts, institutions, and myths as a way of discovering ancient migration and communication routes and distinguishing between different "cultural areas" or *Kulturkreise*. These two competing perspectives on how human societies change shared the common understanding that explanations for contemporary practices can be found in the past by reconstituting historical processes and establishing the regularities underlying such developments (Stocking 1984, 136).

The diachronic approaches advocated by evolutionists and diffusionists were strongly criticized by those putting forward the need for research based on empirical foundations and moving away from establishing universal laws of change toward examining how institutions contribute to maintaining society's overall stability. These critics, who were particularly vocal in Britain, gained momentum from the 1920s onward. Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, for example, strongly opposed "conjectural history" as practiced by evolutionist and diffusionist anthropologists (1923, 125; Smith 1962, 75–76), and Bronislaw Malinowski advocated intensive fieldwork by professional ethnographers as the main anthropological method of inquiry (Thomas 1996, 19–24). This method favors

a synchronic appraisal of societies that is limited to the period of the researcher's stay in the field.

While the debate about the necessity of including historical methods in anthropology continued (see for instance Evans-Pritchard 1951, 57–62), a general sense prevailed for around half a century that stable features of societies should remain the discipline's principal concern.¹ A fundamental aspect of all of these debates about the use of history, however, was less a denial of history in general than a refusal to take the effects and after-effects of colonization fully into account. Denying the population under study contemporaneity with Europe and North America, what Johannes Fabian (2014, 31) called the “denial of coevalness,” is mirrored in the quest for models of society surviving at the fringes of Western influence. Many anthropologists who deplored the fast disappearance of such societies under the influence of colonialism and modernization not only rejected the conjectural history of the past evolution of societies but also ignored important transformations in the making which they could possibly have observed themselves. Therefore, the “change reluctance” of early anthropologists assessed by Francesca Merlan (2015, 229) would be better qualified as a reluctance to study colonial transformation.

There were exceptions, however, mostly in Africa. In the 1930s, researchers at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, including its longtime director Max Gluckman, studied the ways in which “tribal” ways of life that used to be based on kinship were transformed in the urban, industrial context of the Copperbelt region (Schumaker 2001). Gluckman was particularly interested in events that manifested social tensions and had the potential to create new institutional and customary orders, which he analyzed on the basis of detailed descriptions of conflict situations. Thus he set the basis for an ethnographic method for the

¹The global influence of French structuralism reinforced this tendency. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, its founding father and main theorist, the task of anthropology was to establish the categorical oppositions structuring the human unconscious in all place and time. Even if he traced parallels between ethnographers and historians, he deemed historical contingencies irrelevant to anthropological theory (Lévi-Strauss 1974, 9–39).

study of change in the making (Gluckman 1940; Kapferer 2010, 3).² Studies from the Rhodes-Livingston Institute were soon emulated, notably by French anthropologists, with the independence of the colonies approaching and criticism of colonization becoming more vocal. From the 1950s on, Georges Balandier insisted on the importance of studying the dynamics of change in Africa. Focusing on French Congo and Gabon, he documented at length the impact of colonization, the role of Christian missions, the urbanization of Brazzaville, and the effects of the monetarization of the economy (Balandier 1951, 1955).

These teleological accounts of early ethnographic studies of change influenced by narratives of modernization were later criticized by anthropologists such as James Ferguson, who found instances of decline and what he called “non- and counterlinearities” in the Zambian Copperbelt of the late 1980s (Ferguson 1999, 20). His research formed part of a general defiance toward grand narratives (Lyotard 1979) in anthropology which correlated with a critique of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1983), Eurocentric visions of history, and the promotion of fragmented and often conflictual narratives of change (Chakrabarty 2000, 3–23). The postmodern dismissal of any unified concept of objective truth led to calls for a more explicitly political role for anthropology that would lend a voice to the wretched of the earth.

Consequently, public anthropology and collaborative research became important features of the discipline, accompanied by recurring calls to quit the academic ivory tower. Being more explicitly political also often involves trying to find immediate responses to the issues of the day. In this regard, trends promoting the explicit politicization of anthropology paradoxically rejoined the funding agencies’ demands for a reshaping of research agendas to better address issues of impact and policy relevance (Hanafi 2010; Knowles and Burrows 2014), focusing for instance on development, democratization, and the empowerment of local communities. As a result, ethnographers had to adapt their methods to the study of broad transformation processes, although at first sight ethnography might appear an unsuitable tool for such a task.

²His method of carefully describing events and social situations has been developed further by Clyde Mitchell (1956, 1983), and more recently by Alban Bensa and Eric Fassin (2002), Michael Burawoy (1998, 2009), and Bruce Kapferer (2010).

The Assets of Ethnography for Studying Change

In his book *Social Change and History*, Robert Nisbet (1969) criticizes common approaches to change that are based on a metaphor of growth in which, analogous to the life cycles of organisms, change is seen as natural, immanent, and cumulative, as if unfolding an internal potentiality. Yet as he contends, while we can observe birth, growth, degeneration, and death in the life cycles of plants and organisms, no one has “ever seen—actually, empirically seen—growth and development” in societies and cultures (ibid., 3). What we can see instead are “mingled facts of persistence and change” (ibid.). What does this mean for the study of change? How can we empirically observe change? Robert Nisbet (1969, 266) argues that “observation of differences is the beginning of the study of change.” To be able to observe these differences, it is first necessary to specify what is changing in order to be able to analyze the level, engines, components, rates, magnitudes, and consequences of change (Vago 1999; Weinstein 2010).

The more classical sociological and development approaches to change rely in particular on macrolevel and statistical data to analyze shifts in, for example, economic output, the proportion of people living in urban areas or moving abroad, the composition of families, the transformation of political regimes, the use of energy and technologies, and attitudes toward gender and political issues. Such data lead many authors to conclude that changes have accelerated and become global in character (Eriksen 2016a; Weinstein 2010; Nederveen Pieterse 2010). Jay Weinstein (2010, 3) even speaks of a “great sociocultural revolution” sweeping our world. While these macrolevel assessments are important to identify general trends, they cannot account for the fact that people often experience change differently (Schaeffer 2003, 15).

This is why ethnographic research holds great potential for the study of change (Eriksen 2016a; Tsing 2004, 2015). While ethnography is considered anthropology’s core scientific method, other disciplines have also sought to incorporate the ethnographic method in their research practice, from Robert Park, Louis Wirth, and William Foote Whyte, the sociologists of the Chicago School studying urban social life in the

early twentieth century, to the more recent ethnographic turn in political science that seeks to understand political thought and behavior not through disassembled categories but as embedded in real-life settings (Brodkin 2017; Hannerz 1980). While political change is still predominantly studied via “surveys, secondary data [...], formal modelling, and statistical approaches,” a burgeoning yet rapidly growing body of literature is working on deciphering “the nitty-gritty details of politics” (Auyero and Joseph 2007). These emerging trends have contributed to shedding new light on dominant theories about political change, including studies on institutional transformations (Cantini, Chapter 3 of this volume), social movements (Wolford 2007), and political transitions (Ghodsee 2011). In contrast, ethnography has long been established in social science approaches to the study of religion, in research on contemporary religious communities and other forms of religiosity, now also including multi-sited ethnography for the study of the “digital and multi-sited dimensions of contemporary religious practices” (Murchison and Coats 2015, 989). The study of religious change or “religion *in process*” with its “fleeting, ephemeral, and impermanent” aspects including digital data especially calls for adapted ethnographic methods (Murchison and Coats 2015, 1001).

While many anthropologists are skeptical about other disciplines’ claims that they employ ethnography (Howell 2017), there is a common understanding that the method aims “to describe life as it is lived and experienced, by a people, somewhere, sometime” (Ingold 2017, 21). This includes the ways in which people live and experience change. Ethnographic study is a crucial instrument for understanding processes of change and uncovering and analyzing the complex and often contradictory interplay of new and old, continuity and change. Observing the repercussions of change at close range allows us to grasp them as lived experiences, with all their possible inconsistency and polyvalence. It also enables us to challenge hierarchies between scales of change setting the general over the particular, as illustrated by the interconnection of bodies, matter, urban place, and space in Maria F. Malmström’s ethnography of lived experiences during the 2013 military intervention in Egypt (Chapter 10) and Irene Bono’s critical exploration of the hegemonic narrative of the formation of the Moroccan nation-state through

the personal archives of a single actor, illustrating the tensions between hegemonic memory and personal experience (Chapter 6).

The connection of different scales of change is central to Thomas Hylland Eriksen's *Anthropology of Accelerated Change* (2016a) which analyzes the "overheating" effects of the (uneven) spread of modernity and their implications for the environment, mobility, and collective identities (Eriksen 2016b, 470). While these problems are global in scope, they are nonetheless perceived and responded to locally. Eriksen therefore insists on "the primacy of the local" in order to reveal the contradictions between the standardizing forces of global capitalism and the socially embedded nature of people and local practices (ibid., 2016a). Further, as he puts it, clashes of scales can occur, and broad processes at the global level can remain completely unnoticed or be deemed irrelevant at the local level, or can be subject to interpretation using completely different systems of meaning (ibid.; see also Tsing 2004, 2015). And yet as Tania Murray Li (2014) shows, even when change is gradual and largely unnoticed locally, the consequences may be dramatic. It is therefore crucial to examine not just the scales and directions but also the pace and magnitude of change, and how these impact the daily lives of the people we study.

The main concern of authors such as Erikson, Anna L. Tsing, and Li, who advocate for the use of ethnography to study change, is the understanding, description, and explanation of transformation processes. They do not, however, discuss or reflect on practical methods to explore this change, and this is the main gap that this volume aims to fill by bringing together case studies from different regions, places, and times. As most researchers do not have the opportunity to conduct research in a particular place or group over a span of twenty or more years, Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski's question remains relevant: can social scientists use ethnography to write about historical and social change considering the limited amount of time they spend in the field? To answer this question requires setting aside, at least temporarily, the "pathos" accompanying narratives of dramatic change (Passeron 1991, 279–91): we need instead to focus on the descriptive, analytical, and methodological tools at our disposal for assessing change, critically reflecting on their limitations and assets.

Periodization and the Naming of Change

When looking at the ways in which the social sciences approach the issue of change, periodization is the first issue to consider. Too often, assessments of change are based on extrapolation from observations made at two different points in time, sometimes without questioning the validity of the diagnosis used as a premise. Fredrick Barth (1967, 664) discusses the importance of our own assumptions and perspectives on change and continuity using the example of an aquarium: when we see a crab in the place where we observed a fish a moment earlier, we may wonder how the fish now has claws instead of fins, assuming that the rest of the body has remained the same; or we may ask how the crab came to replace the fish, focusing instead on the continuity of the setting. Hence whether we observe change or continuity depends on our perspective. This is also illustrated in Eliza Isabaeva's contribution (Chapter 7) about a squatter settlement in Bishkek, where the replacement of a clay hut with a stone house is a clear material manifestation of the changes in migrants' lives although the illegality and precarity of their settlement remains the same.

Available studies tend to represent change as either an ongoing process or the result of a powerful and disruptive event or moment in history (Bensa and Fassin 2002). The fall of the Berlin Wall is such an example: Bruno Latour (1993, 10) speaks of the "miraculous year 1989" after which a series of events changed the way we look at the natural and social world, while Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016b, 473) speaks of an "acceleration of history since 1991." The idea that certain events generate critical turning points that induce, trigger or make change possible is nourished by the way they are covered by the media. The events of September 11, 2001 are probably among the most telling examples in this regard, with a long list of papers on the U.S.'s relationship with Islamic countries presenting it as the start of a new era (Witkowski and Zagratzki 2014). The Arab Spring is also a good example of the sudden reinterpretation of the history of a whole region in light of a series of uprisings. Funding organizations also contribute to this tendency, with a clear trend since 2011—at least at the level of Middle Eastern Studies—toward research projects centered on "change." This trend is all the more interesting because the current close attention to social movements and

radical change in the Middle East comes after decades when the bulk of such research was dedicated to the influence of Islam on society, with a tendency to highlight continuities and the sociocultural resistance to change.

A whole range of neologisms prefixed by “post” emphasizes the decisive role of such moments in history as the starting points of fundamental change. This applies for instance to the labeling of countries as “post-socialist” and “post-conflict,” and more specifically “post-apartheid” South Africa, “post-9/11” United States, “post-Brexit” UK, for instance. While the prefix “post” suggests a clear break between before and after, its analytic value lies rather in critical reflection on the complex past and the results of such moments of change, as well as on the ongoing presence of former institutions, hierarchies and dependencies in the contemporary social reality, as insights from studies of “post-colonial” and “post-socialist” societies show (Chari and Verdery 2009, 11). Concomitantly, conceptions of change are intimately linked to a whole range of other neologisms with the suffix “ation” that highlight the processual character of change such as modernization, secularization, individualization, democratization, and, of course, globalization.

Thus the terminology used to name transformations is another important issue to consider when looking at the ways in which the social sciences approach the question of change. For instance, how do we distinguish here between emic and etic categories, and terminologies used to describe and name change? Should we echo the terminologies used by the actors to name and describe the transformations they are experiencing, at risk of simply “parroting” them rather than analyzing our data, implicitly prioritizing a particular perspective in the field (see Lüddeckens and Schrimpf 2018, 17–21), or should we rather use our own categories and terminologies, risking using words and meanings that are foreign to the actors in the field (Ginzburg 2012) and that contrast with the way they actually live and perceive change?

There is always the looming danger of uncritically taking over preexisting notions of change when specific events are described *a priori* by researchers as setting the stage for a whole epoch. As Harri Englund and James Leach (2000) remind us in their discussion of modernization theories, such metanarratives of change tend to foreclose a genuine analysis of

what is going on and how people perceive the changes in their lives. They therefore argue for “truly reflexive” ethnographic research that does not assume prior knowledge of the context of what is going on in the lives of their interlocutors and gives them a “measure of authority in producing an understanding of their life-worlds” (ibid., 226). Moreover, it is important to trace back the reasons why certain modes of periodization, and ways that change has been labeled, have gained prominence. Therefore, studying change raises the question of how scholars name and interpret the transformations they are observing or are interested in. More than anything, the terms used to label change are often normatively and ideologically laden, referring to the direction in which the named process is expected to move.

A prerequisite for a critical assessment of modes of periodization and labeling is taking into account the power struggles at stake in the naming of a change, leading to the question of who defines how ongoing processes are interpreted. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1998) denounce, when people describe globalization as the main feature of current times, the conjuring trick of hiding the political lobbying leading to the contemporary interconnection of markets and thereby naturalizing the resulting process. As researchers we should not take change and its counterparts, continuity and stability, for granted; it is important to question the power hierarchies and representations that shape the ways change is apprehended, assessed, and used as a discursive tool of legitimation.

This also means paying attention to the different experts on change, including the local, national, and transnational development agencies and organizations that assess and set the norms of what constitutes “good” and “bad” change. Among them are also anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, and other social scientists who both denounce the cultural encroachments endangering the diversity of practices in different cultures and call for social transformations to advocate for subaltern populations. Processes such as population growth, urbanization, individualization, secularization, and migration, and categories such as youth, women, and new leaders are often interpreted as “carriers of change”

without questioning the reasons behind such associations or considering how such processes or categories may also contribute to reproducing norms. These concerns are illustrated in Chapter 5, in Christoph Schwarz's contribution about a young activist in Morocco, a type of actor commonly referred to as an "agent of change." However, through analyzing processes of intergenerational transmission, the author shows how his interviewee perceives social change primarily as a "trajectory of suffering" contributing to the production of an urban precariat.

Even if notions such as progress and modernization, which dominated the twentieth century, are less prevalent today in academia, "their categories and assumptions of improvement are still with us everywhere. We imagine their objects on a daily basis: democracy, growth, science, hope" (Tsing 2015, 20–21). Notions such as development, transition, evolution, rupture, and revolution have a strong normative dimension, as they often convey teleological presuppositions embedded in grand narratives linked, for instance, to ideas of improvement, liberalism, socialism, and developmentalism (Eriksen 2016b; Koselleck 1997; Li 2007; Watts 2009). Interest in change is therefore often laden with expectations about the course it must follow and also, increasingly, with the negative consequences of "accelerated change" (Eriksen 2016b).

Narratives about both change and stability are thus linked to instruments of rule that can have different significations depending on the historical and regional context (see also Martin and Soucaille 2014). In Morocco, for instance, while the new young king symbolized the beginning of a new era in 1999 via a rupture with the past (represented by his father), the monarchy as an institution was nevertheless still presented as the immutable guarantor of stability that must therefore remain unchanged (Berriane 2005). This kind of compromise between a consensus on the urgent need for institutional change and a deep concern with stability, political unity, and social order can be found in different times and places. Likewise, although market-oriented reforms and the introduction of neoliberal logics and practices have undeniably brought about major changes for the people of countries such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba, they did not necessarily require a break with the socialist past but rather a reconfiguration and remaking of socialist relations, practices,

and forms of governmentality (Schwenkel and Leshkovich 2012; see also Trémon, Chapter 2, and Gold, Chapter 4 in this volume).

The Indeterminacies of Lived Change

These issues related to periodizing and naming change raise important questions about what people make of change and continuity, and the implications of these processes on their lives (Merlan 2015, 228). In people's daily lives, change is never uniform or totalizing but is experienced through the articulation of past and present conditions and future expectations, an idea that is highlighted in several chapters of this volume, such as Marina Gold's contribution on the way life is perceived in a state of perpetual revolution, illustrated by the case of Cuba (Chapter 4), and Anna Dessertine's exploration of practices, imaginaries, and perceptions of change at a mining site in Upper Guinea (Chapter 9).

Due to the limitations of macro-sociological theories, Mansoor Moaddel and Michele Gelfand (2017) argue in favor of taking into account the varying perceptions, outcomes, and configurations of change. This is important because normative discourses on change influence both researchers and their interlocutors. Researchers need to be aware of the pitfalls of selective interpretation when privileging the narratives of change of certain interlocutors over those of others, as it may cause them to overlook other processes of change. For example, due to the focus on artists whose work would be labeled "underground art" in the West and on liberal activists who sometimes even quoted Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault as their inspiration during the 2011 uprising in Egypt (see for instance El-Mahdi 2011; Rizk 2014; Eickhof 2016 for a critique of such perception biases), many observers failed to notice the more authoritarian trends shaping the country's future. Uncritically relying on our interlocutors' discourses on change is as unsatisfactory as trusting theory to provide ready-made explanations for the processes in question.

This means that research should be directed toward identifying and highlighting the complexities of change, showing its apparent contradictions and the combination or interaction of new and old elements, universals, and particulars (Tsing 2004), as well as emic and etic perspectives on change, in order to remain open to the unexpected and the overlooked. This is also what Tsing (2015) proposes in her book on the “possibility of life in capitalist ruins.” Highlighting precarity as the condition of our times, she argues in favor of research that considers change through the lens of indeterminacy and unpredictability, an approach that should enable us to “look for what has been ignored because it never fit the time line of progress” (Tsing 2015, 21), and to grasp multiple temporalities and assemblages of change (see also Bono, Chapter 6 of this volume). Thus there are more pragmatic and micro-sociological approaches that look at what is often called the “grey zone” in which change and continuity go hand in hand and different temporal patterns coexist. In this context, terms such as hybridization, reconfiguration, assemblage (Collier and Ong 2005), and even polyphonic assemblage (Tsing 2015) have gained momentum.

These approaches are all the more important because as Li (2014, 9) shows in her study of agrarian transformation and the entrenchment of the market in the highlands of Sulawesi, change is not necessarily a result of conflict, dramatic events, or destructive outside forces. Change may come about gradually, causing a piecemeal erosion of social relations, land, and labor in unexpected and unplanned ways. To gain insight into these gradual processes of change and their intended and unintended consequences, Li, relying on ethnographic data collected during multiple visits over two decades, was able to analyze processes in a particular place as they took shape over time. In their edited volume Jonathan Rigg and Peter Vandergeest (2012) bring together contributions from researchers who similarly return to the sites of their earlier research in Southeast Asia to examine how economic, political, and social change is affecting the places, spaces, and people over periods some of which span as many as four decades. Researchers’ long-term experience in a particular place allows them to analyze changes that neither they nor their interlocutors may have expected, and, as in the case of Yoshihiro Tsubouchi’s (2001)

analysis of change in a Malay village through the juxtaposition of two “snapshots” taken twenty years apart, that the locals have overlooked.

However, as stated above, not all researchers can afford to go back and forth to their field sites over many decades and conduct what Signe Howell and Aud Talle (2012, 3) call “multitemporal” fieldwork in order to “follow social processes at close range,” thus potentially gaining profound insights into continuity and change. Even when such a long-term relationship is possible, fieldwork results have to be published regularly. To provisionally return to a “presentism” (Elias 1987; Hartog 2015) that denies any past or future to social phenomena is no solution. Researchers need methods that they can use to elaborate sound hypotheses about change in the making, even if these have to be revised later.

Studying Snapshots of Change: An Analytical Framework

In this book, we specifically examine the methodologies and kinds of data that we, as social scientists, can rely on to develop hypothetical scenarios of change when our fieldwork period is relatively short. We argue for a combination of multiple methods of investigation that borrow from both ethnography and other methods of data collection and analysis. A classic example is the combination of ethnographic and archival research to study social change over time, such as in the cases of a Northern Vietnamese village described by John Kleinen (1999) and the political activism in Morocco described by Irene Bono (Chapter 6). Yet there are many other ways to study change, such as through the biographies of everyday objects (Derks 2015); collecting actors’ oral histories and life stories (Berriane 2015); systematic analysis of changes to religious rituals and healing practices (Lüddeckens 2018a, b); and retracing the circulation of concepts (Kreil 2016) and discourses.

In this book, we present concrete examples of methodological approaches and analytical frameworks for researchers who are studying issues involving social change. The case studies presented depart from the same questions: what kind of data enables us to assess social change

when conducting qualitative research? How should we approach the ways in which the actors we are studying conceptualize change? And how do we position our research in relation to different temporalities and scales of change? Each contribution thus articulates and questions, in different ways, these three key issues as it addresses the question of change: the unit of analysis, the empirical data, and the metanarratives of change that are used to make sense of the observed phenomenon.

The first key issue is the choice of a defined unit of analysis, which could be, for instance, a body, an individual's life story, a space, a house, a generation of actors, an institution, and a ritual. Such units of analysis are often set *a priori* for inquiries into social transformation as the objects which make it possible to observe change, as they are perceived as having some degree of internal consistency over time. Yet the relevance of these units of analysis to understand change cannot remain unquestioned. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) illustrates the issue well with his reflections on the "biographical illusion" inherent in life stories, for example, which rests on the false axiom that individual trajectories consist of various stages that are necessarily coherent. Consequently, addressing the question of change also allows us to reflect on the subjects of change; i.e., the units of reference or analysis deemed permanent by the researcher and/or their interlocutors.

Secondly, we address the empirical data used to study these units of analysis. Based on data gathered from the observation of specific actions, situations, practices and emotions, interviews and life histories, network analysis, archival material, and online sources, the chapters in this book critically reflect on what kinds of empirical data can be linked to the chosen unit of analysis. How can the empirical data provide us with conclusive insights into change at the level of the chosen unit of analysis? And how can we avoid the pitfall of circular knowledge, in which we read what we already know from other sources into our material?

Thirdly, we address the metanarratives and theories that underlie the interpretation of change. As mentioned, there are many metanarratives (theories, ideologies, and dominant schemes of interpretation) that offer a certain understanding of change: the interrelation between capitalism and processes of individualization; processes of individualization and secularization and the decline of traditional religion; democratization as

a linear process of transition that occurs in different phases; and revolutions as transformative events during which people are the main actors of change leading to freedom and democracy. What, for instance, does the chosen unit of analysis enable us to say about broader schemes of change? What is the role of metanarratives of change? Do they frame the general setting, the context within which the studied processes take place, or do they blind us from seeing what is actually going on?

In his extended case study model, Michael Burawoy (2009) reminds us of the importance of theory. According to him, researchers need to rely on theory to step beyond the limitations of the field, as this is the only way to account for the broad structural constraints shaping the situations they are interested in. While theories play a central role in our attempts to go beyond the observed case, they are themselves embedded in mundane struggles and not only abstract efforts to provide a general understanding of the world (Castoriadis 1975, 8). In the social sciences, the non-reproducibility of historical situations further increases the difficulty of considering theory as the ultimate framework of knowledge, as there are no means for creating the same setting twice as in a laboratory. Therefore, comparisons necessarily exclude dimensions of reality that could be of great importance for understanding current evolutions (Passeron 1991). Should we then abandon any attempt to gain an understanding of change which would go beyond what is immediately graspable from our fieldwork or formulated by our interlocutors?

To address this general question we suggest shifting the focus away from (purportedly) abstract understandings of theory to concentrate more on two interrelated dimensions of theory-building, which are the emic and the etic dimensions: the categories through which we are observing or studying change and our interlocutor's categories as actors living change. Carlo Ginzburg insists on the importance of both distinguishing between the two and taking their interconnectedness into account: "one starts from etic questions aiming to get emic answers [...] that generate etic questions and vice versa" (2012, 108–16). Thus "the emic perspective can be grasped only through the mediation of an etic perspective" (*ibid.*, 108), while our etic categories are themselves the product of our interaction with the emic dimension. Furthermore, our etic analytical concepts allow us to conduct comparative research and

develop theories while they themselves are “determined by particular contextual conditions differently from emic perspectives” (Lüddeckens and Schrimpf 2018, 19).

Applying this perspective to our analytical framework, we contend that metanarratives offer certain understandings of change that inevitably influence our choice of units of analysis and the related empirical data. At the same time, they can and should be contested, improved, and refined through the material collected via these same units of analysis. Thus, instead of taking such metanarratives as explanatory schemes for the phenomena that we are observing, we should use them as incentives to ask certain questions without assuming their answers. As an outcome, our research should enable us to question the teleological interpretations implicit in these metanarratives.

Book Outline

The chapters that constitute this book address these methodological questions on the basis of concrete empirical cases and diverse approaches and types of data from various contexts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. The questions tackled by the contributors are diverse, but they all revolve around change and focus on the methodological challenges encountered and the tools used to study social transformation. The book’s structure is based on three main challenges pertaining to the study of change.

The first part of the book brings together chapters concerned with the challenge of connecting different scales of change. Change is never simply an isolated event: changes in the lives of individuals are often intimately related to broader societal change and global processes, even though perceptions of the impact of such changes may differ. To understand change it is therefore necessary to go beyond individual life stories or case studies of particular communities and link these to the different scales on which change takes place. The question, however, is how one connects these different scales.

Anne-Christine Trémon (Chapter 2) shows how the inhabitants of a village community in China understand larger socio-economic change, how they refer to this in terms of a revalorization of locality, and how this process alters their relationship with their diaspora. Through this case, she shows how contradictions encountered during our research can inform us about accelerated change, ensuing conflicts of scale, and people's attempts to reconceptualize the valence of local and global scales. With the case study of universities in Egypt, Daniele Cantini (Chapter 3) offers methodological and theoretical reflections on the possibilities offered by the ethnographic study of institutions for addressing the question of social change. In particular, he deals with the discrepant temporalities at stake which sometimes collide in institutions during major political events, as illustrated by the 2011 uprising and its aftermath. Marina Gold's study (Chapter 4) focuses on Cuba, where references to change and continuity are a powerful discursive mechanism for redefining and reinvigorating the revolutionary project. She explores how different kinds of large-scale transcendental events and small private ones shape people's everyday experiences and understanding of the perpetual revolution in Cuba.

The second part of the book consists of chapters that address the challenge of studying change through biography. While this has become a popular way of tracing the lives of people, objects, or institutions in relation to changes in wider society, the biographic approach has been criticized for creating an illusion of coherence and linearity, and for reducing complexity. Consequently the central questions include: How can we make biography useful for the study of change? How do biographies evolve over time? And what does this tell us about changes in society and the roles of individuals in these changes?

Christoph Schwarz (Chapter 5) combines narrative biographical interviews with generational analysis to study transformations. Using the life story of a young Moroccan activist, he shows how research can identify particular constellations of intergenerational relationships as characteristic of generational disparities. Irene Bono (Chapter 6) explores the formation of the Moroccan nation-state by adopting the biography of a single actor as her fieldwork, using personal archives and mnemonic techniques in interviews. With this case study she shows

the tension between the collective memory surrounding political change and personal experiences of it, highlighting the ways in which individuals can participate in a hegemonic paradigm that does not necessarily match their own experience of change. Eliza Isabaeva (Chapter 7) looks at societal change through the lens of house biographies. By describing the gradual transformation of houses in an illegal squatter settlement in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, she shows that the transformation of such micro-spaces for living can inform us about wider developments in Kyrgyz society, shedding new light on the two dominant and opposing meta-narratives that interpret the 2005 Tulip Revolution either as a moment of change or a moment of continuity. Using the example of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian writer who later became a prominent Islamist thinker, Giedre Sabaseviciute (Chapter 8) shows how intellectuals of the middle of the twentieth century alternately put forward mentorship and generational divides when speaking about more established authors as a way to claim authority and discredit competitors, even when the groups making the generational claims were quite diverse in terms of age. She stresses the importance of considering which solidarity networks writers primarily rely on for understanding the shifts in their ideas, an issue that is still relevant in the analysis of today's literary scenes.

In the book's final section, the focus is on the challenges of studying change in the making. Change is often studied *a posteriori* when it has become clear what has changed and to what extent, in which direction, for how long, and at what level(s). As researchers we are often confronted with situations or places in which change is obviously happening before our eyes, sometimes at a very rapid pace. How can we make sense of what is going on? And how can we judge the temporality of these accounts of change in the making?

Anna Dessertine addresses these questions by looking at the transformative role of space in the case of gold mining in a Malinké village in Upper Guinea (Chapter 9). Through Dessertine's example of what she describes as a liminal and ephemeral space, she analyzes everyday situations to explore how people perceive and perform change differently depending on their expectations and interpretations of the behavior and actions that characterize artisanal gold mining in Guinea. In her

chapter on the 2013 military coup in Egypt (Chapter 10), Maria Malmström discusses the difficulties of exploring change in the making. Based upon her own lived experience during moments of intense and violent change, she suggests the use of a method anchored in affect and the body, showing how this enables her to study tangible emotions that resonate with and transform everyday engagements in a transitional country. In the last chapter, Urs Weber (Chapter 11) shows how the study of national newspaper articles can inform us about the changing normative expectations about funeral practices in Taiwan. Using discourse analysis, he analyzes the trend toward a secular understanding of funerals and more generally discusses theories of secularization, one of the dominant metanarratives of change.

Conclusion

Henri Bergson famously argued that a sound understanding of change requires apprehending its movement in its totality. In a conference at Oxford University in 1911, he compared change to a melody: if someone interrupts it, it is no longer the same melody. Bergson uses this analogy to argue against fracturing change into short analytical intervals. For a proper understanding, the whole process of the change needs to be comprehended (2011, 26–27). Gaston Bachelard contests Bergson's approach: he characterizes the experience of time by its disruptions and voids, to which human consciousness grants a temporary coherency. According to Bachelard, a melody only exists through the repetition of its framework and by the rhythm organizing it, without which it would not be recognizable as a melody (Bachelard 1950, 112–28; see also Corbier 2012).

This book aims to show that as social scientists we can neither reach for the Bergsonian ideal of a complete appraisal of change processes, nor abandon continuity as Bachelard suggests. Thus we need to rely on what is at hand: snapshots of change, sketching a movement whose end will always remain unknowable. This book is a reflexive exercise with practical goals. It tries to find the best ways to combine a *longue durée* perspective with the experiences and interpretations of our interlocutors. We

prefer to avoid bombastic claims that this book will revolutionize the ways people do field research, but we nevertheless hope that it is a fruitful attempt to make the best of the fundamental epistemic conditions of our knowledge about change.

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Part I

Scales of Change



2

Scales of Change and Diagnostic Contradictions: Shifting Relations Between an Emigrant Community and Its Diaspora

Anne-Christine Trémon

The issue of placing the study of social and cultural change at the heart of the inquiry rather than relegating it to a separate chapter is an old one in anthropology, and in social science at large, as illuminated in this volume's introduction. Because change is of interest and significance only if there is a substantial and therefore noteworthy non-locally contingent departure from a previous situation, it mostly occurs on spatial and temporal scales that exceed the *hic et nunc* of the field study. The specific question this chapter addresses is how to account ethnographically for change that unfolds on such larger scales. While the revisiting of a field site by the same (Colson 1971; Firth 1959) or successive ethnographers has often been considered an answer to this challenge, another solution is the extended case (Gluckman 1961, 10; Mitchell 1956; Van Velsen 1967). This method was created to seek explanations for the complexity

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*,

Anthropology, Change, and Development,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_2

and contradictions of a local social situation within larger scale historical processes.

However, the issue of scale has remained a point of contention among its practitioners ever since. By its very principle, the extended case method rests on the distinction between a local social situation and the global forces that shape it. Such a separation has been maintained in more recent dealings with globalization, which offer a causal explanation of “local socio-cultural processes” by “global historical forces” (Burawoy 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 283). Others have voiced critique of the ways this separation tends to neglect the microprocesses at play in a case study (Barth 1966, 1967; Handelman 2005), or to locate causal determinations on a scale so large that it is difficult to prove its connection to local sequences of events (Falk Moore 1999). In their reply to Falk Moore’s critique, the Comaroffs suggest practicing ethnography on an “awkward scale” (2003) as a way out of this conundrum. I rather take the view that it is possible to account for change framed by longer/larger scales without opposing the micro domain of interactions with a macro domain construed as external to these interactions, resulting in a substantialization of “the global.”

Since 2011, I have been conducting fieldwork in Pine Mansion, one of the villages of origin of the French Polynesian Chinese that I studied as part of my doctoral research.¹ For over a century, from the 1880s to the early 1990s, Pine Mansion had been a village of emigration, as were almost all the villages in the Pearl River Delta region. Pine Mansioners migrated to French Polynesia but also to Southeast Asia, North and Central America, and more recently to Europe. In selecting Pine Mansion as a new field site, my idea was to conduct a micro-historical and anthropological study of the diasporic reconnections that followed the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and Shenzhen city, of which the village has become an urban neighborhood.² The Shenzhen Special Economic Zone was established in 1980 as part of China’s “Reform and Opening Up” (*gaige kaifang*)—the reopening of

¹This overseas diasporic community is composed of the descendants of migrants who settled in Tahiti and the other islands of this French colony in the Southern Pacific, mainly during 1880–1930. They originated from Pine Mansion and other villages in the same area.

²Pine Mansion is located in the north of Shenzhen.

China and the launch of its economic reforms. This reopening occurred along with reconnections between the localities of origin (*qiaoxiang*) and the diaspora. Indeed, while connections had been severed during the Mao period, during the reopening, overseas relatives were encouraged by the Chinese authorities to visit their villages of origin and to contribute financially to their development. However, as a result of the reform-and-opening policy and the encouragement of diasporic reconnections and overseas kin donations, the village was radically transformed and became a neighborhood of the newly created city of Shenzhen.

My research engages a processual approach which examines the effects of these reconnections on local transformations, but also the effects of these transformations on local residents' relations with the diaspora. The object of study is thus the changing relation between the inhabitants of this former village and their kin in Tahiti and other parts of the world: I show how, in this context of accelerated mutations, the relationship between the members of the emigrant community and the diaspora has changed. Studying this relationship required both retracing a system of relations—the organization and practical modalities of the locals' connections with their overseas kin—and capturing a set of representations of this relation—the perceptions of the diaspora's position and role toward the community, and attitudes toward emigration.

The issue of scale figures centrally in this research project and is tied to the question of change in two ways. First, the community's relation with the diaspora is in itself driven by a tension between continuity—the maintenance of links and the celebration of roots—and change, with the loosening of ties produced by the passage of time and genealogical distancing, as well as by the estrangement generated by the severing of relations during the Mao period. Second, for over a century the village has been the recipient of financial flows (remittances and donations from the diaspora) that have been instrumental in tempering its misery—during the anti-Japanese and civil wars (1937–1949) and Mao period (1949–1976)—and ensuring its prosperity—from the 1880s to the early 1930s, and in the two decades (1980s and 1990s) that followed the reopening of China. As late as the 1990s, donations from the diaspora have played a crucial role in maintaining its main institutions and sites that constitute the symbolic markers and cultural foci of its identity as

a lineage-village community, but which were threatened by urbanization plans. At the same time, during that same decade, the villagers became much less dependent on financial support from the diaspora. Shenzhen's newfound prosperity diminishes their financial dependency on overseas relatives—this dependency has now come to an end. It also lessens the desire for emigration, since the new urbanites estimate that the best potential for a good life is now to be found locally, in China, rather than abroad.

Scale as Scope and Valence

In one of his later writings, Barth (1978) offers a heuristic device for integrating scale more directly within an ethnographic account. He argues that scale must not arise as an artifact of analysis, but must rather be dealt with as an empirical property of the things we study. Once we conceptualize scale as a characteristic of the context of social interaction, we can proceed to discover the scalar properties of the contexts in which the interaction takes place. Indeed, “an exchange between neighbors may well require the context of a world market to be understandable” (ibid., 256). We must therefore make a distinction between the *size* of the unit of observation (the neighborhood in Barth's example, and usually any micro unit in ethnographically grounded studies) and the *scope* of the context of social interaction (the world market in Barth's example) that is being accounted for.³ This distinction between scale as size and as scope helps to liberate the extended case from the micro/macro methodological dichotomy and is a first step toward a processual ethnography that does not treat large-scale global phenomena in time and space as exterior to situations observed in the field, but weaves them into the ethnographic description and analysis.

The second move is to take into account how scales are at stake in social interactions and inform scalar strategies. A substantial body

³My approach is only loosely inspired by Barth, as I also draw from critical realism. I depart from Barth's focus on aggregated behavior, typical of methodological individualism, and from his focus on the size of social systems. Lack of space does not allow me to detail this point.

of geographical scholarship has emphasized the social construction of scale as an outcome of processes of capitalist production (Smith 1984, 2008; Brenner 1999), social and political struggle (Herod 1997; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Jones and Mac Leod 2004) and social reproduction (Marston 2000). This prompts us to introduce a more intentional dimension of scale than what Barth had in mind: scale as it is valued by social actors in “scalar projects” (Tsing 2000), i.e., how social actors take action according to the spatial and/or temporal scale that they consider important and appropriate. The value that the actors give to these scales is their valence. Valence is defined as “the degree of attractiveness an individual, activity, or thing possesses as a behavioral goal” (Merriam Webster 2019). Valence is about potentiality—the capacity to generate value—and desirability—the moral dimension of values. As will become clear in the next sections, what is at stake in the case studied here is both the relative capacity of different scales to be sources of value creation, and the desirability of different scales in moral terms.

Marston et al. (2005) have called for jettisoning the concept of scale because of its enduring connotation of “nesting,” in spite of the more social constructivist approaches to scale that I have referred to above. They advocate adopting a “flat ontology” that does away with the local/global distinction. I side with the argument that scale is too often bound up with (fixed) “size” and “level,” however, I do not follow their call to eliminate the concept of scale but attempt instead to overhaul it. First of all, I follow geographer Richard Howitt’s (1998, 56) proposal for recognizing scale as *relation*, a “factor in itself” in the construction of spatialities, rather than simply as a given. I also draw inspiration from anthropologist Marilyn Strathern’s (1999) distinction between scales as *magnitude* and as *orders of knowledge*. In scale as magnitude, what is measured is independent of the measuring tool; the metric, e.g., the mile, or the Richter scale, is fixed; the scale is that against which the scope of the action can be measured (the scope of an earthquake, or of social networks). In the second kind of operation, part of the measurement is also what is being measured, and “what is held constant is not the values on the scale but a relation between values,” e.g., a ratio such as

purchasing power (Strathern 1999, 205).⁴ I propose an analytical distinction between two relational dimensions of scale in which social action can be considered: scale as the scope of social systems or chains of interdependence that extend to a greater or lesser degree in space and time and in which actions and interactions take place, and scale as valence, i.e., the desirability of scale defined relative to other scales, generating strategies to maintain the significance of one scale rather than another, or to replace one (for instance local) scale by another (more global) scale.

In what follows, scale as level is subsumed under the more relational notion of scope. The focus is on action (processes of scaling and rescaling, cf. Brenner 2001) rather than on the size of entities or preexisting levels; on how the Chinese state and Shenzhen city reorder spatial hierarchies by creating the Special Economic Zone and eradicating the former villages within it.⁵ Scale as scope is the temporary stabilized “product” of social action and interaction, but it is relational in so far as far-reaching spatial or temporal extension is measured relatively to lesser extension. Valence is an evaluation of scope, and “actioning” one particular scale rather than another is related to the potentiality and moral desirability of this scale. Furthermore, anthropologists, as much as the people they work with, contrast the “local” and the “global” (sometimes using these terms, sometimes resorting to equivalents). As “concept-metaphors [the local and the global] act as framing devices, and as such they are perspectival” (Moore 2004, 75). They are polarities, or incommensurables, “which cannot be systematised through constructs such as levels and domains and other conventional demarcation devices” (Strathern 1995, 153). In this sense, by framing the distinctions that are being made between phenomena in terms of their relative scope and valence, they fulfill precisely the task that Marston, Jones and Woodward accuse scale as size and level of failing to perform. Finally, beyond debates among geographers and their concerns with spatialities, scales as scope and valence apply to space (action is meaningful in regard to a space of interaction that is, for instance,

⁴Valence is such a relation between values; it refers to the value that can be generated by something that is valued.

⁵Not considering levels at all would amount to ignoring how they are shaped by power relations (Leitner and Miller 2007, 119; see also Paasi 2004).

regional rather than local) and to time (in regard to an exchange-circuit that continues, for instance, over several generations rather than one).

Change and Diagnostic Contradictions

Looking at scale as a property of the context within which social action takes places thus involves taking account of spatial and temporal scale as both scope and valence. Once we look at scale in this way, we may reach a fuller understanding not only of how actions at the local level contribute to large-scale change but also of why some actions may counter change or constitute an attempt at circumventing or resisting change imposed from “above.” We may also better grasp the motivations for change and the perceptions of its presence or absence. This implies making room for people’s conceptions of change—how they understand and interpret it—and of continuity. Indeed, what interests us as anthropologists is not just explaining the present by identifying the changes and continuities that generated the situation we discover in the field, but also accounting for how change—as well as continuity—is conceived of and imbued with significance by the subjects of our inquiry (Ferguson 1999, 14).⁶ A deeper comprehension of what change represents for the actors may help explain why they have acted in its direction (by participating in larger scale change) or against the tide. The conceptions of change—or of the absence of change—that I am concerned with here are essential to understanding how social actors position themselves and take action in a configuration of changing relations.

In the field, I quickly realized that if I wanted to understand the changes that characterize the village’s relations with the diaspora in the present period, I would have to reach an understanding of the changes the village has undergone. In order to retrace the village’s past, I consulted the wide literature on villages of the same type in the same region based

⁶This attention to conceptions of change does not need to result in an idealism and relativism that reduces the ethnographer’s activity to the collection of emic representations, sacrificing an epistemology of “distanciation” to an epistemology of “intimacy” (Keane 2003). Subjects’ conceptions are indexed according to a reality that has changed and that must be accounted for.

on field studies led in the 1950s and 1960s in Hong Kong, and in the 1980s and 1990s on the mainland. I also collected histories of the village written by members of the community themselves—for instance, the written genealogy of the Pine Mansion Chens⁷ contains a narrative of the village's history and displays documents from the past—as well as recently produced historical books about the area. However, I relied mainly on the oral histories I collected from the members of the community. Indeed, I started the fieldwork with a very precise thread that I wished to follow: the history of the mausoleum that had been built in 1999 around the founding ancestor's tomb. The Tahiti Chens had told me about this mausoleum because they had made large monetary donations for its construction, but they had only an imprecise idea of the reason behind the decision to build it. By taking this mystery as a starting point and collecting oral histories related to this project, I became interested in similar stories about other projects and was able to retrace the processes through which the people of Pine Mansion had succeeded, with the help of their diaspora, in saving some of their most important landmarks and sites from the scheduled destruction. In addition to this micro-history based on oral sources, I conducted interviews with villagers who had overseas kin; I also drew much of my material from participant observation during the main annual festivals in the village. For two years in a row, I attended several ancestral rites during the spring Equinox festival and the major festival held in autumn on the founding ancestor's birthday, where I was able to observe encounters between overseas kin who had returned to the village for these occasions and the villagers. By combining the data from these different sources, I started to gain a general picture of the different dimensions of the diasporic relation.

In the next sections, I reflect on the contrasts and even contradictions contained in the discursive materials I collected. The contradictions emerged between statements held by persons belonging to the same local community, and at times also between statements held by the same person, from one conversation to another, or even during the same

⁷In Pine Mansion almost all of the native residents bear the surname Chen and form the dominant lineage in the village community. They claim common descent from their founding ancestor, who settled in Pine Mansion in the middle of the eighteenth century.

conversation. Tensions and contradictions in the process of social reproduction are central to Marx's understanding of society as a historical process in which social forms emerge dialectically, and such a reading forms the backbone of my research on the way "local capitalism" (Smart and Lin 2007) has taken shape, at the "critical junction" (Kalb and Tak 2005) of China's insertion in world capitalism and the reconfiguration of the former agricultural collectives in Shenzhen's urbanized villages (Trémon 2015). Here I focus on how contradictions in the field materials collected are telling signs of accelerated change that is generating conflicts of scale. Such an approach already has a long history in anthropological research, from Godfrey and Monica Wilson's (1945) functionalist idea of disequilibrium as unevenness of scale,⁸ to Clifford Geertz's (1957) use of the case of a failed ritual to highlight national religious change rather than local social anomie. I agree with David Berliner that "it is time to bring back ambivalent statements, contradictory attitudes, incompatible values, and emotional internal clashes as research objects" (2016, 5). However, in this chapter, I am less interested in investigating how actors live with and justify their own contradictions, than in taking contradictions as a signal of rapid change and a starting point for understanding how people make sense of change by reconceptualizing the valence of local and global scales. Thus, contradictions in comments on the past and the present play the diagnostic role ascribed to contradictory accounts of "events" by Sally Falk Moore (1987), who sees them as a major tool for processual ethnography.⁹ I use here a broad definition of discourse as consisting of utterances that have meaning within a social context and are understandable within the present situation of enunciation. It can appear in the midst of narrations of the past, but differs from mere historical narration in that it constitutes a comment *from the present* on the events reported (Benveniste 1971, 209). Such material, along with the more objective data contained in the narrations I collected, is useful

⁸What they call unevenness of scale is the discrepancy between economic integration in world-society and the persistence of kinship-based social relations and religious beliefs that are part of a "small-scale system" (1945, 161–2).

⁹Falk Moore focuses on "incidents" whose discursive treatment (the way they are reported and commented upon) has a strong likelihood of exposing information on changing circumstances, especially when it contains a "juxtaposition of competing and contrary ideas" (1987, 735). I focus on the contradiction between statements on change.

for understanding where change is located—what makes the present situation significantly differ from the past, or not—and hence the sense that is made of this change.

In what follows, I examine the ways in which the discursive materials I collected during interviews and observations imply different scales and a series of contrasts and even contradictions concerning the presence or absence of change. I show how the local scale (as valence) of the lineage-village community has been revalorized, and how this is rendered visible by the contradiction between accounts of change and claims of continuity in the local social and economic organization. The maintenance of the local community as a “scalar project” is further salient in the contradiction between the moral and political discourse on the lineage’s eternal global unity and the local purposes for which the diaspora’s loyalty has been instrumentalized, as well as in the contrast between acceptance of change and mobilizations to counter its undesired side effects. Finally, I examine how this “eternity” discourse is contradicted by discourses on the declining need for global diasporic support, and how change is conceived of as the local reestablishment of a just moral order.

Economic Change and Continuity in Social Organization

The mutation of the village is part and parcel of the creation and rise of the Special Economic Zone and city of Shenzhen. The Tahiti Chens had only vague knowledge about their village of origin, and had not told me much apart from the fact that it had changed a lot, starting with its name. Once I started fieldwork in China, I discovered that the village was not even officially a village (*cun*), since it had been legally urbanized in 2004. Along with this administrative recategorization, the former villagers lost their peasant *hukou* (residence permits) and became urban citizens of Shenzhen. To this must be added the demographic explosion that resulted from the inflow of migrant workers from inland China, which caused Pine Mansion’s population to grow from approximately 3000 inhabitants at the end of the 1970s to almost 60,000 today. Among the people I met in the village, all those aged fifty (born in the 1960s)

and above started their lives as peasants and belong to the generation that experienced the radical break from the Mao era. Nowadays, many of the former village's native inhabitants do not have to work for a living. Indeed, they have largely benefited from the economic boom generated by the creation of the Special Economic Zone. They even took an active part in it by creating the infrastructural conditions that made Shenzhen as a manufacturing zone possible. The main actors were the former agricultural collectives which mutated in the second half of the 1980s. The production brigades and cultivation groups were changed into cooperative companies which started building factories on plots of collectively held agricultural land, and rented them out to foreign and Hongkongese companies.

Urbanization and industrialization allowed those who lived in the village to put an end to their agricultural livelihoods a decade before they were categorized as urban citizens in 2004. For the people of Pine Mansion, what really changed with legal urbanization was not so much their characterization as “non-peasants” (*feinong*) in the official terminology, but what this recategorization entailed: their right to welfare benefits—health insurance for all, and pensions for women aged over 50 and men over 60. These are distributed by the cooperative companies in addition to annual dividends derived from the management of real estate. Local membership of the former village community has gained increased importance—valence—in the context of urbanization, because entitlement to dividends and welfare benefits is restricted to “native villagers.” Only they are entitled to a share in the companies.

Legal urbanization actually entailed an important change in the administrative organization. First of all, the village is no longer officially a village—the lowest unit in the rural administrative grid—as it has become a *shequ* (community)—the city's lowest administrative level. The *shequ* is managed by a “community service center” (*shequ fuwu zhongxin*), whose employees are appointed by the higher administrative levels. This bears potentially important consequences because the new unit, in comparison to the former village, enjoys less autonomy in managing its internal affairs. The leaders I talked to insisted on the fact that the former village is presently in a period of transition and reorganization, and it seems indeed that the exact degree of upper-level

interference and the division of tasks between each unit is not yet clear. Actually, the former village organizations are all still in place under new names: the four village committees—a large one at the village level and three smaller ones—have been turned into four corresponding urban resident committees, each associated with two or three small companies. The committees and companies are often headed by the same persons, all native Chen villagers. Therefore, although a few people voiced concern about the future consequences of this new state of affairs, most were confident that things would turn out well and that the former village would continue to benefit from a large degree of autonomy. This is plausible, considering the influence of the shareholding companies due to their economic power.

But what struck me most is that Pine Mansioners simply continued to use the former official terminology—the village and the village residents' committee—to refer to the new organizations. This can be explained by the fact that the creation of the “native villager” category fully entitles them to continue to speak of “our village” (*women cun*). The eldest among Pine Mansioners also used the old Maoist term *shengchandu*, production brigade, to refer to the shareholding companies. This is understandable, considering the role they continue to play in the collective economy by organizing production and distribution of the income drawn from the land, albeit now in the form of real estate rents. Their functions are largely the same as in the past. They also play an active role in village daily life and festivals and celebrations by organizing group trips for their shareholders, distributing gifts of money to the young, the old, and the poor, and making donations for ancestral worship. All of this underlines a strong sense of continuity in the social and economic collective organization of the village.

It is not, then, surprising at all that people at once stress the tremendous changes that the reforms have introduced using emphatic expressions such as “heaven and earth turned upside down” (*tianfan difu*) to refer to the betterment of their living conditions and the good life they enjoy at present, while still employing terminology that refers to the village's former administrative structure and social organization. The lasting social and territorial structure of the village and the lineage also

account for the way the villagers perceive themselves as a local collectivity. The village and the lineage are the frames of reference within which people identify and live their lives. This is a structure in the loose sense, as Braudel defines it, “a reality which time uses and abuses over long periods” (1958, 31). It is inscribed on the landscape even though urbanization has radically changed its appearance by covering the fields with concrete. Following the land reform and communalization in the early 1950s, the members of the pre-1949 lineage segments, who formed distinct residential clusters, became the owners of the land they collectively cultivated. In the 1990s, agricultural land was converted into residential land and divided among the households who built new, three to five storeys high, houses on each plot—they live on one or two storeys and rent out the rest to migrant workers. Nowadays, the bumpy and dusty streets in the new neighborhoods are not individually but collectively named—they bear the names of the neighborhoods in the old village center, and these names are also those of the residential committees and shareholding companies. In other words, there has been a kind of centrifugal expansion of the built landscape on the agricultural land that used to surround the old village. Thus, in spite of the change in the nature of economic activities, the village and lineage structures have remained largely the same over time, and are inscribed in the new urbanized landscape of Pine Mansion.

We have here a first contrast between sudden material socio-economic change, and the absence of change in the most meaningful principles of peoples’ lives, sociality and territorial identity—although we would expect the first to induce the second. Being a “native villager” has become more desirable than before as a result of the combination of the continuity in social structure and organization and the reforms leading to industrialization and urbanization that have increased the economic value of the local territory. This contradiction thus explains why there has been a revalorization of the local scale, and brings into relief the increased valence of the lineage-village community scale.

Erasure of the Past and the Eternity of the Lineage

The persistence and revival of lineage as a social entity can account for the next paradox that I witnessed between the unregretful destruction of almost all of the old village's remains and the efforts, verging on illegality, of the members of the lineage-village community to save some of their landmarks. The Tahiti Chinese had warned me that the places they had visited did not match their parents and grandparents' descriptions of rural villages at all. When I first arrived in the village I found the change in the landscape even greater than I had expected, since almost all of the houses that had been built a century earlier had just been destroyed. The people of Pine Mansion had taken an active part in the policy known as *jiucun gaizao* ("renovation of old villages"), willfully supporting the demolition of the houses they once inhabited, and had already left to access more comfortable dwellings. The small tiled-roof houses in the old village center were to be replaced by a block of high-rise luxury flats. Their participation in the urban renovation program takes the direction promoted by the municipal and provincial authorities toward a uniformly modernized urban landscape (Fig. 2.1).

However, while actively transforming their formerly rural village's landscape into an urban one they also collectively mobilized in the past decades, first to revive and then to save some of the landmarks that constitute the basis of their enduring identity as a lineage-village community. Ancestral worship, held biannually at the temple and at the founding ancestor's gravesite, was prohibited from around the second half of the 1950s; it was delocalized in Hong Kong, where it was performed by Chens who had fled the village. The Pine Mansion Chens resumed ancestral worship locally as early as 1981, and they carried out a series of restorative and protective actions. All of these activities were carried out in the 1980s with financial contributions from the Pine Mansion Chens' Hong Kong and overseas relatives. This revival phase was followed in the 1990s by mobilizations against policies linked to state-led urbanization plans that threatened to destroy the founding ancestor's tomb and close down the primary school that had been founded by the lineage in 1914. The purpose of these mobilizations was



Fig. 2.1 Renovated lineage temple surrounded by high-rise buildings (Photo by author)

explicitly expressed as the wish to protect these sites for all eternity—*yongyuan*. In other words, they countered change imposed from above in the name of their own, longer temporality.

In retracing these mobilizations and collecting narratives about the history of the lineage, I recurrently encountered this discourse on eternity. It was particularly strongly voiced about the lineage's unity. Freedman (1958) has outlined the historical process whereby the lineage divides into smaller segments for which later ancestors serve as reference points and nodes of identification, and I did observe the tendency for some branches in the lineage to form their own sub-lineages. Migration has largely espoused this logic of branching within the lineage, because those who migrated as part of the first wave were generally groups of siblings who all went to the same destination. And yet I faced a normative discourse condemning “branch identity” (the tendency to think of oneself as belonging to a particular segment instead of to the lineage in its entirety) and even denying its existence—I was told by some leaders that there was no such thing. This counter-tendency to foreground unity is due to a variety of reasons, the main one being the lineage's strong history of emigration. One telling sign is the establishment of the Pine Mansion Chen lineage foundation, named after the founding ancestor, in Hong Kong in the early 1960s. Chens from diverse lineage segments who had migrated to Hong Kong in those years united under the founding ancestor and ensured the continuation of ancestral worship. The subsequent repatriation of the foundation to the village in the 1990s shows a dialectical movement over time between the centripetal tendencies linked to migration and the centrifugal tendencies linked to the recently resumed importance of the native place. The centrality of the founding ancestor seems to be much stronger in village and lineage life today than it was during the Mao period, of course, but also before 1949.

The Chen genealogy traces all of the members of the lineage to the founding ancestor without making any distinctions among them based on where they live, although the overseas Chens are also separately listed by country of residence in the final pages. The lineage is thus presented as both local and global at once: as having its source, or roots, in the village founded by the first ancestor, and as a social body that extends far beyond the village and that is united around a common cause, forming a global

fraternity. The lineage channels kinship networks and retains faraway and genealogically distant kin's allegiance to the place of origin by invoking the moral imperative to contribute to the public good. A discourse celebrates the past and continuing, eternal care of the overseas Chens for the public good, "the unfailing support of our overseas kin" (Pine Mansion Chen Genealogy 2000, 81–82). I never actually heard anybody among the Chen in Tahiti mention the founding ancestor; they referred to the village only by its name. What the villagers value as their "public good" corresponds to what is valued in the diaspora as the "source," or "roots." A normative discourse is spread globally to celebrate and encourage the moral investment of emigrants and their descendants in the village.

It matters most in the space of the village, where social and political unity is at stake, and where calling for the diaspora's loyalty to the roots is a means of preserving the symbols of that unity. This became clear in the course of retracing the process that led to the building of the mausoleum, for which the villagers mobilized the diaspora. This was not a revitalization enterprise but a rescue operation, decided after the funeral reform was announced in Shenzhen in 1997. This nationwide reform was applied drastically and at a very rapid pace in Shenzhen, to free the space occupied by the tombs that were scattered all around the villages and thereby make way for further urbanization. It summoned the villagers to exhume all of their dead's remains and burn them. For reasons of worship and geomancy, the Chens decided to build a mausoleum over the founding ancestor's grave to prevent the destruction of his remains. From the chronology of facts given by the very precise narratives that I collected and triangulated, it was quite clear that the idea for the mausoleum had sprung up locally in response to a local policy, and that the villagers had called on their overseas kin to speedily gather the huge amount of money they needed. In other words, they instrumentalized their global relations to solve what seemed to be a foremost local problem. And yet, what puzzled me was that several people told me that the overseas kin—the *huaqiao*—were the ones who were most worried about the fate of the ancestral tomb. What this indicates, in terms of the ambivalent perceptions of the overseas relatives by local Pine Mansioners, has led me to further examine the changes in their relationship with the diaspora and how they make sense of these changes.

Local Change and the Changing Relationship with the Diaspora

What makes a discourse on change and the diaspora possible is the categorization of *huaqiao*, overseas Chinese, as a phenomenon of the past. This does not mean that the people of Pine Mansion consider that they have no longer any *huaqiao* relatives—quite the contrary—but they associate things of the past with the *huaqiao*. This is partly because emigration, a massive phenomenon in the two peak periods of the 1890s–1910s and the 1960s–1970s, has now dwindled. People like to state that migration is no longer necessary because life in China has become so much better. Company shareholders do not have to work for a living, and the young now have study and employment opportunities in nearby Shenzhen. Inhabitants of Shenzhen categorize relatives in the diaspora as pertaining to a remote past and consider emigration *passé*, favoring practices of transnational mobility such as living abroad for part of the year and in China for the other part (Trémon 2018).

The local villagers hold a contradictory discourse about the diaspora's financial support for the village. While their celebration of the unrelenting involvement and continuing loyalty of the overseas Chens constitutes a continuing moral injunction, they also stress the reduced need for overseas contributions, thereby underlining their decreased dependence on financial aid from the diaspora. Not only has migration become less of an option than in the past, but also much less overseas money is needed. The relocation of the lineage foundation from Hong Kong to Pine Mansion in the early 1990s illustrates this change in relations. As mentioned earlier, the foundation was established in Hong Kong to ensure the continuation of ancestral worship during the prohibition period. In Hong Kong it had no territorial source of income and operated based on financial donations alone. In the village today, the foundation mainly receives rental income from buildings that were originally built using overseas donations. Several leaders in Pine Mansion stressed that money from overseas is no longer necessary, since the Foundation now has a stable income from these rentals. The overseas contributions that were raised globally in the two decades following

China's reopening have thus created local financial autonomy in the ritual and overall economy.

The meaning that people in Pine Mansion confer on this change in the relationship with the diaspora, in the sense of their reduced dependency, can be grasped further through the discourses they hold on issues of *fengshui* (geomancy), the influence that the ancestor exerts on his descendants' destinies through the combination of his bodily remains and the features of the environment where he is buried. For a long time (the origins are left vague in people's accounts) the *fengshui* of his grave was said to most benefit people who left the village—that is, migrants and women who out-married, often to migrants. Indeed, *fengshui* generally functions as a mode of explanation for differences in fortune between individuals, families, and lineage segments (Naquin and Rawski 1987, 179). In this case, it was of course an explanation of the differing fates of individuals who left to go overseas and of those who remained in the village.

My questions about *fengshui* provoked debate among the people present. Some strongly adhered to the idea that it is pure nonsense and a backward superstition; others justified its existence in the name of common sense or tradition. Many people rejected it as a past belief held by peasants who hoped to reap good harvests, and thus associated it with Pine Mansion's past, when it was still a peasant society. Several insisted that it was a belief clung to by Hong Kong and overseas Chinese in justification of the mobilization to protect the founding ancestor's tomb. Some *huaqiao*, especially Hongkongers, worried greatly about the tomb and the negative consequences that its destruction might bring about. However, the *fengshui* of the gravesite was also alluded to in conversations with villagers about the mausoleum, without any reference to the *huaqiao*. My interpretation is that imputing the attachment to *fengshui* to the *huaqiao* was used as an alibi in two respects: as a way of justifying asking them for money for the mausoleum, and a way of justifying the imperative to save the tomb for reasons that are officially considered "superstitious" in China.

Indeed, many people paradoxically made concessions to the idea that *fengshui* might exist, by stating that it has changed. For instance, one person who had earlier rejected *fengshui* as nonsensical balderdash that

only Hongkongers believe in told me that “houses are better than hills,” referring to the factory that now faces the founding ancestor’s grave. This suggests that the *fengshui* had improved thanks to the change in the built environment. This of course constitutes a way of expressing and possibly explaining the improvement in the livelihoods of those who inhabit the village. The inversion or rebalancing in their relationship with the diaspora thus also finds expression in these declarations.

The contradictory statements that *fengshui* no longer exists (and is a peasant belief), followed by the assertion that it has changed, are expressions of doubt within a context where such beliefs are condemned as “superstitious” by the Chinese state. But they also reveal ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, declaring one’s disbelief in *fengshui* and imputing such views to diasporic relatives, who supposedly cling to old beliefs, amounts to claiming that the people of Pine Mansion are now no longer superstitious peasants, but modern citizens who participate in economic growth and modernization, in contrast to conservative overseas relatives often living in places that now lag behind China. On the other hand, suggesting that *fengshui* has changed, or that the benefits of *fengshui* have become more equally distributed or that its action has been reoriented locally, might also be a way of stressing the resolution of a moral problem that was raised by the manner in which it operated in the past, when leaving the village often led to higher economic rewards than staying (Trémon 2018).

But today, those aged over fifty who have remained in the village tend to stress, in a posteriori rationalization, that they made a judicious choice not to leave at a time when everybody wished to leave; although they suffered difficulties and poverty during the Mao period, their choice was somehow rewarded by their present prosperity. Native villagers reaping the fruits of the native village’s economic development is seen as a reward; indeed, when they established the shareholding companies, those who had never left the village paid a much lower price per share than those who had left temporarily and then returned. The morality they have demonstrated by remaining in the village and the hardships they have endured have been compensated for by the good life that they now enjoy in their native village. Therefore, the wish to be a modern Chinese urban citizen of Shenzhen, one who does not believe in *fengshui*, is at odds

with the wish to point out the return of truth and morality, a kind of restoration of a right order of things.

Conclusion

The local scale of the lineage-village community has become revalorized along with the changes caused by China's reopening and reform, which fostered industrialization and urbanization and thereby heightened the value of local territory, increased the inhabitants' income, and led to the creation of a native category of landlords. The valence of the former village scale is increased in the sense of the locality's power of attraction and value-generating potential. The valence of the local scale also refers to its desirability: the former village's prosperity is interpreted as a return of order, and a more just order, after the disorder of the Mao period. More generally, the resumption of worship in Pine Mansion from the early 1980s, the reimporting of the Foundation established in Hong Kong to the village, and the ways in which the members of the lineage community have managed to protect several lineage landmarks and ritual sites against urbanization plans in the 1990s, can all be analyzed as a process of recentering on the village-lineage community. Investment from overseas and donations to the ritual economy have not only led to increased prosperity but also set the conditions for the increased financial autonomy of the village-lineage economy and reduced dependence on the diaspora. At the same time, they aimed to sustain, restore, and protect the local village as the center from which the community expands globally: without its focal sites where its source is ritually remembered the lineage-village would disappear altogether, and if the change had been such that these landmarks had disappeared there would be no basis for the relationship with the diaspora to continue.

This process and its outcome thus explain the contradiction I have outlined between, on the one hand, "eternitary" discourses that insist on the lineage's global unity, account for mobilizations with the necessity of forever protecting its ritual sites, and celebrate the enduring commitment of the diaspora; and on the other hand, discourses on change that stress

the cultural differences with overseas relatives, thereby locating modernization in the village rather than overseas, proudly emphasizing the end of dependence on the diaspora, and pointing to the betterment of life in the village as evidence of the advent of a just moral order. It is a general ethnographic principle that the presence of contradictions and paradoxes in the data scaffolds the move from “how” to “why,” from description to explanation (Katz 2001). Building on Sally Falk Moore’s notion of “diagnostic events” as a central heuristic principle in processual ethnography, I have used “diagnostic contradictions”: contrasts, ambiguities, and paradoxes in discourses on change and non-change. By weaving together the contradictions in the discourses that emerged from narratives and interactional situations, I have been able to begin to grasp an understanding of this complex relationship, which involves processes and shifts in relations at different scales. The main contradiction between eternity and change is the most significant for understanding the tension, within the diasporic relationship, between the local and global scales in space and time, while also shedding light on how people in Pine Mansion are caught within this tension.

I have also argued for paying attention to how social actors take action according to the scale they consider important and appropriate, in order to reach a fuller understanding of how change occurs on larger spatial and temporal scales, and how it is experienced and interpreted. We can then produce knowledge about historically changing configurations that imply different scales of action and interaction, rather than just accounting for local situations by the impact of “global forces” that are out of the reach of people on the ground—and the ethnographer. A truly processual extended case may then be reached by taking into account, first, the scalar properties of social forms, and second, how scales are at stake in people’s actions and inform scalar strategies—actions taken according to the scale that is viewed as desirable and appropriate. I have proposed an analytical distinction between two dimensions of scale within which social action can be considered: scale as the scope—the extension in space and time—of chains of interdependence within which actions take place, and scale as valence, i.e., the attractiveness and desirability of one scale in relation to other scales, resulting in evaluations and actions to ensure that this scale prevails.

That the valence of scale is not necessarily a function of scale as scope is clear when considering the local scale, but perhaps less so with regard to the global scale. The global extension of flows in space and time, and the interactions and transactions across the locales linked by these flows, seem to bear unequivocally positive valence: spatial and temporal extensions provide resources for value-generating action. Pine Mansioners have made strategic use of the global scalar properties of their lineage, whose extension in space enhanced the potential for fundraising from the most successful overseas relatives. The value of the diasporic donations is acknowledged on the donation plaques and in the genealogy, which recalls how overseas relatives have participated in the public good. Not only have spatially extended kinship networks provided financial resources but their temporal extension has also provided a political resource in terms of the local community's relationship with the state (Trémon, 2022). However, while the global scope of the Pine Mansion lineage is valued positively by the local members of the emigrant community, it also bears negative valence. This is visible in the categorization of emigration as a phenomenon of the past, and of diasporic kin as superstitious conservatives, which members of the local community conspicuously pit against their own and China's modernity. This *ambivalence* in the diasporic relationship—the mixed feelings and contradictory ideas held by the community's inhabitants about their overseas relatives—can thus be analyzed in scalar terms.¹⁰

While analytically differentiating these two dimensions, scale as scope and scale as valence, is fruitful, it is equally important to examine the interplay between them. The strategies of the actors involved for defending or promoting a particular scale of action depend on the scope of the resources available to them, while spatial and temporal extensions provide resources for value-generating action. The temporal and spatial extension of the lineage as a social entity provided local members with both economic and symbolic resources that played a substantial part in the transformations referred to in this chapter: the making of Shenzhen and the opening up of China, but also the cunning resistance to the state's

¹⁰For a more in-depth analysis of this precise point and the valence of scales more generally, see Trémon (2022).

attempt to dissolve the former lineage villages, opposing the valence of their local scale to that of the Chinese state's project. This preferred scale is to some extent global—the local members value their lineage's global scope in space and time and draw legitimacy and prestige from it. It is, however, increasingly aligned with the state's scalar projects, aimed at placing the local and national scales center stage.

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3

Seeing Social Change Through the Institutional Lens: Universities in Egypt, 2011–2018

Daniele Cantini

Egypt, 11 February 2011. Something changed. As is widely known, after eighteen days during which crowds of demonstrators occupied squares in Cairo and many other cities throughout the country, bravely resisting attacks from both police and different kinds of agitators and bandits, the President of Egypt for the last thirty years, Hosni Mubarak, stepped down and power was transferred to a military junta. The magnitude of the event is hard to underestimate; joyful celebrations in Egypt quickly became globally relevant, with iconic references to Tahrir Square spreading to countries as diverse as Libya, Syria and Yemen, Israel,

¹The Egyptian revolution cannot be reduced to Tahrir Square or Cairo, as correctly pointed out by many scholars and commentators; still, it is difficult to ignore the iconicity of Tahrir Square occupied by cheering crowds for many months on at least a weekly basis, nor its place in Egyptian history (see for example Said 2015).

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*,
Anthropology, Change, and Development,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_3

Spain, and the US.¹ Even if the direction and speed of change has since evolved in different ways—at the time of writing a restoration of the pre-revolutionary order is fully in place, and 2011 is a pale memory rather than the foundation-stone of a different order—and even if many commentators have since argued against the notion that it was a revolution, as it resulted in almost no alteration of the control of the means of production or the security apparatus, it is indisputable that something happened in 2011, the magnitude of which was immediately apparent.

Many commentators pointed out that most of the protesters were young people—not surprisingly, in a country where more than half the population is aged 24 and under—and educated, at the very least in using new media and organizing spectacular forms of demonstration. Across the region, protests have gained a stronger impetus in countries with a solid educational background: “Spearheaded by educated youth, the Arab uprisings have been brought to fruition by the masses of ordinary people (men, women, Muslim and non-Muslim) who have mobilized at an astonishing scale against authoritarian regimes in pursuit of social justice, democratic governance, and dignity”² (Bayat 2011, 386).

While the protests in Egypt, as in Tunisia and elsewhere, were fueled by lack of political freedom and oppression, a major factor in escalating action has been the discontent over the crisis of education, particularly the expansion of higher education without simultaneous growth in job opportunities for graduates, leading them to joblessness. However, a direct causal process between the structural condition of youth unemployment and civilian unrest is hard to trace.³ What is more relevant for my purposes here, however, is that the dimension of youth, education, entrance into the labor market, and the failure of the state to act on its promises were all part of a metanarrative of change explicitly adopted both within and outside the country.

²Rebecca Warden (2011) comments: “Once the protests broke out in Tahrir Square, many of the cohort of civic-minded active young people that universities raised in the past years were quick to join in. As the protests gathered strength, the protestors soon became highly organized with medical stations, cleaning brigades, security checks to stop anyone bringing a weapon into the square or small stands where people could leave their mobile phones to recharge, to give but a few examples.”

³It is moreover a recurrent phenomenon in the modern Egyptian history (Abdalla 1985).

Although I had lived in Egypt for a couple of years carrying out studies on citizenship, youth, migration, religious minorities, and educational institutions, the 2011 events were unexpected and positively astonishing—it seemed that the people had finally found the ability to speak after all. At the time, I had started research on the university system in Egypt, thanks to my participation, in 2010, at a Social Science Research Council (SSRC)-funded project on Arab universities, with Egypt and Tunisia, Lebanon and Kuwait as case studies.⁴ The 2011 revolution, and the emphasis it placed on youth and education, inspired me to revisit previous studies in light of the changes occurring; as early as 2012, the SSRC commissioned a revision of the research carried out in 2010 in light of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt (see Cantini 2015).⁵ At about at the same time, I started planning a new research project, which eventually started in 2013, on doctoral studies at Egyptian public universities with the aim of linking the changes in the provision of doctoral studies to the revolution. By studying the university as an institution, I tried to understand the kind of change that was happening while it was taking place. Rather than limiting the analysis to the conditions of change, I wanted to understand how people gave meaning to change by inscribing it in different metanarratives.

Therefore, in this chapter, I address the question of change at two different levels. First, I look at how university administrations were practically affected by the events of 2011 and how the people working in these offices reacted to the revolution. Second, I pay attention to metanarratives of change, or on how people made sense of and justified their actions through change. More precisely, taking the university as the unit of analysis, I discuss whether and how socio-political change, as initiated

⁴I had already a well-established interest in how educational institutions, and universities in particular, shape the lives and trajectories of the young people who attend them. As I have argued elsewhere, universities are spaces where critique can emerge at multiple levels, even when under tight control (Cantini 2016a).

⁵As indicated above, I am familiar with the debates about whether it was a revolution in the proper sense of the term or not, and agree that it was not a revolution from an analytical point of view; continuities from the previous order were always present (for an early analysis, see Kienle 2012). Yet this was how it was labeled and experienced, and I use the term here in an emic way.

by the 2011 revolution, translated within the university as an institution and how it evolved into discourses about change.

I do this by relating the macro level of change pertaining to the national political and social realms to the ways in which the metanarratives of change found their way both into the words and the deeds of the people I interviewed during my research, as well as into institutional practices and structures. The aim is to introduce a way of studying change through a focus on the university and the role of metanarratives of change: how the latter frame the ways in which actors understand and represent what they are doing, and how these metanarratives are contested.

Through this approach, I offer methodological and theoretical reflections on the possibilities offered by the ethnographic study of institutions to address the question of social change, in particular dealing with both changes within the institution itself and how the institution fosters and sustains continuity and change. The university as an institution was a rather unspectacular site of struggle, even during the most turbulent moments of recent years. And yet it was one of the sites in which the struggle between revolutionaries and conservative forces played out at different levels, and thus its analysis offers a multi-layered understanding of change, by looking at how institutional change is connected to changes in the grammar of justification adopted by different actors.

As I have shown in my ethnography of the university in Jordan (Cantini 2016a), following Luc Boltanski (2009), institutions have, above all, the function of constructing a “reality,” a way of understanding the functioning of the institution itself and its role, the “whatness of what it is,” which is inevitably challenged by the “world” or everything that is. Thus, discourses on excellence in teaching and research may be confronted by the practical constraints, known to all, that make the “reality” of the institution sound hollow. For instance, governance reforms regulating access to certain courses could be presented as a way of opening up the university to more students, but are understood by most people as a way of increasing profit. As a result, institutions are inherently fragile because critique can always draw events from the world that contradict the logic of an institution’s reality: the two registers of confirmation and critique coexist, and institutional orders or state of

affairs are to be understood as inherently prone to critique even under the most reactionary circumstances (see Cantini 2016a and Cantini, forthcoming, for further discussion of what understanding the university as an institution entails).⁶

In what follows I further problematize this inherent tension at the core of how institutions work by discussing how different temporalities embedded in metanarratives of change, or the interplay between different layers of change, complicate the representations of the ways in which institutions function.⁷ Showing how different actors talk about change, and looking at disputes and justifications around change, I caution against adopting explanatory schemes too easily, particularly when building narratives, and suggest looking at institutions instead to see how contradictory and overlapping notions of change are created, sustained, and contested, even in times of political repression.

A key aspect of the process of attributing meaning and value to change is the constitution of discontinuity. As I show in the cases I present below, the metanarratives of change vary greatly within the same institution at any given time; whether administrators at a private, for-profit university acknowledge the effects of the revolution on their institution depends of course on the moment in which they are asked, and the accuracy of their answers remains an open question. Similarly, professors and students alike have an understanding of recent changes in the provision of doctoral studies that may or may not have a direct relation to the broader societal changes that are occurring.

This chapter addresses the different scales of temporality at play and how they overlap in the daily experience of people involved in universities, looking at how claims to continuity or discontinuity shape the form and meaning of change. Discrepancies between temporalities hint

⁶It is clear that a complex institution like a university does not evolve in a linear way—adaptation is always at play, particularly at moments of repression, and as widely noted in many studies, institutions are rather resistant to change (see Bammer 2015; Browne 2015). Even studies that emphasize continuity in institutions, however, recognize that work is required to maintain the logic of its reproduction, à la Bourdieu.

⁷In this sense, the proposed model of change is based on a kind of pragmatic analysis, one that is “capable of taking account of the ways in which people engage in action, their justifications, and the meaning they give to their actions” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006, 3, quoted in Browne 2015, 71).

at the distinction of *kairos* and *chronos* proposed by Sian Lazar (following Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who in turn draw inspiration from Martin Heidegger), where the latter constitutes the regular passage of time while the former is the “moment of rupture where the ‘to-come’ is made evident, ‘the opportune moment that ruptures the monotony and repetitiveness of chronological time’ [...] the question becomes how to either recognize or create the *kairos*, the special moment of opportunity for revolution, within the *chronos* of everyday political time” (Lazar 2014, 102).⁸ Therefore, I would finally like to argue that a key aspect of the process of attributing meaning and value to change is a stating and staging of discontinuities in overlapping and sometimes conflicting ways.

“We All Support the Revolution”: Private Egyptian Universities in 2012

“We all support the revolution,” claimed a senior professor at October 6 University (O6U), the private, for-profit university in the homonymous satellite city 35 kilometers west of Cairo, interviewed during the second phase of the SSRC research in May 2012. As mentioned, the second phase had the explicit goal of finding out whether the 2011 revolution had already produced changes at the institutional level. Support for the revolution just before the 2012 presidential elections seemed to be the official line repeated by almost all administrators and professors I interviewed. This view was aligned with the spirit of the time, when the idea that public political debate had become the new standard was perhaps at its highest, despite the already worrisome signs that the revolution still needed to be fought for.

A more relaxed atmosphere was clearly noticeable on campus, with bills announcing public events and talks, the university security guards slightly less visible, and university personnel more favorable to the presence of a foreign researcher. However, this more relaxed atmosphere

⁸Bammer (2015) cautions that other distinctions are necessary, for example between change we can influence and change that is beyond our control, and the difference between scale and tempo of change, where tempo, the pace of the events, is unpredictable, while the scale of change depends on the response from individuals and communities affected by change.

did not prevent an administrator denying me access to the documents outlining the internal regulations of the university on the grounds that it was sensitive information; I was also not allowed to move freely around campus or to speak with whomever I wanted to. The landscape of O6U bore no immediate reference to the revolution through such things as graffiti, posters, or any visible reference signaling change, and my interviews reflected a similar absence of any meaningful change at a deeper, institutional level. A few minor protests were organized on campus after the Revolution by students demanding greater representation, and employees and junior professors demanding better wages, but these occurred on only one occasion during the vacation, as one administrator noted with evident sarcasm. Their demands were met, and in the case of the employees and junior faculty their salaries were raised “even before they asked for it,” as he put it (Cantini 2016b).

The possibility of hosting external guests, either as speakers or as attendees, and indeed the very idea of holding talks during the semester, was a clear marker of discontinuity compared to the first phase of the research, which I carried out in 2010. A professor was keen to emphasize this change; not only was she allowed to invite external guests to her classes without first seeking permission, she was also allowed to use contrasting ideas as a means of teaching in her classes. A senior administrator explained to me that student participation in elections and on governing committees was actively sought. One of the first things the administrators told me, with pride, soon after the claim that “we all support the Revolution,” was that they had created a student union with free elections in each faculty. It turned out, however, that having some form of student representation in the faculty had not been changed but had now been “put into practice,” as one dean explained, implying that during my first fieldwork period in 2010 I had simply been given a description of the system as it existed on paper.

The system allows for faculty elections—I was even shown a ballot box—but when I asked if the students had organized into political parties the answer was invariably that there was no need for that, and that they knew each other and were selected on the grounds of their capabilities. Elected students cannot take part in university governance, even at the faculty level (not to mention on the University Council). When I

inquired about their actual role, I was told that they collect students' grievances, and proposals for cultural and social activities, and submit them to the dean, who in turn asks for funding from the university and informs the students whether the proposed activity is feasible. The vice-president for student affairs underlined during our interview that the university is increasingly willing to listen to students. Toward this goal, a complaints and suggestions box had been provided near the vice-president's office, and he guaranteed that such boxes had been installed in each faculty; whether any concrete measure is taken depends on the willingness of the upper echelons of the administration (Cantini 2016b). It thus seemed apparent to me that the grammar of justification represented by the revolution had not impacted the workings of the institution in any fundamental way. This has something to do with how private universities came into being.

The introduction of private universities occurred in the context of what was represented as a public-sector crisis. While the American University in Cairo has existed since 1919 as a private, non-profit organization with its roots in missionary activities and Al-Azhar University, despite its previous centuries of existence, was incorporated within the public sector in 1961, Egyptian for-profit, private universities had been unthinkable in a state that had made education one of the fundamental services provided by the socialist state to all its citizens. They were only allowed in 1992 (Law 101), after heated debate (Frag 1997), and the first four private universities of this kind, O6U among them, opened their doors in 1996.

The link between these private, for-profit universities and the new satellite cities around Cairo should not come as a surprise. Since the beginning of the Mubarak era in 1981, urban planners and political elites have argued that population density was consuming the promises of economic growth, and the government deployed laws, investment, policies, and infrastructure to subsidize and build satellite cities in the desert to facilitate the "productive redistribution of the population" (Ismail 2006). Vast satellite cities such as 6 October or 10 Ramadan, established in 1979 but scarcely populated until the beginning of the 1990s, attract manufacturers, often linked to international companies and government supporters, which benefit from tax deductions and cheaper rents (see

Denis 2011). Private universities are part of this landscape, along with shopping malls, gated communities, and private companies.

Despite predictions of failure and largely well-founded criticism of the overall environmental and social sustainability of these new settlements, it seems that the political instability that ensued after 2011 and the difficulties of living in increasingly hard circumstances in Cairo's quarters had the effect of making these settlements even more desirable. Recent studies show that a few of them, in particular Rehab and Sheikh Zayed, with their new restaurants, shopping malls, and leisure venues, are attracting at least some of the middle class along with the upper classes, who are experiencing suffocation in the old city perimeters (Abaza 2018). This contrasts with the idea of a "phantom luxury class" evoked by Amar and Singerman (2006). Similarly, despite widespread predictions, including my own, about their ultimate unsustainability and very limited impact on the broader market for higher education, private for-profit universities seem to be on the rise, particularly in scientific sectors promising better employability. While these developments (satellite cities, private for-profit universities) evolved according to a different temporality than the 2011 revolution, it became clear that they would profit from the feeling of insecurity and chaos brought forth by the political turmoil.

Private universities did witness workers' protests, mainly about their salaries and labor conditions, and some student protests—although these latter reasons for demonstrating were less clear.⁹ As mentioned, this happened even at O6U, although I did not witness any during my

⁹In 2012 I had the impression that such private, for-profit universities could not possibly be associated with the revolution in any meaningful sense, and that the link with the new settlements in the desert was somehow revealing a new class of citizens who had benefited from liberalization policies since the '70s and had continued to do so under Mubarak. In my opinion this new class had to be considered as leaning toward stability rather than revolution. At a project conference in Cairo in early 2013, this perspective was heavily criticized; private universities were also witnessing student and worker movements, and to draw too close a link between the new settlements and the for-profit, private universities with a class of supporters of Mubarak's regime, or at least of people not in favor of a continued revolution, seemed unacceptable to the scholars and activists who confronted my hypothesis. However, most of the people I interviewed then in these satellite cities associated the word "revolution" with problems that impacted their lives, namely *baltajjyya* (bandits) and the need to protect themselves and their families. On the positive side, my respondents often mentioned how amazing it was that the Egyptian people had managed not to lose a school or academic year, and that the revolution had only minimally affected the university.

research. As far as I could gather, the demands were not revolutionary in a broader sense, and similar demands were being voiced on a daily basis in almost all sectors of the economy. Moreover, when their demands were met, the workers continued their work with no further challenges to the structure of their institutions. Similarly, students' demands, although linked in some cases to some aspect of the revolution, did not challenge the logic of the institution, neither its reality regarding its private, for-profit setting nor the new class structure induced by the satellite cities. At the German University in Cairo, for example, demonstrations were related to the killing of a fellow student at Port Said¹⁰ amidst fights at the stadium during a football match that caused more than 70 casualties, and at the British University, students protested rising tuition fees and demanded new accreditation with the partner university in Britain (Mahmoud 2013).¹¹ In any case, the more political demands were ignored by university administrators as soon as the political climate changed. The situation happened to be rather different in public universities, where the revolutionary struggle became apparent within the functioning of the institution.

Public Universities During the Revolutionary Years, 2011–2013

From their inception, universities have been one of the main places to challenge the existing order and nurture dissent, and at different moments in Egyptian modern history they have been at the forefront of political and social turmoil, particularly in the 1940s and '70s (see Abdalla 1985), and again from 2003. Abdelrahman (2015) includes university campuses among the mobilization hotbeds from 2003 to the

¹⁰In February 2012, clashes during a football match resulted in more than 70 casualties, and a ban on spectators attending football matches that lasted months. The student was among the victims.

¹¹Students at the American University in Cairo were very active in many respects, from demanding the building of an archive documenting the revolution to other demands, at times in cooperation with other universities in the country. But AUC is not a for-profit, private university; it has a different mission, history, and orientation.

present that eventually led to the revolution, and as Abdalla clearly shows, waves of student demonstrations have been recurrent throughout Egyptian modern history. As many commentators have noted, in 2011 and in the years directly following, activists had access to many repertoires of action and mobilization, and were in explicit conversation with the “’70’s generation,” the last generation to have seen such intense political activity.¹²

Political unrest and institutional critique pertain to the very functioning of the university as an institution, in Egypt as elsewhere, to its *chronos*, although forces of stability seem to prevail at ordinary times. The momentum for change, however, necessitates a rupture, a *kairos*, which did occur in 2011. Universities were gathering points for some of the marches during the 18 days of uprising, particularly the February 8 demonstration that led to the fall of Mubarak. They became sites of political activity soon after his resignation, retaining their strong mobilizing power and taking on a clearly visible role in the series of strikes and protests that marked the country during the military council period from 2011 to 2012 and into Mohamed Morsi’s presidency.

The student movement was at its peak from 2011 to the first half of 2013. At the beginning of the second academic term and following the January 25 revolution, Cairo University, like many other Egyptian universities, witnessed a general revolt against existing academic conditions (AFTE 2017). It began with the dissolution of student union, whose members were widely believed to have been elected under heavy political control and through the exclusion of some political groups, and subsequently the organization of a new election. Diverse political ideologies were represented, and students were allowed to mobilize around their causes. Students, faculty, and even some administrative staff organized many protests, among the main results of which were new student bylaws allowing their initiatives greater independence from external controls, the

¹²This analysis exceeds the scope of this chapter; here it is enough to say that some of the most prominent activists in 2011 came from politically active families, often with members who had also been active in the ’70s. The phenomenon was so widespread that it was also discussed in the press, leading to discussions about the similarities and differences between the two movements, and particularly after 2013, on how to cope with the failure of challenging existing power structures.

expulsion of all police from campuses, new spaces for political groups in universities, and the free exercise of these new rights. This was evident in the increased number of protests, sit-ins, seminars, and bulletins, and the establishment of political clubs and societies (AFTE 2017, 12). These initiatives mostly originated in public universities.

The possibility of relative freedom of political activity led to some significant results, the most evident of which was the student union elections in March 2013. Students belonging to various revolutionary and secular political movements formed strong electoral alliances and managed to achieve a sweeping victory over students belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood, the party then leading the government of the country. This election resulted in ending decades of Muslim Brotherhood dominance over student elections (Shams El-Din 2014). The victory of the non-Islamist student movement was an indication of the erosion of the Brotherhood's influence on university campuses, its major power base up to then, and of what was to come in the next few months.

Other changes pertained more closely to the functioning of the university as an institution. The election of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University was a major event in the context of widespread student demonstrations demanding the ousting of university provosts and in calling for elections for senior academic posts, in substitution of the existing (and, after 2014, reinstated) system of appointments made from above (AFTE 2013). The struggle around this election, which explicitly echoed similar struggles about the independence of the university as an institution since its inception (see Reid 1990), became one of the university's major achievements after the revolution, an indicator that real change was indeed taking place also at the institutional level.

Things were never straightforward, however, and the direction of change was never uncontested. Some actors of change started to gain momentum well before 2011, and seem to have actually lost steam at the peak of the revolutionary moment. Particularly relevant to a discussion of how change happens through different temporalities is the 9 March Group for Academic Freedom, established by 25 faculty members at different Egyptian universities in 2003 in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq, with the intention to challenge the political control imposed

on academics.¹³ In just two years, the group's membership grew to thousands of academics from a wide range of disciplines and universities. The movement has been involved in university faculty strikes and protests, both before and after the revolution, for better pay and pensions as well as for greater investment in the higher education sector and administrative reforms. The core public demands, however, concentrate on the defense of academic freedom and the freedom of scientific research, even if they were always opposed by conservative forces within the institution and a minoritarian interest within the group itself (Abul-Ghar and Doss 2009).

In 2008 I had attended a couple of the conferences organized by the group, one at Minya University and the other at Cairo University. While struggles against political interventions on campus, from security services or the police, were always at the forefront of the group's activities, its biggest problem has mainly been internal, institutional, and organic. This was evident at the meeting I attended, with professors from the more prestigious universities and faculties being self-critical and professors from weaker institutions praising the system, and looking unaware of, or disconnected from, the goals of the group, namely to fight for greater academic freedom, concentrating instead on demands for salaries' increase. "The bulk of the university is corrupt and mediocre," argued one of the promoters of the group in an interview; many professors have "navigated hard times by engaging in questionable practices: giving private lessons; taking endless sabbaticals without surrendering their posts; not teaching for the number of hours that they should; assigning their own textbooks and favoring large lecture classes to maximize their profits" (Lindsay 2013). The fight to change academic practices "is a much more difficult fight to engage in, [...] you're going against the academic culture, against your colleagues, your dean, [...] the person you share an office with" (ibid.). This points to a necessary institutional change that has to be kept distinct from the political struggle, although of

¹³The 9 March inspiration and name came from the date, in 1932, when the first president of Cairo University, Lutfi al-Sayyed, resigned in protest against the government's decision to dismiss Taha Hussein, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and a renowned intellectual, to placate clerics' anger about his book on pre-Islamic poetry, which was regarded as blasphemous (Abul-Ghar and Doss 2009).

course the two are closely related. After the revolution, even for members of the group, the interest went into the political struggle, whereas the badly needed institutional reforms were left behind, as I will discuss in the next section.

All of the cases briefly presented here can be understood as showing different dimensions of change, from the political to the more institutional struggles, before and after 2011, to point out at the working of different temporalities. It should be added that this access to new forms of liberty, the opening up of what is possible and all the new stimuli offered by this situation, generated a considerable amount of uncertainty and even anxiety (for a similar reflection in a different context, see Dakhli 2016). This was true not only for those experiencing the changes and struggles but also for the researcher trying to make sense of at least some of them.

At some point, the developments felt so overwhelming and omnidirectional that one simply had to choose where to focus one's attention. In introducing this section I mentioned that while some events and protests were clearly inscribed in previous repertoires of action and had a clearer political outlook, other initiatives were oriented toward the reform of the institution.¹⁴ As I made clear in the introduction, my own analytical interests lean in this latter direction, and despite some frustration at not being able to follow the more exciting and eventful developments, I decided to stick to what at times looked decidedly out of focus and felt lacking in momentum, but was closely related to the necessary institutional changes advocated by the proponents of the 9 March Group. I thus decided to focus on one of the core aims of universities, where the discourse of crisis was predominant: the production of knowledge through research.

¹⁴The two perspectives are not in contrast, of course. It is necessary again to remember that, despite all the clashes and demonstrations, not a single semester or an exam session was lost. The university as an institution showed considerable resilience and continuity, in my view, due to its absolute relevance for most Egyptians, regardless of their political orientations.

Change After 2013

After the “second revolution,” the coup d’état with popular support on June 2013, the conflict between the military and the supporters of the ousted president quickly dispersed any hope of meaningful change in university life. Some campuses, in particular at Cairo University and Al-Azhar, became organizational hubs due to their proximity to two major protest sites and were places from which demonstrations started—albeit this time not in the direction of Tahrir Square. Moreover, protests by Students Against the Coup, an umbrella group headed by Muslim Brotherhood students, were usually confronted by students supporting the interim government and security forces, leaving those who supported neither the military nor the Brotherhood stuck between a rock and a hard place. In the 2013–2014 academic year, 18 students were killed in anti-government demonstrations and 998 were arrested. Hundreds of university students across Egypt, almost half of whom were at Al-Azhar University, were suspended for their alleged role in on-campus violence and protests (AFTE 2017, 24).

However, attending classes during this period, one could easily remain oblivious of these events. For instance, in the late spring of 2014, soon after the beginning of my project on doctoral studies, I attended two seminars by the same professor of Sociology, one at his Department at Cairo University and the other at a research center not far from the campus, which he directed and where he has run a reading seminar for years. The seminar at Cairo University was very quiet, with seven students attending. The discussion was led by the professor, who does the most of the talking while Ph.D. candidates asked some questions. The seminar at the research center was somewhat better attended, with perhaps two dozen graduate students including M.A.s, and it looked more like a lecture, with an assistant to the professor delivering a frontal lecture while the students sat quietly, most taking notes. In comparison to what was happening on campus, with almost daily clashes between supporters of the deposed President Morsi and loyalists of the present regime, the scenes looked unreal. The immediate feeling was that action was evidently taking place somewhere else.

The state's effort to regain control of the campuses was not limited to violent acts and extended to the institutional level soon after President Morsi's dismissal. Most of the major gains of the 2011–2013 period were reversed, with new laws and regulations treating universities as military facilities under military jurisdiction, with the consequence that many students were referred to military trial. University presidents were given the right to expel students, and exercising freedom of expression and freedom of assembly at universities was effectively criminalized (AFTE 2017, 30). The new system of elections put into place after the 2011 revolution was reversed, as was the system for electing university presidents and deans, who are now appointed by the President of Egypt. The system had actually been more decentralized under the deposed President Hosni Mubarak, who at least allowed the prime minister to appoint deans (Abd Rabou 2015).

In the next academic years, 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, it became apparent that the authorities were determined not to relinquish their control of the universities. While the actual numbers of students killed and arrested gradually fell, this was due to a decrease in the number of protests through the combined effects of repression and disenchantment in a large stratum of the population, rather than to a change in the government's approach to autonomy in university life. As in the seminars I describe above, some normality was restored on campus amidst a widespread context of disillusionment on the part of those who believed in revolution. By 2016 a new "normalization" had been achieved; after many years of activism, campuses went forcibly quiet, as they had under the most repressive phases of previous governments. *Kairos*, the moment for change, was gone.

Conflicting Metanarratives of Change: Revolution and Internationalization

The events succinctly reported above should give an idea of the dramatic changes in the higher education sector, among many other sectors, in Egypt in the post-2013 phase. Let me now turn to other metanarratives of change in the university context, both at the institutional level

and in the discourses and practices of the people I encountered during my research on doctoral studies. While the overall political struggles are less relevant to a discussion of change through the institutional lens, it is nonetheless not hard to imagine the effects that these violent and visible clashes had on academic life, and particularly on the ability to do research.

The scenes at the seminars I described above show a rather placid and uneventful setting despite the ongoing clashes. While they do represent a rather traditional picture of doctoral studies, with training at centers that become somehow affiliated with single professors, or at best to a network of professors, and an overall sense of boredom and remoteness from any significant action, the scenes should not be taken as indicating the somewhat dire conditions of knowledge production in Egypt. The severe political and social conditions and constraints that confront researchers are known preconditions: a sort of public secret.¹⁵ At the same time, however, doctoral studies have been an integral part of Egyptian universities since their inception, and benefited from high status and consideration for some decades until they entered crisis mode in the 1970s, despite a continued increase in quantity and their central role at establishing research credentials (Cantini 2021).

Doctoral studies, despite their seeming remoteness from any consideration of change, are indeed the object of reform attempts—in particular, the creation of doctoral schools, with their credits and courses, mirrors parallel developments elsewhere—and in general there is a new focus, at least in public discourse, on the necessity of research as a precondition for accessing the knowledge economy.

In the limited space available here I limit myself to point to just one factor that I find particularly interesting in a discussion of institutional change: the newly founded Euro-Mediterranean Studies Program (Euromed) at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science (FEPS) at Cairo University. It is an ambitious attempt at developing an at

¹⁵A recent analysis shows that research in Arab countries is made an “impossible promise” by the persistence of political and societal control over knowledge production and the uncertain status of academic freedom. In the social sciences and humanities there is a double impossibility, since in addition to the impediments to research at large there is the poor consideration devoted to such disciplines (Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016).

least partially international study program at one of the most prestigious public faculties in Egypt, which is itself already the object of several attempts at internationalization, in particular through its curricular programs in English and French. There have been several efforts to internationalize higher education at Egyptian public universities, in particular thanks to the many full Ph.D. scholarship programs offered by the Ministry of Higher Education. Egypt's former Minister of Higher Education pointed out that in 2011 and 2012, 3000 Ph.D. students were granted scholarships, including 500 from Cairo University alone (Kubbara 2021). The main disadvantage of these programs, however, is that many grantees do not return to Egypt, depriving their country of the possibility of benefiting from the knowledge they have acquired: the well-known brain drain phenomenon. Euro-Med was initiated to counter this. In its first phase from 2002 to 2006 it was a TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies)-funded joint M.A. program with faculty drawn from four European universities. When the European funding was terminated, the faculty decided to continue this program as a doctoral course, which was initiated in 2007. The latter, now discontinued (see Kubbara 2021), was the only doctoral program taught in English at an Egyptian public university with local staff, and higher tuition fees in comparison to the regular doctoral program offered in Arabic. This attempt at internationalization, which is currently on hold, created many tensions among faculty and staff; and the actual quality of training received and of the theses produced by the program were subject to close scrutiny and debate.

This example clearly shows that some institutional change was taking place in parallel to the 2011 events, yet in a different temporality. Institutional change is slow, but internationalization features prominently within this context, and knowledge production is a core business of the university. These trajectories and discourses are largely independent from the revolution, predate it and continued after it, not without change. They are, however, not disconnected from the political and institutional changes discussed in the previous sections; they pertain to the institution, and affect the practices of those who people it.

Where Is Change, and How Can It Be Studied?

I have accounted for some of the major changes in the higher education sector at a time of the Revolution, both at the macro level and in my own ethnographic research, in the discourses adopted by people I interviewed and in the institutional practices that could be observed. At the macro level the directionality of change seems clear and has been discussed extensively in both the mass media and academic discourse: there was an initial period when revolution stood a chance, or was at least alive, something that is normally taken to have happened between 2011 and 2012. Then a second phase, after the election of the first President coming from the Muslim Brotherhood, in which the struggle became tripartite, with the old regime and the military on one side, the Muslim Brothers on the other, and the revolutionaries on neither side. After 2013, the struggles in 2013–2014 and the ensuing repression, Egypt seems to have resorted to an order similar to what was in place before 2011. On the other hand, change happening within the university is complicated by its unclear relationship to the political and social change happening all around it, and the different temporalities at play. Actors operating within the institution, however, largely adopted grammars of justification that were informed by the broad political developments. It is at this intersection of different metanarratives of change that I now focus my analysis.

There are two major ways in which change within the higher education sector is discussed, and they reveal some of the complexities of accounting for change through an institutional lens. The first, coming from those who were actively involved in the 2011 revolution, is one of depression and silence as a consequence of the severe backlash. The extent to which the revolution penetrated the university as an institution was never altogether clear—changes such as those to student bylaws and the election of deans at Cairo University were counterbalanced by relative indifference toward the political and societal changes as seen at OGU, among other universities. Even when the institutional changes were successful, they were quickly reversed as soon as the political climate changed. Importantly, the very possibility of change was negated by those who opposed the revolution, who invoked the “nature”

of students at private universities or the necessity of keeping the universities under tight political control. The analysis of doctoral studies at Egyptian public universities falls squarely within this negation of change due to the perceived irrelevance of the topic compared to the magnitude of change promised by the revolution and the disillusionment and disengagement under the increased repression. Despite some hints of a possible alternative trajectory, for example the fact that soon after 2011 several students at Cairo University registered for the doctoral program with proposed theses that directly referred to the revolution, doctoral programs were not really part of this metanarrative of change.

The second perspective or metanarrative of change stems from the recognition that the higher education sector is indeed part of a global endeavor, subject to reforms, geared toward innovation and quality, in which a metanarrative of change is indeed posited as necessary and welcome. The overarching narrative, however, links privatization to internationalization and presents an orientation toward profit-making, justified by the diminished funds coming from the government and enshrined in a new ideology in which education is less of a right and more of a good, to be placed on the market like other goods.

Most actors, particularly those who oppose political change, tend to negate the relationship between these two metanarratives of change—institutional change would have almost nothing to do with the overall political situation. In this logic, it is interesting to see how reforms, or plans for reform, seem to have some capacity for navigating through hard times and to resurface as soon as there is a chance. In August 2014, the government announced an eight-year plan to reform the higher education sector and bring it into line with the provisions of the 2014 Constitution, which sets the level of public spending on education, with the goals of “reforming the educational system to reflect the needs of the marketplace and incorporate the competencies necessary for innovative and entrepreneurial thinking” (Sawahel 2014). More recently, the government announced plans to remedy the ‘damage’ done to the education system over the past 30 years, that is in their view not offering education in line with market needs (Bothwell 2016).

The overall stability of the system and the persistence of a clear direction for reforms, toward increased internationalization and privatization,

are remarkable, despite governmental hesitation and, at least partly, societal opposition. In particular, the process of privatization is still ongoing, and has not been challenged by any ministry of any political inclination. For the more politically active, however, these two metanarratives of change are bound to one another, and the remarkable resilience of the reforms, or plans for reform, was clearly linked to the repression of revolutionary forces; in this sense, in contrast to the *chronos* of the reforms, the *kairos* of the revolution simply did not last long enough to have a meaningful impact on the direction of change imparted on the education sector. The inertia of the institution, seen in this way, is much less an absence of change than a change in a different direction altogether. The persistence, and likely proliferation in the coming years, of for-profit enterprises which understand academic freedom in only a very limited way could be understood as going against the ideals of the revolution. In a similar vein, neglecting or outright negating of the institutional conditions for doing research, particularly in the fields of the social sciences and humanities, could also be seen as a way of preventing further radical attempts to reflect on social and political conditions with the ultimate aim of changing them.

Conclusion: What Does an Institutional Lens Tells Us About Change?

The higher education system seems to have navigated through the most turbulent years in recent Egyptian history with few practical consequences: not a single semester has been lost since the 2011 revolution, and despite all the political turbulences the institution has continued to function with very little change, or at least little change that can be imputed to the revolution. The gains of 2011–2012 had already been rescinded by 2014–2015, and other, surviving institutional changes do not seem to be connected to the revolution. The cases, indeed miscellaneous, presented here could represent good examples of the overall failure of the translation of social mobilization into structural change, as discussed, for example, by Sune Haugbolle and Andreas Bandak (2017).

In this chapter, however, I have tried to put these miscellaneous considerations into one single narrative, with the aim of accounting for how political and social change can be seen through an analysis of the university as an institution in the midst of political and social turmoil, as well as by showing the different scales of change and the temporalities at play.

Change is far from unidirectional. The revolutionary moment was characterized by a multiplicity of struggles, some directly political, with clear reverberations in the higher education sector, with seven ministries changed between 2011 and 2013 and some outright revolutionary changes in the sense of *prendre la parole*, such as free seminars at various universities and new doctoral theses on the revolution registered at Cairo University. These changes were always contested, however, and in my analysis of for-profit, private universities it was clear from the beginning that many administrators and professors were simply getting by while waiting to see what would happen, making some concessions to the spirit of the time without allowing meaningful change in how the structure was managed. The university, as a complex and crucial institution for everyday life, in Egypt as elsewhere, allows one to see different and competing temporalities, directions of change and grammars of justification. This analysis brings together the macro political changes and the possible and contested institutional changes to offer a more complex understanding of how change appeared in this context.

For the institutional change, I have focused on two distinct studies: one on private, for-profit universities between 2010 and 2012, and the other on doctoral studies at public universities between 2013 and 2016. In both cases I have discussed the political and social macro conditions and how these entered people's discourses as an initial metanarrative of change. I then discussed the extent to which, if at all, change penetrated the university as an institution. The first study on private universities, conducted at the height of the revolutionary moment, showed a prevailing of the metanarrative of change, even when it was already evident that no meaningful change would be allowed on the premises of the university-as-corporation. Despite their insistence that they were on the side of the revolution, officials at O6U in 2012 tended to minimize the discontinuity I could observe, drawing on the first phase of the

research carried out in 2010, before the revolution. They rather emphasized how even the new developments, such as students' elections or the possibility of organizing seminars at the university outside of the approved curriculum, were somehow already planned for, and in any case were not against the institution itself. On the other hand, between 2011 and 2013 there were some institutional changes at public universities, pushed for by those who hoped that the constant protests and action would eventually lead to some kind of rupture. The search for discontinuity, for example in the election of deans, new student movements, and relative freedom on campus, is a distinctive feature of a revolutionary temporality.

The second study started when the revolution was still alive, at least in political discourse—a few months before the 2013 ousting of the then President Mohammed Morsi, which was nonetheless presented as a second, corrective revolution; the term was also enshrined in the 2014 Constitution. It then continued through the years during which the revolution was gradually being erased from public discourse and political practice. From 2014 onward, the discourse on institutional change became increasingly disconnected from the macro political condition, somehow reverting to an earlier, pre-2011 version of institutional change focusing on the double dynamic of internationalization and privatization, in which both were simultaneously sponsored and prevented by the regime.

I opened the chapter linking the revolution, an obvious event, to the education sector and its crisis, which for decades featured among the top worries of citizenship, becoming over the years almost a trope, and a major source of dissatisfaction. After so much hope that things would change, the crushing of the revolution brought with it more authoritarian liberalizations, also in the education sector, which largely continued the policies that started being implemented from the 1990s onward, and which do not address the overall sense of a crisis in the system. Discontent is clearly still there, and there is little doubt that education, and higher education in particular, will continue to be central for any change at the macro level.

In this chapter I have shown ways of making sense of change as it happened, by discussing some institutional changes that I observed

as they occurred, and through analyzing the grammars of justification adopted by the actors involved, which largely depended on macro level changes. These studies were carried out over several years, during which, despite the large-scale social upheavals, I tried to keep the analysis focused on the changes that were occurring to the university as an institution, in the belief that such an analysis could help generate a better understanding of the broader direction of change. In this process it is crucial to discuss how hindsight—or the co-creation of the past—comes about, for my own experience of both revolutionary moments and politically mundane times (*kairos* and *chronos*) is that the two are not easily distinguishable while they are happening. What makes them different is their effects, or perhaps more properly their perceived effects and the ways in which coherence is constructed after the event. Here, scholars and political commentators in the media play a crucial role in constructing a narrative framework and reworking past events, in collaboration with participants in those events. This is inevitably a multi-layered process, as everyone participates in the co-construction of a narrative, creating *kairos* retrospectively. In the macro metanarrative of change, educated youth spearheaded the revolution and their education was a key factor in their ability to act. Yet very little attention is paid to educational institutions, and when one carries out an institutional analysis of universities it is very difficult to pinpoint any meaningful and lasting change. The predominant feeling at the time of this writing is that of a quickly vanished *kairos* and a largely prevailing *chronos*; one should not forget the heavy control under which universities have been placed for decades and the multiple ways in which their functioning is actively obstructed by the powers that be. As I have shown, however, the possibility of critique stems from the very institutional character of the university, and some seeds of change are inscribed into the fabric of Egyptian universities at different levels. As the experience of these past years indicates, all the repression notwithstanding, discussions on the role of universities in fostering freedom of expression and research are very unlikely to fade into oblivion.

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4

Conceptualizing Change in the Cuban Revolution

Marina Gold

“Change is the very condition of human existence,” states Kapferer (2006, 125) in his analysis of Max Gluckman’s *An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (1940). In his essay, Gluckman points to the importance of analyzing change, as forms of social and political life are in continual flux. There is no essential initial condition from which to appreciate change, and any glimpse of social moments yields a snapshot

¹Founded in 1947 by Max Gluckman, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manchester became known as “the Manchester school” for developing innovative methodological and theoretical tendencies in the discipline. A focus on case studies, a concern with conflict and social organization characterized its foundational years.

I would like to thank the Institute for Social Anthropology and Empirical Cultural Studies at the University of Zurich for supporting me during the writing of this paper with an Associated Researcher position and a collegial working environment. This research was carried out with the financial and institutional support of a research fellowship at the University of Bergen under the European Research Council Advanced Grant awarded to Prof. Bruce Kapferer for the project ‘Egalitarianism: Forms, Processes, Comparisons’.

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within an open process. One of the concerns of the Manchester school¹ has been to understand social processes in constant flux, a reaction at the time to functionalist thought in anthropology, which tended to produce a more stagnant view of an integrated cultural/social whole. Therefore, the Manchester school aimed to contribute detailed and grounded ethnography that could be periodically reviewed and reconsidered from various theoretical perspectives (Gluckman 1940). Gluckman (1979) also notes the importance of time, both past and future, in considering the fluid nature of processes and the interconnectedness of events. This involves contemplating the study of change at three levels: change in the structures of lived experience (the unit of analysis), change that is observable in particular events, which become moments of condensation of the processes of social situations (empirical data), and change in the theories of knowledge through which these events are interpreted (metanarratives of change) (see also Introduction).

The question raised by the editors of this collection—how anthropologists and other social scientist study change—is particularly relevant in the case of Cuba, as change not only represents a methodological challenge, given the paradox of studying an ongoing revolutionary process, but is also charged with ideological connotations. The metanarratives of change and continuity in the academic literature on Cuba inform political positioning in relation to the revolution. These, however, must be subsumed to Cubans' daily experiences, better grasped through long-term ethnographic research, which reveals the partialities and contradictions of people's conceptualization of revolution. Ethnography, however, is hardly repetitive and, critically, event-filled, where the "event" is understood as "a singularity in which critical dimensions can be conceived as opening to new potentialities in the formation of social realities" (Kapferer 2010, 1). In this respect, the practical obstacles that prevent social scientists engaging in long-term fieldwork today can (arguably) be overcome to a certain degree by considering the importance of the event for the study of any social process, especially in cases of long-term engagement with a place with whose historic processes, general debates, and local nuances the researcher is familiar.

This chapter explores one way of studying change ethnographically (and theorizing it anthropologically) in a context where change is

heralded by some as progress while others disregard the trope as an ideological mechanism of anti-revolutionary views. That is, in the context of a political system that characterizes itself as a permanent revolution (see Gold 2015), change is a constant reference in terms of both political discourse and the materialities of people's lived experiences. Underlying these tensions about the nature and meaning of change are conflicting and shifting dynamics of relations, making the idea of "change" an ongoing and contested condition. Therefore, when change is the constant condition, what one perceives is the process or dynamics by which it occurs, which are of course neither constant nor linear. A possible snapshot of these processes is given by events, including both large-scale, transcendental events—such as the death of Fidel Castro—and more inconspicuous, small-scale shifts (a new law, a marriage, a migration) in people's lived experiences. In this way events can manifest tensions and contradictions as well as structures and orders, and are not just reflections of the past but crucibles of unrealized potential (Kapferer 2010, 15). In an attempt to explain how change is understood and studied in relation to the Cuban Revolution, I consider how the social and political processes that shape people's lives as part of a perpetual revolution (explained below) can be gauged through events—public and private, grand and small—that provide a snapshot of the complex and contradictory dynamics of sociopolitical life in Cuba. Therefore, the units of analysis for this purpose are twofold: the large-scale national project of revolution, and people's everyday experiences of it. The empirical data I engage with was collected during consecutive fieldwork trips between 2008 and 2016, and ongoing long-distance email and WhatsApp communications with informants, official media, informal digital media, and scholarly material. I pick two radically different events, precisely for their very different scales: the death of Fidel Castro as it was perceived by my informants, in the public media, and in published accounts; and a series of small-scale events in the life of one woman who is not extraordinary in any way but whose aggregated stories reflect many of the changes regularly taking place in Cuba. Thirdly, the metadata analysis provides the framework for the political and ideological context to the study of change in Cuba, to understand why both events are important in considering the implications of studying change.

Life in Cuba is framed by the concept of revolution, and the meaning of revolution is not self-evident. After a brief clarification of the implications of the revolution in Cuba and the political debate behind the notion of change (the metanarratives), I consider how different events unpack the processes and dynamics underpinning social interactions in Cubans' daily lives. The death of Fidel Castro, I argue, is a transcendental event in the history of the revolution, and acts as a moment of intensification; but this alone is not enough to understand how change is effected in people's daily lives. While transcendental events can serve to materialize and problematize underlying tensions and processes of change, imperceptible events and random occurrences can often crystallize the complexities and ambiguities of sociopolitical processes more clearly (see Moore 2006). Both types of events provide a view of life within the revolution.

Revolution: Change and Continuity

Elsewhere (Gold 2015) I have explored the multiple implications of the concept of revolution in Cuba in detail (see also Holbraad 2014), informed by the notion of perpetual sacrifice and struggle. As such, revolution in Cuba is not a rigid state ideology but rather a negotiated, lived practice (see also Gordy 2015). In people's daily lives the complexities of living in a perpetual state of revolution are evident (see for example Gold 2011, 2016). People must negotiate shifting nuances in state ideology regarding the limits of revolutionary practice while simultaneously shaping the potentialities of revolution through their own actions. For example, *émigré* Cubans were once repudiated as traitors and political defectors but since the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the hardships of the Special Period, *émigré* Cubans who sent remittances to the island were recognized as an extension of revolutionary participation from abroad (see Gold 2015; Eckstein and Barbeira 2002). This shift in the state's attitude toward the diaspora was not effected only from above; it was initiated from below through people's reconnection with family members overseas, and then captured by state mechanisms through the taxation of remittances, the opening up of dollar-stores that

allowed the state to collect hard currency, and the provision of money transfer services such as Western Union.

Revolution, as ideology and practice, is embedded within the social milieu of Cuban life. It is partly a state ideology, partly a discourse of nationalism, and partly a set of practices and habits. What constitutes a “good revolutionary” has changed throughout the 60 years of the process. The construction of the Cuban nation is based on the notion of revolution. Therefore, ideology is only one level of revolutionary understanding. In Cuba, revolution as ideology acts as a system of classification, a normative system, but it is also embedded in daily practices, since it acts as a system of structures that guide people’s actions. As such, revolution implies tacit understanding of what is good and what is inappropriate. These “implicit meanings” (Douglas 2001) of revolution have changed throughout history, altering how people position themselves in relation to the state, the nation, and the concept of revolution.

In the 1960s the subject and actor of the revolution was a communal one—*el pueblo* (the people)—and any action that foregrounded the individual’s interest was considered anti-social and counterrevolutionary. Through this discourse many were excluded and marginalized from the political project: homosexuals, the bourgeoisie, people who refused to participate in mass campaigns such as the literacy campaign. Since the 1990s, and more poignantly in the last ten years, the revolutionary subject has become atomized, reduced from “the people” to the neighborhood, the family, and more recently to a much more individualized understanding of revolutionary commitment. Therefore, just as practices of revolution have never been stable, so the conceptualization of revolutionary ideology is also in constant flux.

Metanarratives of Change: Reform or Revolution?

In the context of studying a process of revolution, conceptualizing change takes on additional challenges. Revolutionary processes are premised upon a partition between “before” and “after” which is always politically and situationally defined. This then demands exploration of

the process of change/alteration, and the before/after of that which is being revolutionized. The processes of change are contested by structures that subsist, often undermining the revolutionary struggle, such as different forms of inequality (gender, class, power). Simultaneously, for the Cuban Revolution in particular, it has been fundamental to establish a *long durée* connection between the current political project and the anti-colonial struggles of the nineteenth century. The meaning of revolution in Cuba is not a foregone conclusion. Since the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, a surge of scholarship aimed to understand the nature of the Cuban Revolution in the context of a radically transformed sociopolitical scenario. Many argued that revolution in Cuba is nothing more than the stagnant state ideology of an authoritarian regime (Kaufman Purcell 1991; Sweig and Bustamante 2013). And yet, in spite of the indescribable hardships of the Special Period (the decade of the 1990s), the Cuban Revolution subsists.

The meaning of revolution became crucial because the collapse of the Soviet Union raised the following question: how is it possible that the Cuban Revolution subsisted amidst the radical global changes of the 1990s? Subsist it did, but not unchanged, and such change has been the focus of countless scholarly studies (Bray and Woodford Bray 2002; Brotherton 2005; Brundenius 2002; Bye 2013; Pickel 2008) taking various political positions on Cuba. For anti-Castro voices conceptualizing Cuba as a “society in transition,” change is an imminent possibility that will transform Cuba from a communist prison to a democratic (and by extension capitalist) paradise (Romeu 2005; Russo 2013). Change has been used as an indicator on the democracy/authoritarianism scale, and has been measured through studies of civil society (Armony 2003; Abreu 2008), religion (Berry 2010), artistic representation (Fernandes 2006), and corruption (Bain 2008). For observers more sympathetic to the revolutionary project, change implies an ongoing process: change from the colonial republic of Batista to the revolutionary government of “*los barbudos*”²; change first toward and then away from Soviet models in the 1960s and 1970s; change from Fidel to Raul in the first decade of the

²The bearded ones, referring to Fidel Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos, Che Guevara, and other guerrilla fighters.

twenty-first century; and a possible change away from the parameters of the revolutionary project (Kapcia 2009). Studies of change in the Cuban Revolution have often overlooked the importance and multivalence of this enduring trope.

The death of Fidel Castro was the spark that set off the latest in the long history of clairvoyant scholarship about the fate of Cuba. Historical moments of crisis intensification have attracted the attention of scholars and raised the question “what next?” This question always implies two political views: will Cuba finally change and embrace capitalism and democracy, or will it remain the same, stagnant, failed state?³ Conversely, the other view asks whether Cuba will finally succumb to the pressures of the market and relinquish its social achievements, or will be able to change within the parameters of the revolutionary project.⁴ In both positions, change refers to the nature of the state, and the concern is with the structures that presumably embody the revolution.

This concern is not uniquely directed at Cuba: change has also been a trope for understanding political transformation elsewhere. In the 1980s and 1990s most of Latin America underwent structural adjustment programs, which had at their core a particular state model and the entrenchment of the US as the neocolonial power in the region. The broader historic context of this intervention is of course the long and far-reaching influence of the US in most military governments that assailed Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, argues Cuban academic Rafael Hernández (2010), reform and revolution are seen as dichotomous: the former is espoused by North American scholars and politicians in order to counteract the supposed stagnation of the latter. Embedded within studies of change as reform are deeply rooted notions of progress and development (Escobar 2001), applied not only to Cuba and Latin America but also to the Global South more generally (Escobar 2004; Willis 2005; McMichael 2012). These concerns, coupled with

³Some of the representatives of this view include: Otero and O’Byrian (2002), Pumar (2009), Corrales (2001), and Pickel (2008).

⁴This view is largely espoused by Cuban academics and Latin American observers of the revolution (Guanche 2008; Hernández 2010; Acanda 2000, 2002; Carranza Valdés 1991; González Cruz 2010). It is also the view of Cubans commenting on their blogs (see for example Fernández Estrada 2017; Rodríguez Rivera 2016).

political expectations shaped by the Cold War, have underscored studies of change in Cuba. Against this backdrop, how is change lived within the Cuban revolution?

The death of Fidel Castro represents what Badiou (2007) would call “an epochal event”: an event that will come to define a particular shared experience. Through this event yet again the trope of change has come to the fore in Cuban politics and scholarship. The much-awaited (by some) and dreaded (by others) event of Fidel Castro’s death did not see the fall of the revolutionary project. In concrete terms, Cubans’ lives have been in constant flux, even while occasionally marked by radical events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or, more recently, the wane of the Pink Tide. In contrast, many of my informants have a typical answer to the question “How are things?”: “*Ya tu sabes. Acá estamos, resolviendo. Nada ha cambiado*” (You know. Here we are, resolving.⁵ Nothing’s changed). However, when I observe their lives, or at least their material welfare, I can see that much *has* changed since I first met them: many have managed to improve their homes, some have purchased a new house, others or their children have migrated, and a few have moved into the private employment sector. All of these changes have significant political implications in Cuba and respond to larger structural transformations. I focus now on how change can be understood by looking both at transcendental events (the death of Fidel Castro) and inconsequential events (a woman’s quest to improve her house), arguing that both sociopolitical analysis and the details of people’s lived experiences provide crucial insights into the study of change.

The Death of Fidel Castro

During my long-term research in Havana between 2008 and 2012 I had a fantasy of living through what I prematurely considered would be the end of the revolution: the death of Fidel. When I settled in Havana for fieldwork in 2009 Fidel had already stepped down from his role in

⁵In Cuba “resolving” something implies sorting out the daily needs—getting food, medication, construction materials, a trip overseas—by both formal and informal economic means.

government and Raúl Castro had officially been voted President of the island. I considered, not without trepidation, the moment of waking up one morning to read in the papers that Fidel was dead. It would be, I imagined, like seeing the Berlin Wall being torn down. As it happened, Fidel outlived my fieldwork period by a good four years. But another anthropologist got to experience the surreal and exceptional moment. Martin Holbraad was in Cuba at the time of Fidel's death and wrote an account of his experience (Holbraad 2017). I borrow from this account and complement it with my informants' reactions and media reports in my analysis of how the event of Fidel Castro's death contributes to understanding change.

On the 25 of November 2016 I opened the newspaper and saw the news: "Fidel Castro is dead." It was not an unexpected occurrence, since the revolutionary leader had turned 90 in August that year and had been forced to retire from office in 2006 due to health problems, ceding power to his brother. While his death sparked demonstrations of joy in Miami and sorrow in Cuba, the Cuban revolution did not collapse and the US military did not invade Havana (even though Trump could not refrain from sending a provocative Tweet about "the dictator's death").

While anti-Castristas celebrated on the streets of Miami with chants of "*se murió la momia*,"⁶ the mood in Cuba remained introspectively calm. On that chilly November day there was "something forlorn on the faces of the people" (Holbraad 2017). Holbraad's landlady, "an exemplary case of what the revolution has done for ordinary people in Cuba,"⁷ had been crying and was profoundly upset by Fidel's death. She was a declared Fidelista, though she would not call herself a revolutionary.⁸ This is a crucial distinction in terms of appreciating change in revolutionary discourse, as well as in people's expression of support for the sociopolitical project. Other people that Holbraad encountered declared that they

⁶"The mummy is dead."

⁷He refers to education opportunities for Afro-Cubans, the option of living in the city and getting a house, and the creation of mass organizations such as the Federation of Cuban Women, which served to empower a much-repressed section of the population.

⁸Many people of her generation, who were in school in the 1960s and were shaped by a revolutionary education—declare themselves *Fidelistas* but not revolutionaries, as in the case of Aleyda, below.

had lost a father; this was a common way of conceiving Fidel, and is not a simplistic case of political paternalism but rather more complexly involves affective power and the importance of kinship in Cuba (see Routon 2010; Härkönen 2016). My informants were also affected by the news, even those who were living overseas in Spain or France. But none worried about what would happen next. Quite the opposite: they understood that the event would not bring about immediate change, as two of Holbraad's acquaintances revealed. The first was a young friend he ran into on the street who said about Fidel: "He lived his life, and now he's dead. We are the ones who have to carry on living in this,"⁹ conveying an understanding of the continuation of the situation beyond his death. A woman working as a cleaner in a guest house told Holbraad of the increased control and surveillance of foreigners and Cubans alike in order to "keep things under control" at a complicated time; her mother added that "they [the government] know what they are doing."

Events in the ensuing days followed a familiar pattern: a state of national alert at the important government service departments (logistics, secret services, army, immigration), control of the news and the Internet, double checks on foreigners on the island, the mobilization of buses to take people to the funeral procession, and a large military and police presence to guarantee order. Old documentaries and speeches by Fidel were republished in the official media, interrupting the daily Brazilian soap opera; important sports, and arts personalities and academics made statements in public blogs or news spaces. Demonstrations by the *Damas de Blanco*¹⁰ would not have been covered by media. The government was well prepared for the event, and, in many ways, so were the people.

It was not an event that shook the foundations of the revolutionary project, because people have long come to embody the struggle that revolution demands in myriads of ways beyond the political structures of the state (Perterra 2006; Holbraad 2014; Premat 2003; Gold 2015). What,

⁹As Holbraad explains, 'this' (*esto*), refers to an aggregate of ideas connected to the ambiguity of the concept of revolution (society/country/socialism/revolution/present moment).

¹⁰Ladies in White is a group of women whose husbands, brothers, or fathers were arrested for political dissidence. They wear white to Mass on Sundays and regularly protest about different issues (relations with the US; church–state relations; emigration matters, etc.). On Fidel Castro's death they decided not to demonstrate as a show of respect for the national state of mourning.

then, does this event reveal about change in Cuba? In many ways it condensed changes that had already been in place: the end of a discursive era of endless political speeches and ideological battles; increasing conflict between the generation that had lived through the revolution and that born after the Special Period, who never saw its benefits; redefinition of the meaning of revolution and people's commitment to it. Fidel had already passed into the pantheon of revolutionaries occupied by Martí, Mella, and Guevara. The seemingly monumental event of the disappearance of the "historic leader"¹¹ of the revolution, while it most certainly signified the end of an epoch, did not induce immediate change.

The death of Fidel did not trigger the onset of the most radical changes that have been transforming Cuban social, political, and economic life. Some of these changes are particular to any life course, such as the generational transition of ideas and expectations affecting Cuba, now that those born in the late 1980s and 1990s are coming of age. This generation,¹² with less affective ties to the legacy of their grandparents and great-grandparents and more exposure to the allures of capitalism through the Internet, have a different outlook on the future. However, a more concrete event that has been creating radical transformation in economic and political ideas has been the legalization of real estate in 2014. This, and Obama's denouncement of the economic blockade as a failed policy, produced more immediate and radical transformations. To explore how these changes impacted on Cuban daily lives, I now shift the focus from transcendental events and look at people's daily lives to appreciate how the small-scale events that define their routine reveal the larger transformational dynamics of their sociopolitical context.

¹¹This is how Cuban politicians and the Communist Party started to refer to Fidel after he retired from office. It represented a slow but purposeful process of repositioning revolutionary political discourse.

¹²The concept of generations is an important one in Cuban sociology, gaining traction in the 1980s at a crucial time for revolutionary leadership when the decadence of the Socialist bloc was palpable. The generational theme was based on Marx's ([1932] 1998) thoughts in *The German Ideology* to explain how power ought to be transferred in order to perpetuate the revolution, while contemplating the possibility that the revolution could transform itself under different generational circumstances (for an analysis of the different Cuban generations see Domínguez 1998).

The story of one particular informant, Aleyda, serves as unit of analysis to consider the impact of these less transcendental events on shaping life within the revolution. This woman's story epitomizes many larger themes of change in Cuba: migration, the emergence of private property, the precarization of labor, intergenerational conflict, and political apathy. Her extended case reveals the contradictions between large-scale changes and people's lived experience.

Aleyda: From the *Solar* to the *Casa Particular*¹³

In 2009, when I was doing my Ph.D. fieldwork, Raúl Castro had been officially elected and there was a degree of expectation that things could change. Raúl Castro's concern was to streamline the economy, and he initiated a process of internal debate that was announced in 2010 as the *Proyecto de Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social*.¹⁴ In 2016 the *Lineamientos* document was still being circulated in the second round of consultations. However, even while things seemed to stay the same from the people's viewpoint, there were important changes that had radical impacts on their lives, such as the legalization of private property in 2014. Aleyda's story crystallizes some of the ways in which this event transformed people's lives. In order to understand the impact of such an event, I must first briefly present Aleyda's situation.

Aleyda worked as a cleaner for my first landlady in 2009. She was in her late sixties and had indigenous and African heritage. She had a 17-year-old daughter, who at the time was starting medical school but later changed her major to information technology, because being a doctor would make it harder for her to leave Cuba.¹⁵ Aleyda's elder son was 27 and was a mechanical engineer. Aleyda had been forced to

¹³A *solar* is a type of communal housing where families live in small one-room apartments and share a common patio. Sometimes they share other facilities such as a kitchen or washing area. This particular *solar* was in Playa. a *casa particular* (private house) means a house that has been refurbished for rental, preferably to foreigners.

¹⁴Draft 'Guidelines for the economic and social policy of the Communist Party of Cuba.'

¹⁵In 2009 travel restrictions in Cuba were strict and doctors, highly valued social capital for the revolution, were prevented from travelling overseas to prevent their defection.

stop working by her last husband, but after the divorce and once her daughter had started university she obtained a state job working for the *Banco Financiero* (Financial Bank) collecting payment for state credits.¹⁶ She had to go back to work because she still had to comply with her life-quota of work hours.¹⁷

With the transformation of work from purely state-controlled, to the appearance of foreign investments and the more recent proliferation of self-employment, Aleyda's (and her children's) stories reveal the changing perceptions of the value of work. Aleyda's son worked with a Canadian company installing the infrastructure for electric generators. Mixed enterprises appeared in the late 1990s as the state implemented regulations to allow foreign investment on the island. Canada, Spain, and China were some of the countries that first began investing in Cuba in spite of the tightened US embargo. Aleyda's son complained that people no longer had the will to work hard for moral incentives and the good of the country. He represents the last generation to have experienced moral incentives around work. His younger sister would not conceive of engaging in voluntary nor morally rewarded employment. In contrast, Aleyda recalled how in her youth people had worked hard because work itself had value. She had finished high school and a tertiary engineering course and started work at the Ministry of Fisheries in the packaging and distribution of catches. She had to deal with elderly fishermen who were upset at having to incorporate the changes enacted by the revolution (including having a part-indigenous woman as their boss).¹⁸ The 1960s and 1970s saw a surge of development policies, central planning, and Soviet-influenced ideology in Cuba, with progress and mechanization the central tenets of development. These would have been the ideas that Aleyda brought to the elderly fishermen. It was the first generational conflict of the revolution, with the young and vigorous governing

¹⁶These were state loans given for people to upgrade their fridges and air-conditioning systems to more energy-efficient ones in the early 2000s.

¹⁷There is a minimum number of work people must do before they can retire and earn their pensions.

¹⁸Aleyda would say she was not Afro-Cuban. This is indicative of the still-latent racial stereotyping on the island, which countless anti-racial revolutionary policies have been unable to eliminate (de la Fuente 1998; Pedraza 2004; Eckstein 2009).

class aiming to modernize the country. Aleyda and her children embody shifts in the value of labor: national policies around work and retribution, equity laws, the penetration of foreign capital into the island's economy, and finally, as will be developed below, the emergence of private property and self-employment.

In terms of her personal life, Aleyda also reflects the changes put in place by the revolution: such as the reduction of class inequalities, the increased opportunity for women in the workplace, and the reduction of the influence of the role of religion. Aleyda's second husband was white and from an upper-class family. His parents owned a beautiful house in Playa. His father had been a banker before the revolution and owned his house, which he had been allowed to keep. His brother left for the US in the 1980s and was now well off. He sent US\$ 200 a month to his parents, and every time he came to visit, he invested in refurbishing their house. In the yard of that house there was a small two-story apartment that Aleyda and her ex-husband had built when they married. Only after the revolution would it have been possible for her, a poor indigenous woman from the country, to marry the son of a high-class family of bankers; and only after the revolution could a woman divorce multiple times without suffering social stigma. She was proud of these facts.

In 2009 the little apartment in the yard was rented out to an Italian and his wife for three years, although technically only one room was left. This was common, as it allowed landlords to pay the tax on the rental of a single room, which in 2009 cost between CUC 25 and 45 a day (which would cost between CUC 750 and CUC 1350 a month for a room), while actually renting the whole house for anything between CUC 3000 and 6000 a month, enabling them to make a large margin of profit. This phenomenon emerged in the 1990s with the proliferation of tourism and the slow and cumbersome bureaucracy that aimed to continue centralizing self-employed activities (see Armengol 2013 and Gold 2016 for an analysis of the rental property market).

After her second divorce, Aleyda moved to a one-bedroom unit with her daughter, who was still underage. Aleyda was perpetually obsessed with improving her unit. In 2016, when I last visited, she had managed to build two further stories upward, which still had no doors or windows. However, soon she would have an extra room and a bathroom, a terrace

and a water tank, important in Havana as piped water only flows for a few hours a day. Despite these improvements, Aleyda complained about the high cost and lack of availability of construction materials and tradesmen's lack of reliability. This was a common complaint of many of my informants from 2009 to 2016, because tradesmen work in cooperatives or government firms and have to do their private work *por la izquierda* (on the side). They also have to obtain materials for their privately organized work illegally, since the state firm that sells construction material monopolizes the market, making materials extremely expensive and scarce.

In spite of her complaints about her stagnant situation, many things had changed in 2016 when I last saw Aleyda. Her daughter had illegally left for the US via the Mexican border and had married a Cuban American, purely in order to get a green card. Now she is divorced and has a boyfriend, also a Cuban American.

The most radical change in Aleyda's life in 2016 was that she had become a property owner, and the manager of a rental property (*casa particular*), and all thanks to her Spanish friend Carlos Alfredo. Carlos Alfredo, a Spanish man in his 80s, had been visiting Havana since the opening up of the tourist market in the 1990s. He was one of the many European men who flock to Cuba in the European winter as sex tourists (Wonders and Michalowski 2001; Berg Rundle 2001). They met when Aleyda was working as a cleaner in the *casa particular* where he always stayed. Renting out a room to tourists had become first an informal practice and then an official and regulated policy in the 1990s as a way of accessing hard currency and catering for the increasing tourism before the state was able to catch up on the necessary infrastructure in the early 2000s. It is now a common self-employed activity.

Aleyda and Carlos Alfredo got married in 2015, when he wanted to buy a house. In one of the most important policy changes in recent years, in 2014 Raúl Castro legalized the sale of houses, which until then could only be exchanged (*permuta*). In spite of regulations limiting the number of properties that a person can own and excluding foreigners without a permanent residence from the property market, many unofficial mechanisms have led to foreigners and Cuban-Americans flooding the market.

One strategy is for foreigners to marry a Cuban, obtain a permanent residence visa and buy a house. Carlos Alfredo bought a house in Playa in Aleyda's name for CUC 40,000 (the equivalent in US\$). The exchange began as an informal deal with the owners, in which he would officially rent it from them for 15 years and then return it. He started fixing up the house and eventually decided to buy it, but the owners did not want to sell, especially because he was going to put it in Aleyda's name. This meant that they would not get their property back. They negotiated an increase of CUC 20,000, and although Carlos Alfredo had already paid CUC 40,000 he agreed, considering a house for 60,000 CUC cheap by European standards. In 2009 an apartment in Centro Habana could be sold unofficially for US\$ 10,000; in 2016 there were apartments in Vedado selling for US\$ 1 million.

As soon as Carlos Alfredo bought the house he held a meeting with the neighbors and explained that while theirs was a marriage of convenience they should all support Aleyda through the process of his getting residency. Having spent many summers in Cuba, Carlos Alfredo understood that while private property was becoming more common on the island, he would still have to contend with the web of social networks that both support and undermine private activities (see Gold 2016). This has also given Aleyda Spanish citizenship (for being married to a Spaniard), in common with many Latin Americans with Spanish ancestry who claim citizenship to obtain an EU passport.

Thus Aleyda, a woman made by the revolution in her political identity, her experience of moral incentives, the opportunities to get a job as an indigenous woman, also reveals the trajectories (desired and undesired) traversed by the revolution: the proliferation of the informal economy, the generational shifts with those born in the 1990s (many of whom emigrate), and the increasing preoccupation with material concerns. Aleyda often described herself as a fervent *fidelista*, not a communist, stating that after he died she would no longer be a communist because to her revolution means constant change, and there has been anything but change in Cuba in the last 50 years. It was common for people to express their position on the revolution, Fidel Castro and the future, and these views were never constant and shifted subtly. The contrast between this and her comments about the importance of the revolution

in transforming work ethics, gender, and race relations reveals the contradictory positions that people take in relation to revolution as an ongoing struggle, with the positive and negative connotations this entails, and to change more generally.

Conclusion: When Change Is the Norm

In the five years that I knew her, Aleyda went from living in a one-bedroom apartment to owning two properties, with a foreign husband and an émigré daughter in the US. She also now has a phone and access to the Internet. In concrete material terms, her life has improved and embodies the political changes of the revolution and the larger global migratory currents. It also reveals how people position themselves ambiguously towards change. Aleyda's story raises important questions about the value of change: even though her life had improved materially, she was not satisfied with the political and social situation.

It is perhaps in this respect that the death of Fidel will retrospectively become relevant. At the time it did not radically transform people's existence. He had been away from public life for ten years and the people had grown accustomed, if not fond of, his brother. But the absence of Fidel will have an effect, perhaps in the intergenerational transformation that Mannheim (1954) and Marx (1998) see as key elements of social transformation. Given many Cubans' view of Fidel as a father figure, the disappearance of the disapproving father may liberate the children to abandon the dictates of a time gone by. In this way, both transcendental events and detailed lived experiences are revealing for any study of change that aims to represent the experience from both a larger theoretical and macro-structural perspective and a more phenomenologically informed view of the practices and views of those who are going through it. Change is present at both levels, but is represented in different ways. While from the official perspective, revolution changes its circumstances but always involves the struggle for and commitment to a larger sociopolitical project (variably defined), in people's lived experience revolution can be variably defined as a social network, a set of values, a cause for

shortages, a historical moment of family histories and a shared imagined future.

Following Gluckman, when change is the norm, that which remains stable must be carefully considered. In the case of the Cuban Revolution, a process that bases its legitimacy on the very conditions of struggle and persistence, change and continuity are key tropes in the political and social analysis of Cuban life. The event of the death of the historic leader of the revolution served as a moment of crystallization of particular enduring tensions within the revolution: state control, citizens' frustrations, diasporic resistance, forms of political participation, self-reflection on revolutionary personhood, the use of political symbols, and the making of political myths in Cuba. However, it falls short of revealing the more profound changes affecting people's lives that have been taking place in the past twenty years and are, imperceptibly but enduringly, transforming key structures in Cuba: labor relations, property rights, local–global relations, and intergenerational conflict. The story of Aleyda reveals the impact of larger regional and international processes such as migration, the emergence of private property, the precarization of labor, intergenerational conflict, and political apathy through a person's lived experience. What makes this analysis particularly “Cuban” is that these processes occur within a political and ideological framework where change and continuity—in the discourse of revolution and resistance—are continuously revisited, elaborated, and transformed, not only from the top-down (as ideology), but also from the bottom-up (as practice).

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Part II

Biographies of Change



5

Social Change and Generational Disparity: Education, Violence, and Precariousness in the Life Story of a Young Moroccan Activist

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Introduction

In this chapter, I argue for generational analysis as a tool for researching change. Through a focus on the empirical subject of *intergenerational relationships* in life stories, and particularly on processes of *intergenerational transmission*, social change becomes empirically accessible as narrated patterns of social interaction. When we analyze interviewees' appropriation and reinterpretation of narratives, norms, and resources passed on to them by older generations, and how they situate themselves in a generation or generational unit, in Mannheim's (1952) sense, we can reconstruct the pivotal questions that define their generational

The author would like to thank Lena Inowlocki and the editors of this volume for helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*,
Anthropology, Change, and Development,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_5

actuality (*Generationszusammenhang*) in comparison to that of the older generation. Regarding methodology, life stories or narrative biographical interviews (Bertaux 1997; Rosenthal 1995; Schütze 1977) are adequate tools for analyzing intergenerational dynamics as well as for discovering the potential spaces within which the interviewee can actively and deliberately participate in or resist social change, rather than being the object of social change. The particular pattern of the biographical process structures that are conveyed through an interviewee's life story shed light on the material and structural constraints to, and the subjective experience of, social change: is change something that is suffered and must be accepted or adapted to? What are the resources, spaces, situations, and, most of all, relationships that allow individuals to consider themselves legitimate and capable agents of social change? Regarding political socialization and political participation, i.e., activism in social movements: do the interviewees present their activism precisely as a necessary break from the political or cultural traditions of their families or older generations in general, or as a "mission" imposed on them by their family or community? What significant others are relevant in the process of political engagement or disengagement, and what is their generational position?

Below, I present the case of a young Moroccan activist engaged with two social movements which, compared to the so-called Arab Spring protests of 2011, have received relatively little attention from the Western public; namely, the unemployed graduates' movement and the Amazigh movement.¹ The pattern that the analysis will carve out can also be found in other interviews I conducted, but this case epitomizes it in particular drastic manner. I present this case to illustrate a particular constellation

¹Some decades ago, the Amazigh movement was mainly referred to as "Berber movement", whereas now many activists reject the term "berber" for its pejorative implications and instead now refer to themselves as Imazighen (the plural of Amazigh, which literally translated means "free person"). Activists consider themselves the heirs of the indigenous population of the Maghrib who inhabited the region before the Arab Muslim invasion in the seventh century. Their language, Tamazight, a language of the Afro-Asian family that occurs in Morocco with three regional varieties, is often referred to as the strongest marker of difference from Arab cultural identity. The Moroccan Amazigh movement, which has developed as a result of social and cultural cleavages over the last decades, is a cultural and political nationalist movement that opposes the project of a pan-Arab or Islamist hegemony and the concomitant social exclusion and marginalization of the Amazigh population (Ait Mous 2011; Maddy-Weitzman 2011).

of intergenerational relationships that can be characterized as a *generational disparity*. In this constellation, intergenerational relationships are characterized by a particular alienation between the generations, in the sense of incommunicability concerning key aspects of their everyday life, for instance the understanding of politics and the moral economy of political engagement or disengagement. Accordingly, members of the younger generation often describe social change as an experience of estrangement from the older generation, often narrated as a trajectory of suffering (Schütze and Riemann 1991): key aspects of the younger generation's social situation are significantly different to that of their elders, and the symbolic, economic, and social resources that the older generation could pass on do not help the younger generation to deal with social change, i.e., to make ends meet economically, resist politically, or make sense of their situation and attain agency. Instead, they have to rely primarily on networks of trust that they develop among members of their own generational unit. However, this disparity does not have to be definite and permanent, and it does not necessarily entail the breaking up of an intergenerational relationship in all its aspects. In the case discussed here, generational disparity mainly refers to differing processes of political socialization that result in unreconcilable perspectives on politics; it seems particularly relevant in the context of the production of an urban precariat constituted of the relatively well-educated sons and daughters of peasants, artisans, and nomads from rural Morocco (Schwarz 2017; Standing 2011).

Intergenerational Transmission as a Subject of Life Stories

Time constraints, material limitations, and academic obligations can make undertaking qualitative long-term studies difficult for researchers who study social and political transformation (see Berriane, Derks, Kreil, Lüddeckens in the introduction to this volume). The life story, or narrative biographical interview (Bertaux 1997; Riemann 1987; Rosenthal 1993, 2009; Schütze 1977) offers an appropriate methodological approach to tackle this problem, since the data produced here allow the

inclusion of particularly long units of time—the lifetime of the interviewee up to the time of the interview—and can be retrieved in relatively short periods of time (Apitzsch et al. 2008). The subject of social change has been at the core of life-story research since its inception (Thompson 1981), just as questions of intergenerational relations and transmission, particularly regarding social mobility and precariousness (Benei 2010; Delcroix 2005). However, in many cases the notion of “generation” is reduced to familial generations, thus leaving aside other institutional settings of interest (Bertaux and Thompson 1993).

Furthermore, biographical research appears to be the most advanced way of tackling the “biographical ideology” (Bertaux 1976, 1997, 41) that Bourdieu (2004) later criticized so prominently as “biographical illusion”, before making extensive use of life stories himself (Bourdieu 1993b). While the illusion of the self as a coherent entity, and of coherent life courses, is at play just as much in other forms of qualitative and quantitative research, the biographical approach has arguably theorized this effect in a particular explicit reflection: in order to make the interviewer understand how one thing has led to another and how she or he has become the person interviewed, the interviewees have to deal with the constraints of their narrations’ own dynamic. In theorizing these constraints, as forces shaped by the structural logic of narrations as well as by hegemonic social norms, the postulate of coherence and comprehensibility, biographical research offers criteria and tools to analyze their effects.²

In a mode of horizontal comparison within my sample I have chosen the case presented below as it represents the life story that made me conceptualize and contextualize *generational disparity* as a particular type of intergenerational dynamic set apart from types more strongly characterized by conflict or negotiation between members of different generations, or by a clear acceptance of the elements that have been passed on to younger generations (Schwarz 2019).

²The narrator in this sense is by no means a unit of analysis that is deemed permanent. Authors like Riemann (1987), who interviewed psychiatric patients, have done much to show the social suffering that is produced when individuals are no longer capable of fulfilling these norms of subjective coherence.

When conducting the interview, I largely followed the standard procedure as outlined by Schütze (1977) and Riemann (1986), that is, after asking the interviewee to tell me his life story I did not interrupt his narration but listened until he had finished. Then, at first, I only asked questions about subjects that he had brought up himself, and only at the end added external questions on subjects not yet addressed by the interviewee. I aimed to formulate my questions in a way that would produce further narration rather than explanations or argumentation. Most of my internal and external questions were concerned with intergenerational relationships and political socialization.

When I present the case in the next section, I first “zoom in” and start with a rather detailed narrative analysis of the intergenerational relationships evident in two initial passages of the interview that seem emblematic of the further course of events; I then use this analysis to briefly introduce key concepts of narrative biographical analysis. In the subsequent sections, I “zoom out”; that is, based on a more condensed summary of the interviewee’s subsequent life story, I present these first findings in relation to recurring patterns in and general characteristics of the interview.

Interview: Shafik

Shafik³ is the oldest son of an Amazigh nomad family from the High Atlas. He has six sisters and two brothers. Two of his older and two of his younger sisters are already married and his older brother works as a shepherd; he was the first of the family to attend school. Two of his younger sisters and his younger brother are currently attending school, living in the house of their maternal grandparents, while his parents continue to “live in the desert,” as he says. His grandparents, parents, and older siblings are illiterate. Shafik is moreover the first and, so far, the only member of his nuclear family to go to university. He graduated with a B.A. and an M.A. in mathematics, and is currently writing his

³All the names of interviewees and others mentioned in the interview, and all local references are pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity.

Ph.D. in the same discipline. At the time of the interview in autumn 2014, he was 32 years old.

The First Day of School as an Emblematic Scene

When asked to tell his life story, Shafik first introduces himself by name and nickname and then describes himself as “the son of a nomad,” saying: “I’m not from a particular city, town or district; I was born in the desert. I don’t exactly remember the place or its name, but it was close to Ouarzazate.” He recounts how three days after his birth, his family traveled to a nearby city where he “celebrated his seventh day.” Due to drought, his family had to move to different regions several times, and he mentions some respective childhood memories without going into detail. He relates how when he was seven, his father announced one day that he was taking him to live in his grandparents’ house in another city so that he could attend elementary school. He says that it was quite hard to leave his parents and siblings, but when they told him that he would soon find new friends in school and when he “left the tent to live in a house and when I watched television for the first time,” he felt encouraged, as he says. He recounts how his father took him to school on his first day to register him:

I started my first day. I went to the school with my father for the registration ... after a short while my dad left and, well, me-, I stayed. Well, I registered ... this is the only time that my father, that he visited my school, this is the only time in my life that my father-, well, that he took me to school, that was on the first day, to register me.⁴

If we interpret this excerpt using narrative analysis according to Schütze (1977), this passage represents a *narration* in the strict sense of the term: Shafik contextualizes the scene by mentioning a particular place (school) and time (his first day at school), which marks this experience as a one-time event and linguistically sets this passage apart from others that *report* or *describe* everyday repeated interactions, or from passages in which the

⁴This and all other quotes translated from French by the author.

interviewee *argues*, i.e., gives reasons for his decisions, explains assumed causal relations, or presents his own normative assumptions and theories. And unlike *argumentations* or *descriptions*, the *narration* of one-time events usually presents turning points in the course of the interviewee's life story, critical junctures that often mark a shift from one biographical process to another. In the interview, these are functionally relevant to understanding how the interviewee became the person who is now talking to the interviewer. Accordingly, on a micro-level they are the prime data on which biographical analysis usually focuses. If similar patterns of biographical change are found in other cases in the sample they might allow for an analytical abstraction and feed into larger debates on social change, for example as typical school career patterns at certain intersections of class, gender and ethnicity in a given social context.

Here, the subject of the narration is Shafik's first day at school, and it is narrated first and foremost as a story of an abrupt separation; the child's loneliness is highlighted by stating that his father left "and I stayed," followed by the reiterated emphasis that this was the only time in his life that his father ever visited him at school or took him to school. At one point it sounds as if Shafik even had to register himself ("I registered"), his father having already left before this actual administrative procedure occurred. Such a confusion of agencies and the slight shake-up of the chronology conveys a rather fuzzy picture of his father as a subject and a decision-maker. This, in turn, indicates that the child did not actually understand the meaning or "message" implicit in his father's action, and it seems that his father did not give further explanations, or maybe did not even know them himself. In general, the narration thus conveys the impression that Shafik's father is a person who feels out of place in this institution at which he has decided to register his son. In this passage his father only appears as a significant other regarding formal education, in that he was the person who rather abruptly took the decision to send Shafik to school. But he is not described as someone who passed on any relevant knowledge that could have helped his son on his way. The father obviously decided that his son must take up a life project very different from his own, for which he could hardly offer him guidance or symbolic resources. Such a constellation bears certain tensions and contradictions for the younger generation, which, according to Bourdieu (1993a, 508)

even imposes a “murder of the father accomplished at the father’s injunction” on the member of the younger generation. All the characteristics of the passage in question can thus be read as strong markers of *intergenerational disparity*, since the passage is characterized by incommunicability and an impasse in intergenerational transmission. It thus anticipates a certain estrangement between members of two familial generations with regard to a key aspect of Shafik’s biography, that of formal education. This dynamic becomes increasingly salient in the subsequent narrative.

Peer Violence and Liminality

Shafik continues his life story, implicitly describing how he felt different from others of his own generation—his classmates—who, unlike him, had “already seen a biro and a notebook.” He recounts that having done very badly in the school exams to start with, he gradually started to produce better results. Most importantly, he describes his years in elementary school, and particularly his first weeks, as characterized by daily discrimination on the part of his classmates, who felt superior to a shepherd’s son and frequently insulted him so that he often came into conflict [*entrer en conflit*] with them, suggesting that this was in the form of physical brawls. As the life story continues, the separation, loneliness, and estrangement conveyed in the passage about his registration are exacerbated by his peers’ behavior. By persistently addressing Shafik as “the son of a shepherd”—an obvious fact, but here used as an insult—they are metaphorically sending him “back to the desert, where he belongs.”

These insults were hard to bear, and after some days Shafik told his aunt, who also lived at his grandparents’ house, what he was suffering. She would then come to see him at school and intervene in a very resolute way:

It was the first day, or, well, the first week. I told my aunt. So she came to school and came to see me in class. I’m fighting with [this other pupil]; she slapped [him], she gave him a good slap [...] Yes, she slapped this pupil, so the teacher came and told her ‘You don’t have the right to slap my pupils in class; I’m in charge here’. Anyway, the situation calmed down, and at night, well, at night again, this pupil’s mother comes [to

our house]. She comes and she says, well, that my aunt, she'd slapped this pupil, and the mother of this pupil, she wants to fight [*entrer en conflit avec*] my grandmother. My grandmother tells her 'I'm an old woman, so if we fight and you win that wouldn't be a real victory for you anyway. Just wait, I'll call one of my daughters—she's your age, so you'll see, so you can...' Well, this made a strong impression on me [*cette idée m'a resté dans ma tête*], since I-, well, I was watching from a window to see what was going on. Well, the first days and months were like that: every day, every week there was a problem of this kind, either with the pupils or with others. In any case, my aunt and my grandmother always defended me; always, they would defend me.

In the narration, the aunt's sudden appearance is described as a resolute, physical intervention, without explanation, or any use of words, for that matter. His grandmother, on the other hand, engages in a verbal argument with the pupil's mother and discursively plays the cards of her social age and the authority that comes with it, additionally threatening to call one of her daughter's, one of whom had already proven that she had few qualms about resorting to physical violence.

In Shafik's life story, school is described as a hostile and very brutal place, characterized mainly by peer violence. Teachers do not appear as relevant others in this narration. An important indicator in this regard is the fact that throughout the entire interview, and in all of Shafik's narrations about school and university, the teacher who expelled his aunt from the school premises is the only educational member of staff that he mentions. Such negligence on behalf of the teachers indicates that the explicit discrimination by peers should not be read as the result of individual misdemeanor, or mere adolescent group dynamics, but rather as an echo that amplifies the often rather implicit institutional devaluation of his father's male life project. "Son of a shepherd," used as an insult, is intended to make Shafik feel out of place in this institution, by depreciating his social background and denying his capacity to participate in or contribute to social change, i.e., the grand narrative of development and educational progress with which school, as a modern, and modernizing institution is imbued.

Analytically, the biographical process associated with Shafik's narration about his elementary school experience does not appear as a programmatic *institutional process structure*; that is, a process that passes through stages with explicit rules and a predictable outcome. Instead, it contains certain characteristics of a *trajectory of suffering* (Schütze and Riemann 1991), in the sense that the subject is increasingly losing control of his life until his aunt and grandmother step into the arena and confront not only the pupil, but also the pupil's mother. Although Shafik does not report any further verbal encouragement from his aunt or his grandmother during the course of the interview, these two illiterate women are obviously the most significant others in bringing an end to Shafik's trajectory of suffering in school, allowing him to regain a sense of agency in this institutional setting. The scenes of his aunt's intervention and the altercation between his grandmother and the pupil's mother also relate a process of *intergenerational transmission*, since the two women appear to provide him with a relevant example of struggle for respect and against discrimination. The confrontations with the pupil and his mother made a strong impression on Shafik (literally translated, "stayed in his head"), as he emphasizes above, highlighting their lasting relevance for him. In a later passage, Shafik mentions that after the first year in elementary school his marks improved, and afterwards he was among the top pupils in the class.

Language and Collective Identity

It is worth mentioning that at first Shafik does not seem to frame these experiences as racist discrimination, but rather as social discrimination—the crucial word at play here is "son of a *shepherd*." When I learned later in the interview that he was now an activist with the Amazigh movement I asked him when he had first identified himself as such. Shafik recalled the first time he heard an Amazigh word in the setting of an educational institution, during a geography lesson in high school. Until the early 2000s the Tamazight language had never been officially used in Moroccan schools, and French had been reserved for the field of natural sciences when the regime of the 1980s introduced a process

of Arabization. Shafik was surprised that his family's preferred language was actually used in school, and that it was called *Tamazight* in this context, because in his region of origin they always referred to his native language as *chleuh*, or *tachelhit*, as the local variety of Tamazight is called. According to Shafik, this experience in school left him with a fundamental question: "So I asked myself: 'What am I? Am I Arab or not?'" He relates how, when discussing the subject with one of his older cousins who was studying at university at the time, he heard about the Amazigh movement and its demands for the first time.

This personal experience and reinterpretation of linguistic differences seemed to act as a catalyst for Shafik to reflect upon his identity. It offers a particularly clear case of the repercussions of the Moroccan regime's project to Arabize the educational system on the one hand, and in reaction, the significance that the Amazigh movement attributes to language as the "the repository of Berber culture and history, and as an object that requires rescue, development, and elevated status" (Maddy-Weitzman 2011, 17).

It is telling that in this key scene in the discovery—or rather construction—of an individual's reference to collective identity and cultural belonging we hear nothing about intergenerational transmission, i.e., parents, grandparents, or teachers telling children about their traditions or passing on a particular cultural knowledge that they themselves had received from their own parents. On the contrary, Shafik's parents and grandparents do not even seem to know the term "Amazigh", let alone any related movement. What is relevant instead is an *intragenerational* interaction in the aftermath of said geography lesson, since it was a cousin of Shafik's who apparently offered a new framework to reflect his experiences of discrimination and participate in the construction of the *Imazighen* as an imagined community (Anderson 1983) beyond the confines of his own family or community.

Politicization at University

After finishing high school, Shafik moved to Meknes and later to Oujda to study at university, where he soon joined the Amazigh movement (Movement Culturel Amazigh, MCA), a movement resisting the

political and socio-economic marginalization of the Amazigh population and promoting recognition of their culture and which has, for instance, campaigned for the recognition of Tamazight as an official Moroccan language with relative success. Shafik relates how he met the local MCA discussion group and soon decided to actively join the movement. He mentions other political student associations, namely the leftwing “*Basist Path*” faction and the Islamist faction, and goes on to describe the sometimes-violent confrontations between them and Amazigh activists. Confrontations between these three groups are common at universities throughout Morocco, sometimes even resulting in student deaths (Silverstein and Crawford 2004; Zerhouni 2018). Shafik relates how in Meknes a student had died in one such clash, and that he himself felt unsafe on his way to university since he was known as an MCA activist. He presents himself as someone who is “rather quiet” and not prone to violence, emphasizing that he and his fellow activists organized several activities encouraging students to abstain from violence: “We organized cultural days which were also intended to tell our activists that the university is based on ideas, not violence.” A certain *continuity* is evident here, in the sense that throughout his life story, the problem of peer violence in educational institutions—now in a politicized form—remains a relevant problem in his narration.

After University: Politics and Precariousness

After finishing his mathematics degree in 2011, Shafik started looking for a job, without success. After three years of precarious employment and “*bricolage*,” as he describes his daily struggle to make ends meet with informal, precarious jobs, Shafik decided to register for a Ph.D. in mathematics. In Morocco, the unemployment rate among educated young people is even higher than among the less-educated, which is why Bennani-Chraïbi (2000, 143), already two decades ago considered the integration of the educated urban young “the most pressing problem in Morocco today.” Since then, and

particularly since 2010, things have deteriorated, with unemployment rates of over 20 per cent for people aged between 15 and 24 as the national average, and even over 45 per cent in urban regions (Medias24 2017; World Bank 2012). The Moroccan *Diplômés Chômeurs*, or Unemployed Graduates Movement, addresses this issue in its own way, and Shafik's trajectory on joining the movement soon after receiving his Master's degree can be seen as typical. The movement regularly stages protests, usually in front of the parliament building in Rabat, demanding public-sector employment from the government. *Diplômés Chômeurs* is an "apolitical" movement (Emperador Badimón 2011), in that it does not make further demands for political change, but has a narrow focus: their activists' presumed right to employment in the public sector and the protest against the nepotism and patronage practices that exclude them from such employment. In the past, the movement's mobilizations often resulted in effective negotiations with the government, which, drawing on repression as well as co-optation, occasionally employed some of the activists in the public sector; for this purpose, local *Diplômés Chômeurs* committees pass their members' list to the respective ministry. Elected committee coordinators moreover monitor their members, noting their presence at protests and making sure that only those who regularly and actively participate are given a job. Activists are given tokens that they have to return to their local coordinator after a demonstration (Bogaert and Emperador Badimón 2011; Emperador Badimón 2007, 2009). Apart from this characteristic feature, the movement's repertoire of collective action (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly 1986) is undoubtedly inherited from the Moroccan Leftist movement and can be traced back to Moroccan student unions in the late 1980's (Emperador Badimón 2011; Rachik 2010, 26; Sater 2007, 94). However, precisely because of its "apolitical" character, the unemployed graduate movement represents an ideologically very open movement which, from the very beginning, has allowed not only Leftists but also Islamists, Amazigh activists, and non-partisan graduates to participate.

So, whereas the violence between different political factions does not seem to be an issue at this stage in Shafik's life story, there is a *thematic continuity* in that there are many accounts of police violence

during *Diplômés Chômeurs* protests. For some local *Diplômés Chômeurs* committees, exposure to police violence is even an explicit part of the “meritocratic” monitoring process: activists who expose themselves more directly to police violence during sit-ins, for example by forming the front row, are given a higher ranking on the list that the coordinators pass on to the government should the negotiations for jobs prove successful.⁵

Since Shafik joined the movement he has frequently protested in front of the parliament building in Rabat, demanding a job in the public sector. But since the change of government in 2011, he tells me, the prospect of this is rather dim, as succeeding governments have explicitly refused to abide by agreements that the movement signed with the previous government. At the time of my interview with Shafik he was in receipt of a government Ph.D. scholarship of 1000 MAD (around US\$95) a month and was working in the informal private sector as a freelance tutor to cover his living costs in Rabat. He frequently describes his livelihood strategy as a sequence of precarious jobs, a “*bricolage*.” At the time of the interview he was sharing a rented rooftop room measuring approximately 18 m² in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Rabat with three other Ph.D. students; apparently his family is unable to support him, and in any case he would refuse their support because he would not consider it appropriate at his age.

To begin with, Shafik hid his activism in the Amazigh and the Unemployed Graduate Movement from his parents and his family, as they would fear the repercussions. When asked if he has discussed questions of politics of social justice with his family, he says:

When I discuss politics with my father, my uncle or my grandparents, all they talk about is the *makhzen* [the monarchy and its tightly-knit network of repression, control and patronage] or the King. They say: “Be quiet, be quiet—the walls have ears, they’ll hear us,” because they’re closer to the colonial era, and they say it’s very good that the King came to power, because before there was only war, and afterwards there was peace. “When you’re in the desert, you don’t need justice,” they say.

⁵Personal communication with an activist, November 2014.

On the one hand, this passage describes the intergenerational transmission of fear of violent reprisals by the regime. These fears are clearly the result of the historical experience of colonialism and Morocco's transition to independence, as well as of the notorious "Years of Lead," the period with the most violent repression, under Hassan II (r. 1961–1999). On the other hand, this scene, and markers of spatial difference such as "if you live in the desert," offer another account of incommunicability in Shafik's current situation and his strategy for achieving political change through the Amazigh movement and improving his socio-economic situation via the *Diplômés Chômeurs* movement. Shafik may feel the fear passed on by the older generation very clearly, but due to his different situation he feels compelled to resist succumbing to it.

When asked what he would do if he were given the public-sector job he is currently reclaiming, he says first that he wants to provide for his family to reciprocate all they have given him, and especially to provide for his younger brothers and sisters. In addition, he would dedicate himself more to the Amazigh movement's struggle. But then he returns to the question of providing for his family, and mentions that he has bought books for his younger siblings "so that they don't feel inferior." When asked directly about plans to have a family of his own, he answers that this is a rather low priority: "Maybe in four years, once I have a public-sector job." He reiterates that the most pressing issue is providing for his siblings.

In a follow-up interview in September 2015, Shafik explained that he had left the *Diplômés Chômeurs* movement because he saw no future in it with the current government's continued reluctance to honor the agreement signed with the prior government. He tells me that his younger brother quit school at the age of 14. Although Shafik had tried to talk him out of it and to discover the reason for his reluctance to continue his education, his brother would not tell him what was going on in school. Shafik tried to take him to a public service psychologist in a city a day's journey away, but found the waiting room full of "really crazy people" waiting for a doctor who never arrived. He gave up the idea of consulting a psychologist and they returned to their hometown.

Discussion: Intergenerational Disparity, Peer Violence, and the Production of the Precariat

Shafik's life story provides an impressive account of the social change to which Moroccan nomads have been subject in recent decades: the son of illiterate parents, he is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in mathematics. This could be presented as an educational success story involving outstanding social mobility and thus as an example of upward mobility, as often found in normative narrations of "development" and "progress." But already on this manifest level it is clear that the next step in his career does not seem to be the result of a choice from a variety of options but is propelled by a different dynamic: the fact that he cannot find a suitable, stable job, and thus feels obliged to continue his education, not least since his Ph.D. studies give him access to a modest scholarship. So far, his career has not brought him social mobility in the form of employment that allows him to make long-term future plans and provide for his family as he wishes.

If we understand modern educational institutions as the focal point of the organized intergenerational transmission of knowledge, embodied routines, and social norms, a key question regarding social change is to what extent pupils and students in schools and universities are institutionally allowed and encouraged to appropriate and creatively deal with the knowledge and norms that are passed on to them, or are encouraged to reinterpret them so that they can experience society as changeable and conceive of themselves as potential agents of social change.

What is telling in Shafik's life story is firstly, a surprising absence of scenes of generativity, in the sense of care by the older generation (Erikson 1959). There are hardly episodes of intergenerational interaction that would allow him to appropriate, reflect, and reinterpret the societal knowledge and norms that have been passed on to him. His first day at school, when he was dropped off by his father and left alone, in this sense functions as the onset of a more general pattern that permeates the ensuing narration and is also found in the intergenerational relationships within the family, but even more so in state institutions; i.e., in students' interactions with teachers and professors. As stated, the only member of staff mentioned in the whole of his educational trajectory

is the elementary school teacher who evicted his aunt from the school. Secondly, Shafik describes all of the official educational institutions that he attended first and foremost as spaces of danger and humiliation, and more precisely, of peer violence—first among his classmates in elementary school, and later as physical altercations between political factions, even resulting in the death of one student. In this regard, his aunt and grandmother's intervention in elementary school can be read as an important act of intergenerational transmission of an attitude of resistance. Since this is the only event mentioned that would disrupt the pattern of intergenerational neglect, the memory of this event seems to be a key resource for later political action; since it is described in such detail and summed up with the statement "they always defended me," it illustrates a very caring relationship. However, this relationship appears to be so important to Shafik precisely because in his life story are the only persons who would intervene to put an end to this bullying by directly mirroring the violence. Staff toleration of peer violence, whether in school or university, is obviously a marker of institutional neglect. In this situation, the university students themselves have to find a way of negotiating and managing conflict. After leaving university, this pattern continued in Shafik's life with the police violence to which the *Diplômés Chômeurs* activists are exposed, intentionally taking this risk into account and even including the violence they suffer in their quantified system of meritocracy, which is reflected in their membership list.

Shafik's characteristic experience of *social change*, then, is socio-economic and physical precariousness or vulnerability, which seem closely linked to the generational disparity that this group is experiencing. Analytically, we can speak of a generational disparity in the sense not only of his family choosing that Shafik should take on a different life project to their own, but also that this disparity from members of the older generation in the family has not been mended, since there is no account of coming to an understanding with regard to the difference of experiences in their everyday life. On a political level, this is echoed in the incommunicability of his political activism. As nomads, his family continues to live in relative poverty, although not in urban precariousness, so they see no socio-economic benefit in organizing themselves in ways similar to Shafik's political activism. The respective passage cited

above thus once more highlights generational disparity, since their experiences, frames for action and ensuing patterns of interpretation differ to the extent of incommunicability, and apparently Shafik does not even try to help them to understand his actions.

It is telling that Shafik's hopes of secure, public employment first and foremost involve using his experience in the educational system to support his younger brother, who is currently attending high school. Shafik obviously aims to exercise generativity. However, the incommunicability between the older family members and himself seems to be reproduced in this relationship: whereas Shafik as a pupil at least talked to his aunt seeking help and solace, his younger brother is apparently unwilling or unable to describe his experiences and difficulties in school. Shafik apparently aims to offer his brother dedicated support, similar to that which he received from his aunt and grandmother, but including guidance and psychosocial generativity that is more adapted to the symbolic realm of a school setting. In consequence, Shafik takes his brother to a psychologist far away, an act that can be read as a search for a "translator" to bridge the incommunicability. But this episode of the life story is characterized by an almost Kafkaesque ending that epitomizes the futility of looking for advice on adequate forms of familial care, since the doctor simply does not show up and Shafik and his brother are left in the waiting room with "very crazy people" until they give up and return home.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter aimed to illustrate generational analysis in the life story approach as a method for researching social change, based on the in-depth analysis of a single case. The social change described in life stories such as Shafik's is the production of an academic precariat with a rural background and clear generational contours. Empirically, this becomes accessible through a focus on life-story narrations and analysis of the intergenerational relationships that these convey. After his first days in school, and the resolute intervention of his aunt and grandmother, the only significant others in Shafik's political socialization are other

members of his own, precarious generation: fellow Amazigh students, and MCA and *Diplômés Chômeurs* activists, many of them also the sons and daughters of nomads, peasants, and rural artisans facing the exclusive and largely saturated labor market in Moroccan cities in their search of a stable job. Departing from cases such as Shafik's, the *Diplômés Chômeurs* movement in particular can be seen as a strategy of a precarious generational unit (Mannheim 1952) for forming intragenerational networks of trust and negotiating their social mobility and concomitant transition to adulthood, as it is socioculturally defined in this context, with a semi-authoritarian, "hybrid regime" (Desrués 2013). Whereas the *Diplômés Chômeurs* movement is surely an agent of change, it is also apolitical in the sense that it does not demand further social and political change. The Amazigh movement, in turn, appears to be the context in which Shafik develops a political vision for wider society, and here, too, most of the activists I met had a rural background and considered the Amazigh movement an adequate expression of their demands for change.

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6

Rescuing Biography from the Nation: Discrete Perspectives on Political Change in Morocco

Irene Bono

Main Witnesses and Master Narratives of Political Change

In 2009, I was in search of a privileged observer who could help me understand the complex dynamics of the formation of capitalism in Morocco. A colleague introduced me to Ahmed Benkirane, an 80-year-old man who had recently retired from a very active life in business and the public space. Shortly after our first meeting, Benkirane asked me if I would help him write his memoirs. His proposal sounded quite in line with the spirit of that time: giving voice to witnesses of the past

¹The expression “Years of lead” is commonly used to point a period of Moroccan history characterized by violence and repression committed by the State. The ERC promoted public hearings of witnesses and victims of violence and repression committed between 1956 and 1999. On the ERC see Vairel (2008) and Linn (2011).

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*,
Anthropology, Change, and Development,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_6

had become a national priority in Morocco since the launch, in 2004, of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC), an instrument of transitional justice in charge of gathering the truth about the violations committed by the State during the “Years of lead”.¹ His profile, however, was quite uncommon: the most-heard voices in the public debate at that time were those of 50-year-old former activists in anti-system political organizations. Most of them were from intellectual and middle-class social milieus and many had experienced prison and torture. It seemed to me that Benkirane’s life story could provide a valuable contribution to understanding political change in Morocco beyond the voices of the victims, which have become one of the main voices of contemporary history far beyond the Moroccan case (Traverso 2016). At the same time, my curiosity was fueled by the fact that people of his age rarely spoke in public in those years: the actors of Morocco’s “nationalist generation”, to which Benkirane belongs, were acknowledged by the public debate without apparently feeling the necessity of hearing their voices, and were completely absent in the common-sense narrative on what happened after independence was gained in 1956.

Although I was very flattered by his proposal and intrigued by his profile, I remained rather skeptical, not only about my competence to accomplish the work but also about the relevance of relying on a biography to carry out my research. As a political scientist, I had been used to thinking of the subjective perspective that characterizes biographical writing as a sufficient reason for placing biography as a method outside the boundaries of my discipline. Political science has generally steered away from the biographical turn that the social sciences are experiencing.² As Lewis Edinger maintained in the early 1960s, political biographies are seldom carried out by political scientists (Edinger 1964, 423). The latter have progressively disinvested themselves from the study

²The contributions of Bourdieu (1986) and Levi (1989) are at the origins of the debate on the uses of biography in social sciences. Loriga (2010) and Bayart (2014) have contributed to renewing this debate in recent years. For an interdisciplinary overview of the recent biographical turn see Renders et al. (2016).

of political leaders in favor of the study of political leadership by establishing frameworks of analysis based on general patterns of collective behavior.³

The study of political leadership in Morocco is constructed, to this day, on the social categories upon which John Waterbury (1970) based his analysis of the Moroccan political elite in the 1960s. According to Waterbury's thesis, the king, as Commander of the Faithful, plays the role of the arbiter at the core of a segmentary society structured on relations of alliance or dissidence between specific social groups. The power structure supporting his authority, denominated *Makhzen*,⁴ is defined by unstable alliances between the monarchy and the social groups that accept that they must pay taxes, provide men for the army, and undertake public roles. Waterbury focuses, in particular, on the unstable relations between the monarchy and the *Fassi*, a number of big families with notable origins from the city of Fez, whose presence in politics was considerable at the time he wrote.⁵ Benkirane's life story is quite different from the patterns of collective behavior that such a framework of analysis presupposes. Even though he actively contributed to the struggle against the French Protectorate he is almost a generation younger than the actors generally included in the category of "nationalists," and his active participation in the national movement was mostly outside the partisan organizations usually associated with this category, such as the *Istiqlal Party*. Coming from the city of Marrakech distinguishes him from the inner circle of the *Fassi*. Moreover, even though he has held several senior civil servant posts at different times in his life, his activities within the State apparatus differed from the representations of authority, coercion and violence usually associated with the category of *Makhzen*.

At the time of my first meeting with Ahmed Benkirane these categories were still the reference and main patterns of the master narrative

³Blondel (1987) clearly defines the premises of this analytic turn. Dahl (2005) is among the most acknowledged works approaching political leadership without referring to political leaders.

⁴The term *Makhzen*, literally "warehouse" or "chest," is employed both to indicate the unaccountable power structure supporting the monarchy and to indicate the coercive apparatus of the State.

⁵According to Waterbury (1970) the shared traditions, alliances, and experiences that the *Fassi* preserved become relevant in order to acquire positions of power.

of political change. The activities of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC) had contributed to defining not only the main witnesses of political change in Morocco but also, and more importantly, to shaping the master narrative for interpreting their stories, which relies on both a chronological and an interpretive frame that are rarely questioned. The fact that the ERC did not take the timeframe before 1956 into consideration contributed to the consolidation of a taken-for-granted narrative of political change before independence. At the same time, the period between 1956 and 1999 became the most discussed timeframe of political change. The activities of the ERC also contributed to renewing and reinforcing an interpretative frame accounting for political change based on the struggles of opposing segments of society aiming to take control of the State. Hence before 1956, the master narrative on political change is structured upon the struggle between the Moroccans and the French. After 1956, attention moves to the political actors opposing the monarchy: the Fassi at first, and then the victims of the State's repression.

In the face of the solidity of this interpretive framework, taking a less-heard voice into consideration was not sufficient to move beyond the master narrative of political change. It was not a matter of which voice to listen to, but of how to listen to that voice. In this paper, I describe the process that led me to dismiss biography as a subject and to develop what I call biographic fieldwork. In a general sense, fieldwork research is a way of investigating social phenomena through direct experience. Ethnography adopts fieldwork as its privileged approach to inquire into people's lives. On one hand, arguing that my fieldwork is not ethnographic but biographic means, in my terms, adopting biography as the entry point to sharing a double experience: the experience of preserving things of the past, and the experience of remembering and accounting for political change. On the other hand, arguing that the fieldwork I conducted is biographic is a way for me to place the attention on the dialogic relation that Ahmed Benkirane and I developed during this work, and

the shared character of such an experience.⁶ The personal documentation that Benkirane has collected all his life, and the memory associated with this documentation that he shared with me during our intensive meetings and exchanges over a relatively long period of time, constitute the principal data of my biographic fieldwork. In the following, I explain how I developed this approach, and how it allowed me to explore political change in Morocco beyond the established master narratives.

Biographies, Traces, and Nonhegemonic Accounts of the Nation

The fact that Benkirane was as hesitant as I was about biographical writing challenged me from our first meeting. While determined to tell his story, he was unsure about the best way to do it. Considering both my skepticism and his doubts about biographical writing, I had decided at first to carry out interviews not only with him but also with a number of other actors with similar profiles: independence activists of the same generation and a comparable social milieu, with experience in both public institutions and business. Benkirane played the role of gatekeeper and was my privileged research witness during this phase. He not only helped me to draw up a list of actors and ways of reaching them but also advised me before and after my interviews with them, drawing my attention to the most salient episodes that each had witnessed. I conducted a series of biographical interviews with several of these participants, exploring the relations among them and their personal trajectories after independence. I originally conceived the operation as functional in the identification of patterns of collective behavior suitable for framing Benkirane's trajectory.

Almost a year after our first meeting, Benkirane gave me access to some private documentation from his past experiences: the oldest dated back to his childhood and the newest concerned his recent activities.

⁶I analyzed elsewhere the heuristic value of the shared intersubjectivity resulting from the process of deconstruction of our respective subjectivities—that of the actor who wants to give his testimony and that of the researcher who, from this requirement, aims to read the trends of political change. See Bono (2019).

The contents were very diverse and included professional and private correspondence, the minutes of meetings, bylaws, pamphlets, projects, reports, and booklets, classified into approximately 250 folders some of which concerned specific roles he had played in public institutions and the business sector, others referring to his political participation and various other experiences including travel, marriage, meetings, conferences, spare time and family issues. In addition to this documentation, Benkirane had kept approximately 1000 photographs and some collections of magazines and newspapers, some of which he had been the editor. It was hard to find a folder containing complete coverage of the issue it referred to: not only had the documentation been collected on an irregular basis, as is common in personal archives, but during his life Benkirane had moved home many times to different cities in Morocco and even abroad. The documents he had conserved were therefore those that he had managed to keep. By giving me access to such material he was probably aiming to provide me with some starting points from which to overcome the difficulties he foresaw in writing his biography. The documentation appeared to me the empirical material that I needed to frame his profile within more general patterns of collective behavior that I felt more prepared to analyze than his biography.

However, I could not find any evidence in the documentation that could link Benkirane's profile to a precise social category, nor did it enable me to situate his trajectory along precise political divides. Immersing myself in his documentation made me realize that taking his subjectivity seriously was much more relevant than trying to classify his profile within a broader category of actors in order to explore political change through his life story. Political biographies often give the impression of a fusion between the subject who is telling his or her life story and the social body that s/he wants to represent. In this way biographical accounts and narratives of the nation state exert a reciprocal fictional influence: the nation as an imagined community is embodied in the biographies of imaginary actors. Benkirane's material was a valuable starting point from which to avoid the risk of accounting for his life in fictional terms by emphasizing specific characteristics and experiences and neglecting others. Exploring the documentation allowed me to focus on him not as a militant, a senior official, or a businessman, but as a man

of flesh and blood whose militant, senior official, and business activities could be explored and interpreted through the traces that he has kept of such experiences.

In the most general sense, traces can be understood as what remains of phenomena, facts, actors, etc., which we cannot directly experience. The notion of traces is often used in modern history and anthropology to refer to something that has disappeared or is difficult to access. From the perspective proposed by micro-historians, traces are clues that need to be questioned and interpreted.⁷ Their interpretation leads to considering the actor who left them as a level of analysis for capturing wider phenomena, rather than as a subject. Focusing on the traces that Benkirane has kept from his own experiences directed my attention away from his biographical account to focus on the formation of the nation-state beyond the overlap between his life story and national history. At that point in my work I stopped using his full name and started privileging his initials to explain his place in my work. I was not going to write the biography of Ahmed Benkirane: I was going to explore the formation of the nation-state following the biographical traces of that process which Abk has kept.

My first approach to the documentation sought to identify the episodes, moments and phases that could be considered salient in Abk's life. Tracing such phases was a way for me to free his life story from the turning points that are conventionally considered in accounting for political change in Morocco, such as its independence and successions to the throne. Abk's personal and family events were certainly important for accounting of his life story beyond such turning points, such as the date of his own birth in 1927 and those of his brothers and sisters in 1926, 1930, 1931, 1933, and 1942; the deaths of two of his sisters and then of his father in the space of two years between 1958 and 1959; his marriage in 1962; the birth of his three children in 1963 and 1964; and his mother's death in 1971. Identifying the moments of change of domicile and professional activity in the documentation was even more important to my aims. According to the periodization I reconstructed, Abk spent his childhood in Marrakech from his birth until

⁷On the notion of traces in microhistory, see Levi (1985) and Ginzburg (1979).

1937, when he moved to Rabat to attend the Guessous Institution, one of the most-acknowledged free schools inspired by the national movement.⁸ At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 he moved back to Marrakech. In 1946–47 he attended a high school of commerce and industry in Casablanca for two years before moving to Paris to enroll in a prestigious business school. The documents he kept from the period he spent in Paris are testimony to his active political engagement.

Abk returned to Morocco in 1951. After a few months spent at his family home he moved to Casablanca. His material includes documents from the commercial activity for which he was responsible at his father's sales office and the vibrant political activity that he developed in parallel. Between late 1955 and 1960 he spent most of his time in Rabat working on shaping the first commercial and economic policies in independent Morocco, first as Director of the Cabinet of the Ministry of Trade and Economy, then as Secretary of State of the same Ministry, and later as Policy Officer in charge of specific negotiations, notably on Morocco's exit from the Franc Zone and the recovery of the State Bank in 1959. Later he worked as the director of some important public enterprises. When he moved back to Casablanca in 1960, he was appointed managing director of a private bank, became a shareholder of and consultant to a number of international companies, and began his vibrant activity in the fields of insurance and finance. In parallel Abk was the founding president of a media group that published an economic newspaper and a magazine between 1960 and 1966, where he took an active part in the newsroom work. Between 1966 and 1968 he was appointed managing director of a financial public institution supporting monetary and public development policies based in Rabat. In 1969–70 he was the director of a public office in charge of agricultural exports headquartered in Casablanca, and in 1970 he was elected Member of the House of Representatives and President of the Provincial Council of Marrakech. In 1971 he was the editor of a newspaper for a few months, and between 1973 and 1976 he lived and worked in Brussels as the Moroccan Ambassador to Belgium and the European Community (EC). During this time,

⁸See Damis (1974) on the free school phenomenon in general and Damis (1975) on the free school movement in Morocco.

he negotiated the first commercial agreement between Morocco and the EC.

When Abk returned to Morocco he was appointed to the Chamber of Representatives as delegate of the Casablanca Chamber of Commerce, where he remained from 1977 to 1983. In 1979 he contributed to the institution of a political party, founded with the support of the monarchy, which gathered the backing of many businessmen. He participated in the creation of the party's newspaper and took part in several of its international delegations in the first half of the 1980s. Once back in Casablanca, Abk also resumed his business activity in the insurance and finance sector, in parallel taking up a series of managerial roles at the head of large companies throughout the 1980s. Between 1996 and 2004 he was Vice President of the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs. After that he retired, but he continued to lead a very active life in both business and the public space. In the years following his retirement, Abk has been honorary president of an insurance company that he founded, participated in various investments, held a number of mediation and arbitration positions, participated in the Equity and Reconciliation Commission interviews, and contributed to a series of initiatives commemorating the struggle for independence.

Following Abk's biographical traces opened up two research directions. First, it helped me shift the attention from Abk as a social actor to the various social processes he was involved in during his life. In his biography of Mozart, Norbert Elias (1993) disabuses the reader of the idea that even such a master artist had functioned in a vacuum as an autonomous genius independent of the situation in which he found himself. Accordingly, the biographical account that I was able to retrace through Abk's personal documentation was not intended to classify him into a social category nor evaluate the extent to which he contributed to the nationalist and democratic achievements generally used to account for political change. My aim was rather to retrace his life course by bringing out the episodes that have marked it, the activities in which he has been involved and the social worlds in which he spent his time. Consequently, I have chosen not to extrapolate from these processes the experiences that could be considered relevant to bringing his trajectory back to a specific social classification, such as the categories of the

heroes of the nationalist struggle and the victims of the authoritarian state, as part of the *Mahkzen* or as *Fassi*. Starting from the traces he produced as a witness to certain events, I had the opportunity to reconstruct and explore the circumstances, the particular contexts and thus also the contingencies and the hazards of Abk's personal trajectory, which are completely overshadowed in most biographical accounts of nationalist activists as they are not considered relevant to the process of the formation of the nation-state. Focusing on his personal traces allowed me to draw out how Abk experienced such a collective phenomenon.

Second, focusing on Abk's personal traces was my starting point for exploring the continuous process of the formation of the nation-state itself. Instead of exploring his personal trajectory by adopting the usual sequences considered when accounting for the nation-making process, I adopted the periodization emerging from his traces as a starting point for exploring such processes. My idea was not that the two temporalities were to be considered independently, but that in order to better understand their interconnections it could be fruitful to distinguish between them. I was not interested in finding out from his personal documentation what Abk was doing before or after the main dates that are commonly used to tell the story of the nation-state in Morocco such as independence in 1956, the state of exception in 1965, the failed two coups d'état against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972, or the arrival at the government of the historical opposition in 1997. Instead, starting from the material referring to different phases of Abk's life experience, I was eager to explore how the power relations worked and to study the main political cleavages, the boundaries of political sovereignty, the ways in which domination was exercised, the form of the imagined community and the processes that led to political socialization.

Biography as Archivistic Imaginary of Continuity

In her work on the decolonization of Egypt, Omnia El Shakry (2015) remarks that secular reforms and Islamic movements are generally archived separately. This tendency has led to underestimation of the role

of some intellectuals generally framed as Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb, in the processes of reform and decolonization. Similarly, in Morocco the historical phases and social phenomena that Abk experienced are generally archived separately: the periods prior and subsequent to independence in 1956, the economic and political activity, public and private affairs. Not only are these phenomena generally explored from the perspective of different sources, they are also, and most importantly, often seen as distinct from one another. Abk's archive led me to explore the continuity between these phenomena: I started considering his documentation not only as a source of information about his life story but also as a reference for imaging the continuity between timeframes that are generally accounted for separately. The documentation brought together in his personal archive refers to phenomena that are generally considered separately, but in his life story there is no room for partitions between the period prior and subsequent to independence, between economic and political activity, between public and private affairs.

Adopting biography as an imaginary for thinking about the continuity between these phenomena seemed to me particularly relevant given the current conditions of the national archives in Morocco. Until recently, archival research on Morocco has relied on colonial sources. As in British India and many other colonial contexts, political occupation was preceded and accompanied by the production of sources on Morocco and the Moroccan people that led to the compilation of a veritable social inventory, realized by ethnographers and colonial officers (Burke III 2007). After independence most of the administrative archive produced during the colonial era was moved to the diplomatic archives in France, reinforcing the tendency to consider archival sources extraneous and unavailable for the study of the Moroccan nation-state. In 1966 the Moroccan government made an official request to UNESCO, soliciting its expertise on "the procedures to be adopted and the methods to be practiced to inventory and preserve documents and archives" (Pérotin 1969, 3). In his final report, the expert in charge of the mission described the fragility of Morocco's archival legislation, structures, and practices. The strategy prescribed for dealing with this situation was never applied: Morocco's national archives were established only in 2007 following a recommendation from the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, and

the institution opened to the public in 2013. The establishment of the national council in charge of coordination between public institutions and the national archives was only established in July 2017, and the building that will house the archives is still under construction.

The fragility of the national archival infrastructure reinforced, in my eyes, the importance of reading Abk's documentation as an archive. The establishment of a first inventory of his archive gave me an idea of what kinds of phenomena are researchable through such biographical documentation. The items referring to Abk's childhood and education comprised just a few photographs and some disparate documents including old identity cards and copies of diplomas. Regardless of their small number, they offered unique archival material on a period that has mainly been accounted for on the basis of knowledge produced by colonial ethnographers studying tribes and oriental curiosities. The documentation becomes more abundant and more heterogeneous, although it is still disparate, with Abk's sojourn in Paris as a student. In addition to the diplomas and the number of photographs documenting his many trips with friends and classmates all over Europe, he has kept some study notes, an internship report, and a considerable amount of political documentation of various types. The latter becomes especially abundant in the period that Abk spent in Casablanca after leaving Paris. A folder dedicated to family business refers to the same period. This material seemed most useful for broadening the knowledge offered by the available archival coverage from that time, which mainly relies on intelligence notes from the French protectorate's security services and records produced and conserved by Moroccan political parties engaged in the struggle for independence, especially the Istiqlal party. Regardless of their opposite origins, these two sources contribute to drawing an image of the French and the Moroccans as two different political groups, each homogeneous within themselves and radically antagonistic toward the other during the protectorate. Abk's documentation, however, enables us to read a certain amount of diversification within these groups and suggests depicting the relations between the two groups less univocally.

Most of the material that Abk has preserved refers to episodes and activities between 1955 and 1976, when he was first working for the government and then involved in business activities, before moving back

to working for state institutions, then back to business, and later to state institutions again. The variety of activities covered by the documentation and the diversity of the sectors in which they were carried out contrasts with the regularity with which the documentation has been collected, classified and stored. The material covering these 25 years has been added with relatively constant frequency and the typologies of the documents collected are quite homogeneous. Abk has classified the material in folders related to specific issues, most of which cover his role in the issue quite exhaustively and allow the retracing of a fairly accurate chronology of his activities. The different folders covering political activities, those related to government offices, to business, and to the media, all contain correspondence, notes, messages, reports, projects, business cards, and addresses. In addition, most of the photographs precisely recall the episode or task to which they refer. The material from the period following Abk's return to Morocco in 1976 gradually becomes less frequent and more disparate. Only some precise sequences are easy to identify, such as the phase during which he was a member of the political party and the period he spent at the national business confederation, thanks to the folders' references to several issues that he managed during his mandates. A variety of documents refer also to some of his positions at the head or on the board of a number of important companies, but the scarcity of the material makes it hard to follow the process.

The consistency of Abk's documentation of the period between 1955–1976 contrasts with the scarcity of material from the same period in the national archives. This lack of archival coverage reinforces the idea that during the Years of Lead the establishment of authoritarianism involved the constriction of the economic, social, and cultural spaces as if emptying them of every sort of everyday process. The documentation that Abk has managed to preserve refers instead to extremely wide and dynamic daily economic, social, intellectual, and cultural processes. These processes have remained marginal in terms of what Halbwachs (2013) calls the “social frameworks of memory”. Looking through Abk's documentation convinced me that the archival vacuum characterizing the Years of Lead corresponds neither to an actual lack of activity during this period nor to the absence of its documentation: it became clear to me that the scarcity of documents referring to the Years of Lead relied on

the oriented, selective and restricted statute assigned to sources referring to that timeframe, which are rarely recognized as archival.

Abk's traces from the 1960s were particularly significant in my development of this argument. In May 1960, at the end of Abdallah Ibrahim's period of government, Abk resigned and returned to private business, as did so many of his generation who had served the State as senior officials since independence in 1956. His material from the 1960s refers to a wide range of his financial activities at the time in the banking, insurance, and equity investment sectors. I found this documentation very suitable for exploring the process of political change on at least three levels. First, it was possible to build an idea of the Ministry of Economy's activities in its governance of these sectors, and more generally, its relations with the private sector; public discourse on the 1960s refers almost solely to the Ministry of Interior as the principal apparatus of coercion. Second, Abk's archive provided me with a valuable means of exploring the progressive acquisition of control by national capital of economic sectors that were still dominated by foreign investors. This contrasts with the dominant public discourse on the acquisition of economic sovereignty, which situates this process in the 1970's when the entry of Moroccan capital in private companies became mandatory by law. Lastly, Abk's documentation allowed me to observe the redeployment of many nationalist actors into the financial sector, and the progressive transformation of the sector into a battlefield in which power relations were still being played out, despite the end of Ibrahim's government generally being seen as the starting point of the rise of the monarchy to the detriment of the nationalist movement.

During the protectorate, Jacques Riche (1936) published a very rich repertory of archival sources on Morocco that were available both nationally and internationally, suggesting that the generally-accepted opinion of the fragility of archival documentation on Morocco was the result of failures in archive policy rather than a lack of sources. A few years after independence, Germain Ayache (1961, 311) claimed the existence of a consistent archival heritage on Morocco, affirming that the "legend of Morocco without archives" was based rather on a precise orientation of historiography: national historians tending to move away from the contemporary archival sources, which were considered too close to

the colonial regime, focusing instead either on the period preceding the protectorate or on biographic accounts and oral history.

Questioning these archive politics convinced me of the importance of basing my archival imaginary on Abk's biography. His life course provided me with a suitable frame for considering his private documentation not only as a collection of sources informing us about different phases of Morocco's history and diverse social phenomena, but also as an object of inquiry in itself. The very fact that a single actor had produced, kept, and stored such a quantity of material was in itself an object of inquiry worth studying to explore the process of political change. This perspective provided me with further levels of analysis that enabled me to study the making of the nation-state. In the first place, my attention was drawn by the concomitance of archival documentation referring to disparate activities and the recurrence of the same actors in different fields of action. Furthermore, the irregular consistency of the stored documentation offered another fruitful avenue for questioning the nation-making process. Changes in the ways in which Abk produced and kept material referring to disparate experiences appeared to me an original object for inquiry: the very fact of owning and preserving documentation could be considered a relevant dimension in the analysis of power relations, political change and the borders of political struggle.

Memory Practices and Biographic Fieldwork

Working on Abk's archive involved spending a lot of time at his house. Between 2011 and 2015 the documentation was stored in a room to which I had free access during my stay in Morocco. In 2016 it was digitalized and moved to the premises of an archival company with better conditions for conservation, but I continued to have free access to his house.⁹ My frequent presence at his home transformed our interactions. Our meetings progressively ceased to be scheduled, and the goals of the

⁹The online version of Abk's archive is under construction. See: <https://fondsahmedbenkirane.archiui.com/>.

interviews I regularly conducted with him became more open and flexible. The fact that it took quite a long period of time to conduct my work with Abk helped to consolidate our relationship. After our first meeting in 2009 we met every time I traveled to Morocco: almost daily for a week every two months between 2009 and 2012 and almost daily for a week every three months between 2012 and 2016. In the last years I stayed at Abk's house for almost a week every three to four months. These frequent and intensive visits constitute the premises for conducting what I call biographical fieldwork on his experiences of political change and his memory practices.

As Olick and Robbins (1998) suggest, studying memory as a practice involves questioning how in a given society one remembers the past, how one attributes meaning to the past in the present, and how these processes affect social relations. From this perspective I started considering Abk's archive not only in terms of traces of his past experiences but also on two further levels. First, I view Abk's archive as a memory practice in itself, a manifestation, among others, of his memory. Second, I see it as a way for bringing to light his relationship to the past, and the weight of that past within his present, through the memory that the archival traces solicit. Thinking about political change via such biographical fieldwork led me to deconstruct the idea of the subject itself: it was neither a matter of exploring the life story of a significant actor nor of obtaining a careful reconstruction of a typical man of his time. It was not therefore a case of contributing to the national truth, but rather understanding the singular truth of my subject: the ways in which he lived the episodes he remembers, and the weight of past experience in his life.

Through this biographical fieldwork I was able, first of all, to discuss with Abk the memories of his past experiences and the meanings he attributed to them. I started to conduct another kind of interview with him which was mnemonic rather than biographical, a process whereby he would recall the memories evoked by the traces that I could identify from the documentation. Archival documentation became my principal instrument for soliciting and stimulating his memory. The traces of past experiences were useful not only for the information that I could obtain but also, and most importantly, for triggering and soliciting the memories and emotions that the events, people, and situations that I

came across in his archive evoked in Abk. The interviews no longer related to a certain period, a specific episode, or particular individuals. The chain of memories and accounts that a simple trace could evoke became for me the primary source for apprehending Abk's national experience. Building trust and confidence between the two of us became of foremost importance in this work of recognition and contextualization through mnemonic interviews. More than that, constructing and sharing a common ground of landmarks and a common language created an important resource for receiving and interpreting his memory practices. I started to realize that this method could work when, instead of telling me "You didn't ask me the important questions...", as he had done at the end of most of our interviews during the first part of my work, one day Abk started saying "You've made me think of..." which is the starting point for returning to forgotten memories.

Interviews developed through this mnemonic technique became my sources for contextualizing and completing information acquired from archival documentation. It was particularly interesting to frame the archival objects referring to Abk's political activism with the national movement in this way. The memories associated with a single archival object were always plural, and sometimes apparently inconsistent with one another. For instance, the only trace of the period that Abk spent at the Guessous Institution, a photograph of one of his favorite classmates standing in the school grounds with a teacher, allowed the contextualization of this experience in four different frames. First, the frame of his political education through which he was not only initiated into nationalist keywords, discourses, and rituals but also where he established his first contact with future leaders of the national movement both of the older generation and of his own age. Second, in the frame of his family relations and lifestyle: his years at the Guessous Institution were his first after leaving his father's house, and he was experimenting with a different kind of authority and a different lifestyle in a new city. Third, it was simultaneously a prestigious experience in complete continuity with the elite position of his family in the context of Marrakech and his first experience of social stratification within the Moroccan elite in the cities of Fez and Rabat. Fourth, in the frame of the political conjuncture of the

time: in Abk's memory the fact that his stay at the Guessous Institution was interrupted early on by the outbreak of the Second World War was an extremely important element in the construction of his political consciousness: "We realized that the French could be defeated," he used to tell me.

Moreover, biographical fieldwork offered a level of analysis for exploring the phenomena and processes to which Abk applied the terms "nation", "power" and even "politics" as meaningful categories. The first step consisted of asking him which episodes he considered relevant to the process of nation-making in the trajectory I had reconstructed through his personal documentation. The defeat of France in the Second World War in 1940 which put an end to his stay at Guessous Institution, the killing of the Tunisian syndicalist Farhat Hached in 1952 a few months after Abk's move to Casablanca, the splitting of the Istiqlal party in 1959 when he decided to resign from the Ministry of Commerce, and the end of the Abdallah Ibrahim government of 1960 a few months before he moved back to Casablanca are among the "non-events" (Vezzadini 2015, 9) to which he referred when explaining his experience of the nation. These episodes generally remained in the background of national historiography. Some of them occurred after the date on which Morocco gained its independence, which is generally viewed as the endpoint in the process of nation-making. Discussing the meanings that Abk associates with his past experiences beyond the factual content of the traces referring to them allowed me to broaden the spaces of political action that he considers meaningful in the shaping of the nation.

This is how, for instance, a 1951 letter in which Abk defends the interests of Moroccan olive oil traders in Casablanca became the starting point for exploring his relations with the small traders active in the armed resistance against the French Protectorate. His memories about the networks between the small traders, the nationalist activists of his generation, and the armed resistance offer unique information about how the struggle for independence had already started within the national borders at a time that historiographers have until now mainly studied from the perspective of activities led from abroad by exiled nationalist leaders. Likewise, a folder containing consistent documentation on the business projects of a

joint venture involving Moroccan and US investments in 1962–63 initiated discussion about some of the informal ways in which international relations were developed at that time even beyond the most acknowledged relationship between Morocco and France. Similarly, documents on the foundation and activities of the Moroccan Royal Golf Federation produced an opportunity to discuss the importance of private initiatives aimed at encouraging public debate, even after the state of exception had been proclaimed in 1965. Sharing Abk's memories of how social relations developed in private spaces during moments of leisure or worldliness deepened my understanding of a political phase in Morocco that is generally depicted as devoid of any possibility for public debate.

The King and his entourage are the main actors on which both academic literature and public debate focus in analyses of the political change that Morocco has experienced since gaining independence. Until the 1990s it was very rare to find sources, witnesses, or accounts of what had happened in Morocco beyond the common opposition between the coercive apparatus of the regime and the part of society that suffered from it the most. Governmental institutions are accounted for as spaces that progressively lost their importance as the King acquired an increasing control over the country. The work I shared with Abk enabled me to explore political change beyond such representations. My biographical fieldwork allowed me to explore different spaces in which the political game continued in parallel to the progressive disempowering of institutions. The memories that Abk associated with a number of business activities, personal experiences, and private events, the meanings he attributed to them and their contextualization suggest that the deactivation of the political dynamics in the areas assigned to them did not indicate their disappearance but rather their displacement to other fields of action. To explore these processes, it was necessary to approach the archival coverage of a number of economic and private activities without interpreting documents by linking them to a single field, or to one and only "jurisdiction," to use the terminology proposed by Angelo Torre (2011). This operation helped me explore the porosity of the distinction between public and private, politics and economics, in the nation-making process.

Abk's storytelling allowed me to explore a variety of everyday processes and methods of coercion that widen the boundaries and definition of authoritarianism beyond the violence inflicted on its victims. The investigations and the debates that developed during the years of transitional justice since the institution of the Equity and Reconstruction Commission in 2004 have brought to the public's attention the physical violence, torture, and arbitrary detention in secret prisons of young activists and officers involved in the several attempted coups against the monarch in the 1960s and '70s. Abk's souvenirs from his business activities during the 1960s, and his subsequent return to work in institutions, provided me with a starting point from which to explore the ways in which coercion was applied to the elites. In 1966 Abk was appointed general director of the Deposit and Management Fund (*Caisse des Dépôts et de Gestion—CDG*), the main instrument of monetary policy in Morocco. The discussion I developed with him, starting from his documental traces, helped me reconstruct the meanings of such an experience. His appointment as the head of the CDG was both a promotion and a form of repression as it led him away from his activity as a journalist at a time when the newspaper he was running had become one of the rare political forums which escaped censorship. Taking on a managerial role in such an important institution meant that Abk had to change his social relations and attend the royal court, respecting its rules and conducting himself appropriately. This experience, which he remembers with a great deal of pain, forced him to share the table with actors he saw as emblematic of the regime he contested, some of whom were the material executors of the suffering or disappearance of the people closest to him.

Approaching biography as fieldwork also allowed me to conduct an ethnographic review of the weight of the past in Abk's present life, in the sense that Michael Burawoy attributes to this notion: "studying others in space and time, with a view to comparing his or her site with the same one studied at an earlier point in time" (2003, 646). The development of our work together strengthened our relationship and deepened our intimacy. These were crucial premises for my fieldwork exploring Abk's experience. Within this exploration his role was that of a witness. The fact that we reflexively discussed the reasons that caused him to remember things, the ways he wanted to tell his story, the logic behind

the collection of objects in his personal archive and their classification, and the historical moments and social configurations that accompanied his effort transformed the biographic fieldwork into a cognitive site from which I was able to draw questions. An example of this dialogic process is the questions that allowed us to explore the multiple political meanings of Abk's memories associated with his promotions, which he had always faced painfully since he considers that when he accepted the promotion he was allowing the regime to recuperate him.

Discrete Perspectives on Political Change

Focusing on contemporary China, Prasenjit Duara (1996) invites us to consider the role of nationalism in the production of a linear understanding of history that is, in turn, constitutive of the nation-state. In Duara's terms, "rescuing history from the nation" means exploring the recent past by revealing contestation, appropriation, and pluralism. By analogy, the approach I developed was a way for me to rescue biography from the nation and explore political change beyond taken-for-granted conceptions of the nation-state and its trajectories of change. This perspective implies conceiving the nation-state not as an empty space with pre-established borders but as an ongoing process that can be explored through the experience of flesh-and-blood actors, following the chain of connections between periods, actors, and phenomena that a single trace could evoke. The biographic approach I experimented with through this work led me to explore three levels of analysis that might be of some use beyond Abk's experience and my work on it, or what I have come to call some discrete perspectives on political change.

The first of these is the discontinuity perspective. Moving away from linearity and the accomplishment of political experiences, avoiding strong causality and accredited chronologies can help in exploring politics as undefined phenomena beyond predefined horizons of change. Focusing on the traces of a single actor can overcome the long-term perspective generally adopted in thinking about paradigmatic change. By adopting the timescale of a single life, one can explore the different ways in which a shared social and political language (in my case, the language

of the nation) can be appropriated and enunciated. From a discontinuity perspective, one can pay attention to the different experiences, rather than the episodes, that a single actor has lived. Experiences offer insights not into the plot that is presumed to orient political change, but rather into some of the phenomena that constitute such processes. The connatural incompleteness of experiences is never synonymous with the lack of accomplishment, but refers to a way we can think of political change as an unplanned process, unpredictable and unlikely to find definitive fulfillment.

The second perspective is what one might call the marginality or irrelevance of political change. Exploring biography as an archive and establishing a piece of biographical fieldwork leads to a move away from actors and questions that are generally considered “relevant” and helps in exploring the mutual relations among actors without seeing the structure of social configurations as ineluctable. From this perspective, the distinction between actors who hold the power and those who resist it is less interesting than the power configuration (Hibou 2011). Similarly, actors’ roles themselves are less important than the concrete practices by which single actors exercise their roles and the plural meanings they attribute to such experiences, even those considered irrelevant or marginal. Ambivalences in these meanings are to be considered seriously. Beyond the fluidity and informality that characterize social configurations, the interest is not in discovering a presumed deep structure of power or its invisible dimension, but rather different practices that are generally not accounted for, since they are seen as having marginal importance in thinking about political change.

The third level of analysis that seems meaningful for exploring political change is the discreet, or personal, perspective. It is of course necessary to admit that memories do not tell us what actually happened: they tell us how people remember, how they frame their experiences in retrospect, and how these impact on their present life. Far from being something of residual interest, this is the very experience of politics. Paying attention to personal ways of conserving memory, remembering, and revealing political experiences leads to approaching politics as a real phenomenon that is hard to fit into formal models of explanation. If politics is real, its experience cannot be objective or univocal, and must rather be subjective and

plural. Subjectivity and plurality are relevant objects of inquiry for understanding political change. By considering biography as an archive and as a piece of fieldwork, one is able to explore not only non-hegemonic accounts of political change, but also, and most importantly, the tension between hegemonic memory and personal experience. It is not a matter of unveiling an anti-hegemonic account of the nation in opposition to the hegemonic one, nor of exploring a subaltern experience. The interest is rather in understanding the tension between the collective memory surrounding political change and personal experiences of it in order to explore the ways in which one can participate in a hegemonic paradigm while retaining a discreet experience of change.

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7

“A Proper House, Not a Barn”: House Biographies and Societal Change in Urban Kyrgyzstan

Eliza Isabaeva

A house is a never-finished project:
as a family’s wealth, reputation, prestige and membership grows, the
house will also grow.

(Osella and Osella 1999, 1018)

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution in 2005, the topic of change dominated Kyrgyz society—practically everyone in the country, whether politicians, civil society representatives, or ordinary Kyrgyzstani citizens, was actively discussing the consequences of the Revolution and the future of the country and its people (Nechaev 2005; Shenker 2006). Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the Central Asian region to experience a popular

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revolt, which ended the rule of the country's first president, Askar Akaev, and many in Kyrgyzstan were hoping for positive change.¹

The Tulip Revolution brought about change in political leadership when Akaev was ousted from office and Kurmanbek Bakiev came to power. While some activists and observers cheered the revolution and had big hopes for wider political change (Olcott 2005), a large number of researchers argued that the revolution did not result in noteworthy changes in the country. For example, Tucker (2007) questions the meaning of the word "revolution" in the Kyrgyz case because "the use of the word 'revolution' is not meant to imply any long-term consequences but rather only to identify that the anti-regime forces were in fact successful in overthrowing the current regime" (2007, 536). Fairbanks (2007) likewise did not expect lasting change because "the Tulip Revolution only replaced one former communist apparatchik with a less sophisticated one, and the northern elite with a more parochial southern elite" (2007, 55). In a similar manner, Radnitz called the Kyrgyz revolution "putative" and concluded that it was merely a "transfer of power" (2006, 133), while Tudoroiu (2007, 315) spoke of a limited rotation of ruling elites rather than a democratic revolution.

In this chapter, I will move the focus away from these meta-debates about revolution. I do not intend to provide yet another definition of what a revolution is and what it should entail to be called a "real" revolution with "revolutionary" changes. My aim is rather to offer an alternative perspective on the aftermaths of the Tulip revolution by exploring some of the visible and tangible changes that took shape in the lives of ordinary Kyrgyz at the intersection of both institutional transformations and individual agency. In other words, I am interested in the way change is lived and materialized, as well as in the way it is shaped by everyday objects and activities. How did ordinary Kyrgyz perceive and experience the institutional changes triggered by the political transition that followed

¹Akaev had been in power in Kyrgyzstan since the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. By 2005 he had been accused of corruption, nepotism, and strong one-family rule (Lewis 2008). Prior to March 2005, when he was overthrown in the Tulip Revolution, Kyrgyzstan had held parliamentary elections in February in which Akaev's eldest daughter and eldest son were elected to the Kyrgyz Parliament. The opposition in the country feared that the Akaevs would continue to rule without any significant change, and it was important therefore to insist on change.

the revolt of 2005? How did they themselves contribute to producing change in times of unrest and uncertainty?

I will illustrate how these questions can be tackled through the ethnographic study of house biographies. Things or objects that are subject to change have been conceptualized in the literature as having their own lives and biographies (Appadurai 1986; Carsten 2018; Derks 2015; Kopytoff 1986; Osella and Osella 1999). Using the example of houses, I will show how such trajectories can inform us about broader social transformations. First, houses represent tangible and material units of observation that the researcher can visit at different moments of her investigation, thus following the manifold and most often visible transformations they undergo (alterations, renovations, deterioration, extensions, etc.). Second, as shown by several authors, a close relationship exists between persons, their houses, and the valued possessions within them (Carsten 2018; Hoskins 1998; Telle 2007): houses are "inanimate things that come to be socially alive" (Telle 2007, 195). Their social embeddedness makes them ideal sites for the observation of social change. Houses are "embedded in the biographies of their inhabitants and vice versa, they embody the interconnections between individual trajectories, kinship, and the state" (Carsten 2018, 103). Thus, focusing on houses helps reveal the multiple entanglements they present "between the lives and relations that are enacted within them" and also "the historically inflected social and political contexts in which they are situated" (ibid., 103). Third, just as "every person has many biographies" (Kopytoff 1986, 68), biographies of things are likewise multiple. Physical, technical, economic, social, and cultural biographies of things inform us about their constantly changing trajectories. These multiple biographies are not separate but closely interrelated, and when they are carefully studied through observations and descriptions (Barth 1967, 661) we can get a grasp of a society and societal changes by linking empirical data to wider developments. Thus, focusing on houses as a unit of analysis of change enables us also to connect the micro-level analysis of individual experiences of change to the macro-level of social, political, and economic change.

I seek to illustrate these points more specifically by tracing the post-2005 development of houses in the illegal settlement of Ak Jar, which

is situated just outside the official boundary of the capital city, Bishkek. These houses are significant because they were built in the direct aftermath of the revolution through squatting practices of internal migrants with no private property in Bishkek. I will show that there is a close relationship between houses in Ak Jar and sociopolitical change in Kyrgyzstan. Like the change in leadership, Ak Jar can be seen as one of the material results of the revolutionary period. Moreover, the mere fact that the Ak Jar residents built and upgraded their houses despite the settlement's illegal status tells us as much about the Kyrgyz government's inability or unwillingness to confront and evict them as about the residents' determination to create houses of their own. Thus, the observation of houses and the changes they undergo throughout their existence in Ak Jar gives us clues about the lives of their dwellers, the structural conditions in Kyrgyz society and the ways in which people try to make use of and even influence the direction of change through their houses.

In order to illustrate these ideas, I first introduce Ak Jar and its inhabitants and provide an overview of the houses in the settlement. I focus particularly on the house of Chinara and her daughter Meerim with whom I lived during the summer of 2012. Living in this house and visiting it again during two shorter stints of fieldwork in 2013 and 2014, I was able to observe how my host's house was subject to change over the course of time,² and how changes to Chinara's house are related to broader changes in Kyrgyzstan such as ruptures, power struggles, and consolidation during and after the Tulip Revolution.

The Birth of Ak Jar and Its Inhabitants' Concerns

The birth of Ak Jar is intimately linked to the Tulip Revolution. It popped up on the northern edge of Bishkek in the immediate aftermath of the revolution as the result of unauthorized land squatting. On March

²Besides participant observation and interviewing Ak Jar residents, I met and discussed the concerns of the settlement dwellers with the settlement's community leaders, high-ranking officials, and NGO representatives and collected secondary sources on the background, demographics as well as infrastructural development of the settlement.

24, 2005, due to massive revolts, the first president, Akaev, had to flee to Moscow. The interim government in Kyrgyzstan held negotiations to identify people to appoint to key state positions, but until the Kyrgyz opposition consolidated itself around Bakiev's candidacy for the presidency, the country found itself in a political vacuum. During this time of political uncertainty and unrest, businesses—mostly malls and private shops—in the center of Bishkek were looted, and the outskirts of the city became a site of illegal land squatting, locally referred to, in Russian, as *zakhvat* or *samozakhvat*: (land) grabbing or occupation. The illegal settlement of Ak Jar grew as the result of this form of land squatting.

Prior to 2005, the land where Ak Jar stands today belonged to the Province of Chui and had been leased by Aslanbek Maliev (Mitenko 2011), a former member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, for fifty years. The politician had wanted to build a market complex in Ak Jar, but had never succeeded because the plot was occupied by a small group of people known locally as *top bashy* (squatters) who were believed to have connections with high-ranking politicians, state officials, and state agencies, from whom they had allegedly received information about what pieces of land in Bishkek and nearby was "vacant." During conversations with Ak Jar residents, I was told that having occupied Ak Jar after the revolution, the *top bashylar* (pl.) measured out plots varying in size from 400 to 600 m² and allocated them first of all to themselves and their immediate family members for free, then to relatives, fellow villagers, and friends for relatively small amounts of money. In the last instance, they sold plots to people who approached them for a piece of land. Today the whereabouts of these *top bashylar* are largely unknown. People who bought plots from them have no official documents to prove their entitlement to the land except a *raspiska*, a letter drafted by a *top bashy* confirming that he or she sold the plot for the requested sum of money. The *raspiska*, however, has no judicial authority as it is not certified by any state institution such as the State Registry Office.

Despite its illegal status, Ak Jar grew significantly over time. According to official figures, it stands on 1,280,000 m² of land, and is organized along a main axis crossed by 40 side streets. The settlement includes 1935 construction sites: finished, unfinished, and temporary houses, a mosque, two-car service stations, 19 private grocery stores, and the office of Ak

Jar's self-governance unit. In 2012, 7240 households were registered in the accounts of Ak Jar's community leaders.

The infrastructure of the settlement has also significantly changed. Initially, when the settlement emerged on this vast territory, it was completely without services: there was no electricity, drinking water, or sanitation for people's basic needs. Mentioning these early days, the residents spoke of "conditions like those of the middle ages," referring to the lack of electricity and dark nights. They criticized the rulers of Kyrgyzstan for their inability to provide water for Ak Jar's population despite Kyrgyzstan's rich water resources. Given the state authorities' neglect of the everyday concerns of Ak Jar's inhabitants, they took care of these problems themselves, each household lighting its house in the evenings by means of a private generator bought at a local bazaar and buying water in bottles and containers for drinking, cooking, and washing. These solutions were very expensive, however, in comparison to state-provided electricity and water.

Despite the poor infrastructure, the lack of state-sanctioned property documents, and the illegal status of the settlement, the residents invested much effort, resources, and time into building and improving their houses. Their properties were constantly changing: houses acquired new roofs, gates, and fences, additional floors, new furniture, etc. This effervescence contrasted greatly with Ak Jar's uncertainty about its legalization and the general assumption that "[p]eople who are not secure in their property rights will not invest labour and other resources in [...] the improvement of their houses built on the land, and the infrastructure of their neighborhood" (Ubink 2009, 7). It was as if—in a context of uncertainty marked by the illegal status of the settlement—the residents tried to impose their presence and create stability and continuity through construction and refurbishing activities. The houses in Ak Jar served as bulwarks against the people's illegal status and provided them with security. They made their houses as comfortable as possible because the outside world offered them no comfort. Furthermore, Ak Jar's inhabitants believed that building and upgrading houses and forming a neatly organized settlement would help accelerate the legalization process and

save the settlement from demolition.³ In other words, by making changes to their houses, they hoped to create permanence, indirectly promoting the legalization of their settlement.

The Houses of Ak Jar: More Than just Bystanders

Thus, the houses in Ak Jar have been constantly changing since the emergence of the settlement. Initially, my informants in Ak Jar told me, their dwellings were small, simple shacks, but over the course of time they grew bigger and were refurbished, constantly changing their interior and exterior appearance. Some houses changed ownership during this process, but only a very few were abandoned by their owners. They also grew in number: if initially there were just a few scattered houses in the settlement, today Ak Jar is the largest and most densely populated illegal settlement in Bishkek.

When I first came to Ak Jar in February 2012, I was struck by the frenzy of construction that was rapidly transforming the settlement. Wherever I looked, people were busy building houses, improving them, designing interior spaces, and acquiring new furniture and household items. Their activities were evidence that the houses were not static constructions but, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones point out, “dynamic entities” undergoing significant alteration (1995, 37).

Most of the houses in Ak Jar were constructed of clay, which served as a cheap building material for many residents. Usually the foundations were laid using cement to make the base solid and strong. Those who could afford to purchase more cement were able to build deeper and more solid foundations. The clay walls stood on these foundations.

³This resembles what has been observed in other contexts. For example, Aktaş (2013) showed how the Turkish *gecekondu* dwellers aimed for recognition from the state authorities. In every possible way, they tried to improve their habitat and living situation in *gecekondu*s in order to reach a certain standard of living that would prevent state authorities from demolishing settlements and evicting people (ibid., 179). Similarly, people who live in *asentamientos* in Buenos Aires try to establish the legality of their settlements through a high level of self-organization that is also in accordance with the state’s requirements (van Gelder 2010; van Gelder et al. 2016).

Again, those who could afford to mixed straw into their clay to make it more stable and to keep the house warm; and those who could not afford straw relied solely on clay. Even more crucial was the roof, because in Bishkek it can rain heavily in spring and snow a great deal in winter. Without a roof, clay houses could easily be washed away.

Inside, the walls were usually covered with a whitewashed cement, sand, and water plaster. The same was applied to the outside walls, but only when people had enough money to pay for the relatively expensive cement and sand. Similarly, those with money added a wooden floor, and those without ended up with a clay or cement floor, which was very cold in winter.

I visited many different houses in Ak Jar. In the winter, when I started my fieldwork, most of those that I entered were cold. Since the settlement was not connected to the city or the region's central heating system, the residents heated their houses using coal or electric heaters. However, due to the frequent electricity blackouts the latter often stood unused and gave way to coal. But coal also had its disadvantages, as its heat quickly escaped through the gaps in the walls and the roof, and the smoke gave the whitewashed walls a grayish color. As a result, families with bigger houses lived in only one or two rooms during the winter months, with the rest uninhabitable and kept locked due to the cold.

Although most houses in Ak Jar were simple structures and only contained the most basic utensils and furniture, some were more upscale. At the time of my fieldwork, Ak Jar could be divided into two parts: the houses up to 20th street were bigger, solid constructions, and were painted, roofed, gated, and fenced, whereas those from the 21st to 39th and 40th streets were smaller shacks that were unpainted, ungated, unfenced, and fitted with makeshift flat roofs. Furthermore, basic service infrastructure such as electricity pylons and wells had not reached the very end of the settlement, and the people in the upper parts of Ak Jar had to derive their electricity and water from the lower parts of the settlement (Fig. 7.1).

Many people in Ak Jar, especially those who owned small simple shacks, dreamed of a house made of brick on a high cement foundation. Bricks as building material guarantee more stable and warmer walls than clay. While such a house was a costly and luxurious asset, the



Fig. 7.1 A “proper” brick house (Photo by the author)

people of Ak Jar aspired to construct or upgrade their existing houses as nearly as they could to these dream houses of brick and cement. Another dream was to have an *evroremont* (lit. European maintenance) interior. In *evroremont* houses, the walls were not whitewashed but covered with a smoother plaster, the rooms were large and bright with built-in kitchens, functioning bathrooms, new furniture, and modern electrical devices such as washing machines, color televisions, and large refrigerators.

While most residents of Ak Jar linked their aspirations for the future to these material changes to their houses, it took time, and not many people were able to realize their dreams of home improvement. Below, I describe how the houses were constantly changing by describing the example of the shack of my host, Chinara. Applying the biographical approach, I trace the life of the shack from its early years when she bought it to its coming to maturity with new facilities such as fences, a solid roof, and running water. In addressing each of these changes I relate them to wider developments in Kyrgyz society.

Gradual Change in Chinara's Shack

2012: Early Days in a Dark and Stuffy Room

Chinara and her 10-year-old daughter Meerim came to live in Ak Jar in 2007. She bought her shack from a *top bashy*. She said it was in poor condition, uninhabitable, and with no access to electricity or water. With her two elder sons, who at the time of my research lived elsewhere, Chinara painted the inner and outer walls of the shack to make it prettier and more comfortable. They also put a flat roof on the shack, which was less expensive than a peaked one. When I came to live with Chinara and Meerim in 2012, I saw a small shack in front of me. A thick black electricity cable connected it to a neighboring shack on the lower street, which in turn was connected to another neighboring house that was connected to the high-voltage power station. I understood that several households shared electricity. Next to Chinara's shack was a barn in which she kept her fifteen goats and sheep, which provided her with

milk on a daily basis. The setup of Chinara's shack and barn reminded me of typical rural houses.

Chinara's shack had two rooms. One was still unfinished and was mainly used for storage, and the other served as the living-eating-sleeping room. It had a tiny window and was therefore rather dark. Despite its small size of approximately 14 m², the room contained an old Soviet-style cupboard holding dishes, an old sofa, a small fridge, an oven, a small TV, and a dining table. As a result, there was little space for the three of us to move around. Most of the time, Meerim and I sat on the sofa and tried to play games while Chinara watched her evening soap opera.

Despite Chinara's efforts to make the shack a bit more habitable, there were cracks in the walls, holes in the roof, and unfinished corners through which insects got inside. In the summer the room was unbearably hot, and correspondingly in the winter it was severely cold. The floor was made of cement, covered with an old piece of linoleum on top of which Chinara had laid an old carpet. Since the shack was on 36th street, it did not have direct access to power mains or a well. Chinara shared electricity with several other households, which meant that the power was low. As a result, the one room we lived in was almost always only dimly lit. During the day, Chinara would leave the door open so the sunlight would help illuminate the room. Drinking water had to be carried from the well located on the main street. Every evening, Meerim and I went to fetch water, Meerim carrying two smaller buckets and I two bigger ones. We made several trips because we had to fetch water not only for our own consumption but also for the animals. As water was scarce, Chinara refrained from washing the dishes we used for eating.

In 2012 Ak Jar had already existed as an illegal settlement on the far northern edge of Bishkek for seven years. In the evenings over dinner and tea Chinara recounted stories of how everyday life there was gradually getting better. She was thankful for the electricity and water wells that were delivered to the settlement because she remembered living without these resources. "It was a very difficult time," she would say, sighing heavily. Moreover, she recounted how she had to live with the constant

threat of eviction and demolition, and how Ak Jar's population mobilized to demand basic infrastructure along with the legalization of their settlement.

Demanding services and legalization from the authorities was not easy for Ak Jar's residents. They wrote numerous letters to state agencies and high-ranking politicians, held peaceful demonstrations in front of the Kyrgyz Parliament and had even staged protests. In their largest street rally in August 2011, they blocked Bishkek's key arterial road for several days, burning tires on it and demanding the arrival of the prime minister and the city mayor. The protest was successful to the extent that it brought important politicians to the people and made them listen. Having heard their concerns, the Prime Minister pledged to resolve their problems. By December 2011 electricity pylons had been installed along the central street and people were able to access electricity. Although this provided power to only part of the settlement, the people were content that in the future the entire settlement would be electrified. They shared this vital resource with one another: households close to the central street connected directly to the main power source and shared with households farther away. The bill that the main electricity-providing household received was equally divided among all the electricity-sharing households. Soon, wells were installed along the central street, freeing people from purchasing drinking water in bottles and containers.

The delivery of these services to Ak Jar was one of the first signs that the settlement might not be demolished in the near future, if ever. Politicians' visits to Ak Jar and their negotiations with the settlement's population showed that the authorities were aware of its existence and of the residents' concerns, *de facto* turning Ak Jar into a semi-legal settlement. This recognition gave the residents the impression that they were no longer neglected and could make demands on the state, in turn reinforcing their belief that Ak Jar would become legal in the future, making them property owners, and able to remain in Bishkek.

2013: Growing More Solid Through New Acquisitions

When I returned to Ak Jar in 2013 for a follow-up study, I noticed some major changes to Chinara and Meerim's shack. Whereas the second room was still unfinished, the shack now had a new, "proper" roof made of metal and forming a high peak.⁴ From a distance the high roof automatically changed the physical appearance of the shack, making it taller and more elegant. The roof was one of the first things Chinara talked about when I asked her for the latest news of her household, and of Ak Jar in general, since I had left. She recounted how with financial help from her two older sons she had been able to purchase the necessary materials for the new roof and to hire workers to install it. Listening to Chinara, I could feel her growing confident in her belief that the houses in Ak Jar, especially in the depressed upper part of it where her shack was located, would not be demolished. This was another signal of the permanence of the settlement. Due to this firm belief in its permanence, Chinara's family had invested financial resources in replacing the flat roof with a "proper" peaked one. Furthermore, I realized how the changes to the shack influenced the status of its inhabitants. While its poor condition had made her sons work to save money for the new roof, the construction activity had turned unemployed Chinara into an employer, raising her social status as someone with enough money to hire laborers.

In addition to the new roof, Chinara proudly showed me a new sink in her kitchen-living-sleeping room and told me that she no longer had to carry drinking water. Looking at the sink I realized that the water pressure was not strong because there was a bowl collecting drops from the tap. Nevertheless, the fact that Chinara could now access water directly at home indicated to me that her shack was gradually becoming a house. She told me that Ak Jar's community leadership had negotiated with the state water company to allow residents to pipe water from the central street into their houses at their own cost. Chinara and her neighbors had agreed to raise their own funds and hired someone with a tractor to dig a long trench from the main street to the side street where they lived.

⁴The peak-formed roof was particularly useful as it allowed snow and rain to easily run off rather than settling on it as before.

Each household purchased the water pipes and other necessary devices to bring the water directly into their houses. This was a good deal for the water company because people paid for their own extensions, and the company generated more income as the connected households paid more for their water every month than those without direct access to water. This connection to the water mains shows how Chinara and her neighbors grew as a united and cohesive community who could come together to accomplish common goals and believed in the permanence of Ak Jar, and therefore also their houses.

Apart from the new roof and water access, I noticed that everything else had remained the same in the shack. The electricity was still weak and the old furniture was still in the room. However, Chinara informed me that the company responsible for the electrification of Ak Jar was going to install another high-voltage power station in the upper part of the settlement to allow residents there to connect directly to the power source. Furthermore, Chinara wanted to refurbish her shack in the *evroremont* style. The fact that it was now equipped with a sink, running water and a proper roof meant that her property was already no longer a simple shack. For her neighbors, who could not afford these “luxuries”, the shack had become valuable housing and an object of admiration, discussion, and future projection.

Having accessed the essential infrastructure, the residents of Ak Jar now wanted to accelerate their work on the legalization of the settlement and obtain their property documents. There were obstacles to the granting of these, however, because Ak Jar first had to be recognized as a legal settlement. In Ak Jar, when people spoke of legalization, they called it *transformatsiia*, transformation, implying the transformation of land under the administration of the Province of Chui to land that was part of the municipality of the City of Bishkek, but also the transformation of previously agricultural land into a residential area. During one of the meetings organized by Ak Jar’s community leader, Kuban, residents asked him how the *transformatsiia* was developing. When Kuban told them about the bureaucratic obstacles, one resident demanded in a loud voice, “Shall we block the road again then?” This question reveals many things: obviously, the property documents were of the utmost

importance to Ak Jar's residents and they were willing to resort to disruptive practices to achieve results, but most importantly, blocking a road would unite a large number of people as a single group in pursuit of a common goal. These expressions of unity and belonging inform us how Ak Jar's residents gradually consolidated power within their settlement through what Asef Bayat (2000) calls "quiet encroachment," in which ordinary people silently advance on the propertied and powerful. Although quiet encroachment implies resistance against the state, the rich, and the powerful, the case of Ak Jar shows how the residents tried to win over the state by demonstrating the harsh conditions in which they lived, thereby hoping to gain its attention and compassion.

As Ak Jar's residents no longer feared demolition, the realization that they had settled permanently became stronger and firmer, giving them even greater incentive to invest in their houses. Thus, the shacks kept growing bigger, becoming more solid, concrete constructions, and some even grew into multistoried brick houses. Although they had not yet been granted their property documents, the residents believed that it would not be long before the *transformatsiia* was complete. After all, they had raised their own money to help the architecture office draft the master plan (*gen plan*) of the settlement and they hoped that the state agency would finalize the work. Eventually, the *transformatsiia* would bring about new changes because it would entail the incorporation of Ak Jar into the city's structure. This would have implications for Bishkek's demography and geography: the city's boundaries would expand and its population would rise.

With the gradual development of Ak Jar's built environment and concomitant increase in population, people's perceptions of the settlement and its dwellers changed. If initially they were stigmatized as squatters, criminals, and lawbreakers, by 2012 the state authorities had negotiated with them on the terms of their inclusion in state structures. Ak Jar's inhabitants argued that they were responsible and contributing citizens because they paid their electricity and water bills every month. Through their aspirations to transform their shacks into big brick *evroremont* houses, they clearly communicated the message that they valued permanence over transience (Osella and Osella 1999).

2014: Standing Firm—Gated and Fenced

I returned to Ak Jar in 2014 and straightaway went to visit my hosts. However, I had difficulty finding Chinara's shack. It was difficult to see, hidden as it was behind high iron gates and fences. Moreover, since Chinara's neighbors had also installed gates and fences around their houses, all the houses on the street looked more or less identical. After I had roughly identified the location of my host's house, I spent some time knocking on the iron gate with a stone, as there was no doorbell, hoping to see Chinara and Meerim again. Bothered by the noise I was making, Chinara's neighbor came over to tell me that Chinara had moved to her son's house and no longer lived in the shack, which she now rented to tenants.

Chinara's small shack had been through an interesting trajectory in terms of both its new acquisitions and its new inhabitants. With the new iron gate and the fence around it, the shack now stood as a solid and secure house. In order to enter it, one now had to pass through the gate first. It was no longer directly accessible to visitors as it had been a few years earlier. The fence created some privacy and invisibility for its inhabitants, as neither they nor the shack were exposed for outsiders to see. Furthermore, the gate and fence clearly marked Chinara's territory. Previously, her animals had wandered onto others' properties and Chinara had to endure her neighbors' criticism. Now, the fence prevented the animals from leaving her yard.

In addition to its new material acquisitions over the years, Chinara's shack had also gained new inhabitants, in the form of paying tenants. This meant that there was still strong demand for cheap housing in the city due to continuing internal migration from rural areas. Before settling down in Ak Jar, Chinara herself had rented a shack in a different Bishkek settlement. Becoming a private property owner (albeit still without property documents) meant that she could now rent her shack to others in need of shelter in the city. On the other hand, the fact that internal migrants were still seeking tenancy in illegal settlements such as Ak Jar informs us further about the Kyrgyz government's lack of success with its affordable housing project. Its inability to implement such a project

obviously had an impact on illegal settlements such as Ak Jar: it meant that they would persist on Bishkek's periphery.

Besides its main function as a shelter for the new family, the shack now also generated income for Chinara in the form of regular rental payments. In times of economic difficulty in Kyrgyzstan, having several properties was helpful for many families. By providing her with a regular income, it could be said that the shack prevented Chinara from becoming a labor migrant in neighboring Kazakhstan or Russia.⁵ Instead she had the privilege of staying at home and still collecting a regular income.

The example of Chinara's shack demonstrates that "objects have histories, careers, social lives [...]" (Derks 2015, 332). Just like a human being purchasing new clothes or accessories, Chinara's shack acquired a new roof, a sink, and new gates and fencing, thereby upgrading itself through Chinara and her sons' efforts. Like a human being who holds different positions and changes functions during his or her career, an object can also change its functions: for instance, the shack went from being Chinara and Meerim's dwelling for many years to becoming a source of income once she moved to her son's house. Having no official employment with a regular salary, the monthly revenue generated by the shack has been a considerable help to Chinara and her family. Witnessing this new development, I recalled how she once told me that she wanted to buy herself a car in order to visit her relatives in neighboring Kazakhstan. I imagined that she would be able to realize this dream in the very near future. In a way, the small shack has allowed her freedom of movement, financial security, and the maintenance of social relations. One could say that the shack has outperformed its original function since the time Chinara first purchased it.

Since the emergence of Ak Jar, the most important milestone in its history has been the delivery of electricity and water infrastructure. This attracted more and more people to the settlement, and so it expanded. In 2012, I counted 37 side streets; a year later I saw scattered houses along a

⁵Due to economic hardship in Kyrgyzstan, many people choose to emigrate in search of employment. See Abashin (2014), Isabaeva (2011), Reeves (2012).

new street, 38th street; in 2014, Ak Jar's side streets numbered 39.⁶ Some 15,000 people live in the settlement, and the authorities in Kyrgyzstan seem to have abandoned the idea of demolition or resettlement because the process of its legalization has already started. In the summer of 2018, the speaker at Kyrgyz Parliament informed journalists at a press conference that Parliament had approved a bill for legalizing informal settlements that had emerged on the city's fringes prior to 2009. The bill had been passed to the president to be signed (Radio Azattyk 2018). This means that Ak Jar is just a step away from becoming legal and that it is only a matter of time. Changing their houses and transforming their settlement brought Ak Jar's inhabitants closer to permanence and acted as a way of asserting their rights to the city.

Conclusion

While Ak Jar's illegal status persists, everything else about the settlement has changed: people move in and move out, houses are being constructed and renovated. The observed transformations inform us about various (interconnected) scales of change: at the individual, the collective, and the national level. At the individual level, the transformations of Chinara's house inform us about her gradual social mobility from illegal and precarious settler, to employer, and later landlord. While her status as illegal resident has not changed, her economic and social situations have clearly improved. This example makes clear how, within the same and seemingly unchanging category of "illegal settler," variations of status can occur.

Second, the gradual improvements of Chinara's shack enable us to analyze how Ak Jar's residents perceive the political changes their country is currently undergoing. Ak Jar's growth and the amount of energy and resources invested in people's houses inform us about the resident's growing confidence in the future and in the expected legalization of the settlement. Moreover, this perception has concrete effects with regard

⁶Alymbaeva (2008, 72) has documented the similar enlargement of Kelechek settlement, observing the emergence of a new 15th street there.

to the transformation of the settlement: it contributes to the residents' capacity to organize collectively in order to get access to water and electricity and promotes their desire to resume renovation work in order to impose their presence through material constructions. Some fifteen years after the settlement's sudden emergence on the edge of Bishkek, its residents seem to feel that they have now lived there for a long time. Initially, the authorities' frequent threats of demolition had made it seem imminent, and there was no such feeling of permanence. Gradually, the number of settlement dwellers and houses grew, and therefore became a stronger force when voicing demands for infrastructural improvements and property documents. While electricity and water services have been partially delivered, the residents are still waiting for their property documents, hoping that their wait will not be a long one.

Ak Jar's existence and persistence allowed its dwellers to actively build, renovate, and enlarge their housing. Its emergence and expansion, population growth, and upgrading of houses gradually led to its recognition and inclusion in the city. This very fact led to much broader changes in Bishkek's borders and demography. Agreeing to the *transformatsiia*—that is, handing over Ak Jar and its population from the jurisdiction of Chui Province to that of Bishkek City—has further demonstrated flexibility with regard to Kyrgyzstan's political governance. Whereas other countries have demolished their illegal settlements, Kyrgyzstan decided first to tolerate and then to accept Ak Jar's illegality. Hence, by changing their houses, Ak Jar's residents actually influenced processes such as urbanization and governance in Kyrgyzstan. All of their activities—upgrading their houses, raising funds, protesting, enduring difficulties, etc.—are their ways of asserting their rights to the city and participating in shaping it and their own lives (cf. Harvey 2008). When scholars debate whether the Tulip Revolution brought about changes or not, examining the dynamics at the micro-level can help us detect both change and continuity.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that change can be detected in and studied through objects. Change is processual. Examining objects as a unit of analysis throughout their lifetime/biography enables us to see changes in their usage, functions, careers, and social lives. Ethnographic fieldwork is particularly important here, first of all because it allows a

researcher time for observation and participation, and second because it connects meta-narratives of change—in this case contradictory narratives about the outcome of the Tulip Revolution—to the researcher’s empirical data—in this case, the changes made to Ak Jar’s houses. Fieldwork data helps us understand the connection between changes at the micro and the macro-level. By applying a biographical approach to the study of objects, we can see how a particular object changes (houses in Ak Jar were upgraded), how status changes (Ak Jar has gone from existing as an illegal settlement to being a step away from being legalized), how the living conditions of its inhabitants improve, how urbanization processes evolve (Bishkek’s shifting borders and increasing population), and how governance/politics transform (Kyrgyzstan tolerating and accepting illegality/informality). Thus, the biographies of the houses of Ak Jar are intrinsically tied to wider developments in Kyrgyzstan.

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8

When a Coterie Becomes a Generation: Intellectual Sociability and the Narrative of Generational Change in Sayyid Qutb's Egypt

Giedrė Šabasevičiūtė

The wave of uprisings that swept across Arab countries starting in the winter of 2010 was immediately interpreted as the “revolutions of the youth.” Whether portrayed as the explosive symptom of social, demographic, and political crisis, or, as in the case of Arab revolutions, as the promise of a democratic future in the region, in literature on Arab societies the youth are consistently seen as the main agents of social and political change (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2012).

The generational narrative structured on the conflict between juniors and seniors is a widely used analytical approach to social change in many national contexts.¹ Since it was introduced by nineteenth century French

¹For example, the 1968 Revolution in France is typically analyzed through the prism of generational change, see Sirinelli (2008, 113–124); in Egypt, the generational framework is also often used for the analysis of cultural renewals, see, for example Shukri (1971).

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historians to define the Romantic youth who arrived on the literary scene in the 1830s (Diaz 2010), the notion of generations has traveled into other fields of inquiry, such as sociology, history, and the arts, where it gradually replaced the traditional focus on the succession of political regimes as the main site for observing historical change (Mannheim 1972, 276–86).

However, as Pierre Bourdieu has noted, the youth is a sociological rather than a biological category, whose assumed homogeneity and boundaries are subject to intense struggles of classification (Bourdieu 2002, 143–54). Indeed, the notion of generation is used not only by historians to account for social transformation, but by social actors themselves who employ generational rhetoric as a claim to power. To present oneself as part of the junior generation is indeed a powerful claim, since it implies that those defined as seniors are outdated and need to vacate their place.

In academic literature on change, the performative dimension of generation claims often goes unacknowledged. The problem of generations, to borrow the title of the foundational essay by Karl Mannheim, lies in its ambiguity as a term. It is both descriptive and discursive, referring simultaneously to the phenomenon of change and a discourse on change that are not easy to untangle. While a number of social scientists have been attentive to the discursive dimension of generational dynamics, analyzing the formation of “generational consciousness,” “generational identity” and, moreover, the role of culture in creating generational labels (Eyerman and Turner 1998; Edmunds and Turner 2002), the majority of studies tend to either infer a generational change from a historical transformation that has already taken place (cf. Theweleit 1987) or, on the contrary, to rely on generational claims as a sufficient indicator of a change to come (cf. Jayyusi 1995). Yet, the failure to differentiate between the discourse on change and the effective change presents a risk of confusing the cause with the outcome, preventing one from seeing how concretely generational collectives emerge and disappear from collective memory. Indeed, several studies dedicated to the generational phenomena have shown that the semblance of a generational unity, be it aesthetic, intellectual, or political, is usually forged after the collectives defined as generational are formed. The generational narrative allows

to conceal their original heterogeneity (Jacquemond 2003, 202–206; Sirinelli 2008, 113–24).

Focusing on intellectual history, this chapter suggests a way to study social conditions in which the generational rhetoric leads to a cultural renewal. It argues that connecting different scales of change—the emergence of a generational claim and the effective generational change—can be achieved by introducing an additional unit of analysis: the modes of intellectual sociability that socialize actors into collectives variously defined as literary schools, coteries, or generations. The examination of intellectual networks in relation to which a generational claim is made allows one to observe the importance of the public expression of bonds of solidarity in making the announced change a historical reality. This study suggests that collectives defined as generational tend to emerge in tandem with a change in a writer's relationship with his seniors, from a bond of mentorship to that of confrontation. Consequently, the change announced is effective when followed by the concrete actions of shifting one's public solidarities from masters to peers.

To better understand relations between generations in the literary field in Egypt, I draw on Walter Armbrust's concept of *isnad* (1996). Borrowing the classical term from Islamic sciences, where *isnad* refers to the chain of authoritative voices that authenticate a hadith,² Armbrust described different strategies employed by Egyptian cultural producers to either connect themselves to authoritative figures within their shared profession or to write people—and sometimes themselves—out of chains of transmission, in this case either by praising mentorship or by staging generational struggles.

This rhetoric of transmission combines with other narratives of literary history. The accusation towards literary community members of forming inward-oriented cliques became increasingly known as *shilaliyya* in the second half of the twentieth century, a derogatory term for a group (*shilla*) solidarity viewed as compromising to writers' commitment to

²Hadith is a record of the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, revered as a second major source of religious guidance in Islam after the Qur'an.

the society as a whole.³ Richard Jacquemond astutely shows that the praise of “generation” and the criticism of “*shilaliyya*” function as two opposed argumentative registers to describe the writers’ propensity to form solidarity-based collectives (Jacquemond 2003, 208-9).

Therefore, this study builds on Armbrust’s analysis of chains of transmission in Egyptian popular culture and on Jacquemond’s work on generational renewal in Egypt to show how intellectual sociabilities can provide crucial insights into the means of cultural change.

In order to document intellectual sociabilities, this chapter draws from the empirical data consisting of “textual traces” of intellectual practices of socialization. These are book reviews, literary confrontations and criticism, dedications, allographic prefaces, memoirs and all other “textual noise” produced as a result of intellectual interaction in print. This type of data usually falls outside the boundaries of authorial texts that are typically considered in the analysis of literary milieus.⁴ Addressed exclusively to peers, this type of literature is, however, particularly informative in uncovering the complex patterns of intellectual exchange.

The wealth of non-fictional texts on the social dimension of literary life produced in colonial Egypt is directly related to the weak institutional basis of its intellectual field, in which literary activity is pursued through personal networks rather than institutional regulations.⁵ As a result, both mentorship and peer-solidarity play a central role in promoting a literary career. This specificity of colonial Egypt’s intellectual field allows to grasp the multiple ways generational narrative articulates with social change. The absence of institutional efforts to canonize generational collectives reveals the fluctuating nature of generational claims and the ways they

³On the significance of *shilla* in shaping homosocial intimacies in contemporary Cairo, see Kreil (2016); on the function of *shilla-s* in politics, see Springborg (1982).

⁴The systematic use of this type of data is typically restricted to the study of literature of particular historical periods defined by the significance of literary coteries, such as those within nineteenth century France and eighteenth century Great Britain. See, respectively, Glinoe and Laisney (2013), Schellenberg (2016). From the perspective of digital humanities, this type of data had been extensively used in research projects on Belgium’s literary field, see, for example, Dozo (2009).

⁵Formed in the shadow of the British colonial domination, the Egyptian intellectual field can be characterized as “weakly institutionalized,” defined by the quest for both local and international recognition and the organization of literary activities through networks. On “weakly institutionalized” intellectual fields, see Aron and Denis (2006).

result in cultural renewal. Through analyzing the combination of generational claims with narratives on change, using intellectual networks as a unit of analysis and “textual noise” as empirical data, this study is intended as a methodological contribution to the study change within qualitative research.

The chapter’s argument is based on a case study of two generational battles led by the Egyptian intellectual-turned-Islamist ideologist Sayyid Qutb in the 1930s and 1940s, namely “The Battle of Literary Criticism” in 1934 and “The Battle of Juniors and Seniors” starting in 1947. Born in 1906 and executed for a conspiracy against ‘Abd al-Nasser’s regime in 1966, Qutb is mostly known today as a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood organization whose publications inspired radical Islamist movements worldwide. But before dedicating himself to political activism, Qutb was known within the Egyptian literati as a literary critic and essayist with a pronounced taste for intellectual confrontations.⁶ His position during controversies shows the particular argumentative sets he had at his disposal to either legitimize his peers as members of the literary community or to exclude them from it under the argument of opportunism. Depending on his shifting intellectual relationships with his elders and peers, he defined the relation between writers either as a legitimate endorsement of juniors by seniors or as a battlefield of generational struggles by showing cronyism at work among the former or the latter group.

The article begins with the historical overview of the emergence of generational narrative and of its inversion, the accusation of *shilaliyya*, in colonial Egypt in order to understand how it acquired its argumentative force in intellectual confrontations. Then, it proceeds to the examination of Qutb’s involvement in the two controversies I just mentioned, combined with the parallel analysis of his shifting intellectual solidarities. Eventually, I compare the case of Qutb’s relationship with the postwar intellectual generation with that of Naguib Mahfuz, his former colleague and a future recipient of the Nobel Prize. By this example,

⁶The biographic literature on Qutb is vast. Among the most remarkable contributions are Yunis (1995), al-Khalidi (2007), Badawi (1992), Shalash (1994), al-Namnam (2014), Calvert (2010), Toth (2013), Musallam (2005).

the last section of the chapter considers how generational collectives preserve their identity over historical periods or, inversely, disappear from collective memory.

Generational Rhetoric in Interwar Egypt: Transmission and Rupture

In Egypt, the generational rhetoric spread as a result of the emergence of literary modernity in the first decades of the twentieth century. The British colonial domination to which Egypt was subjected since 1882, both in terms of the physical occupation of its territory and of cultural domination, favored the circulation of European literary models which were perceived as universal and normative. One of the most dramatic developments of this changing literary landscape in Egypt was the introduction of a new image of writers. Based on the Romantic myth of the “uncreated creator” (Bourdieu 1995, 187–91), the image of writers as endowed with a superior sensibility that placed them above the rest of humanity gradually replaced the classical conception of intellectuals, the *adib*, as “a cultivated person, a man of letters and good manners” (Pepe 2019, 181). As a result, literary creativity, originality and genius came to supplant, and in some cases merge with, models of erudition, loyalty to existing aesthetic canons and high moral purpose embedded in the pre-print patterns of knowledge production (Pepe 2019, 197–202).

The reformulation of a writer as “uncreated creator” introduced a set of new literary values. The portrayal of writers as inspired geniuses led to their relocation from the social sphere to that of transcendence, posited as the hypothetical origin of artistic inspiration. This shift inevitably entailed that a writer’s subservience to all forms of material power—be they economic, political, or social—become the biggest source of suspicion of his/her authenticity. As a result, “interest in disinterestedness” (Bourdieu 1995) emerged as the most powerful claim of the newly redefined symbolic capital in literature.

The spread of these literary models to Egypt was encouraged by the emergence of a new bureaucracy of cultural production during the

interwar period, including the establishment of the representative political system by the 1923 Constitution, a significant expansion of the press, and the rise of new educational institutions such as the Egyptian university, founded in 1908 and reformed into a public institution in 1925. These developments favored the emergence of a new social class, known in the historiography of the epoch as *efendiyya* (Ryzova 2014). Its members eagerly adopted European literary models as weapons against the established intellectual class of the time.

Portraying themselves as the spokespersons of modernity, members of the *efendiyya* relegated their elders to the sphere of tradition and, in the process, implanted new registers of criticism as the basis of a redefined literary normativity. During the interwar years, the denunciation of writers' political subservience had firmly taken root. This is demonstrated by the numerous attacks the emerging poet 'Abbas al-'Aqqad waged against the quintessential genre of courtly patronage of the arts, the panegyrics (*madh*), through the criticism of its most famous representative, the courtly poet Ahmad Shawqi. Likewise, "the disinterestedness" of literary creation imposed itself as an indisputed value in the press (al-Hakim, n.d., 75–80).

The generational rhetoric traveled to Egypt in tandem with literary models inspired by European Romanticism. The claim of forming a new literary generation was used by modernist writers as early as 1914,⁷ and by the 1920s the generational narrative had become a standard narrative within the history of literature.⁸

This generational rhetoric gained a particularly wide currency in the 1930s, a time when youth were claiming an increasingly assertive presence in politics and culture. Demonstrating a distrust of conventional political participation, young Egyptians formed organizations and engaged in extra-parliamentary political activism, becoming the central source of national anxiety concerning the youth's role in nation-making

⁷See the preface written by the poet 'Abbas al-'Aqqad to his friend's Ibrahim al-Mazni's first poetry collection published in 1914, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazni, *Diwan al-Mazni* (2013).

⁸See the book on literary criticism authored by 'Abbas al-'Aqqad and Ibrahim al-Mazni in 1921, in which they classified Ahmad Shawqi as part of the "past generation" (1928). See also al-'Aqqad's more systematic assessment of the "past generation" of literati in his *Shu'ara Misr wa Bi'atubum fi al-Jil al-Madi* (1937).

(El Shakry 2011).⁹ Although largely forgotten nowadays, the November 1935 youth upheaval that swept the universities and streets at that time had a powerful formative effect on young people's subjectivities (Abdalla 1985). This resulted in perhaps the first full-fledged generational battle splitting writers into "seniors" (*al-shuyukh*) and "juniors" (*al-shubban*), each defending their positions using classical arguments of generational struggles: juniors blamed seniors for blocking their careers, while seniors accused the youth of lacking knowledge and seeking rapid success (respectively, Qutb 1996, 5; Husayn 1989b, 170–77).

It is important to consider what the notions of "senior" and "junior" concretely meant in the context of interwar Egypt. As it appears from the debate, "senior" was less an indication of age than of fame. An anonymous author writing in *al-Risala* magazine in the midst of the battle used the notions of "senior" and "famous" interchangeably about writers. Petitioning for the creation of a syndicate for "junior" writers, he claimed to be a "junior" despite his advanced age, arguing for his limited fame (1934). Moreover, fame should be understood in relation to a powerful institution in the literary field of the period: intellectual mentorship. An example of how the playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim reached the status of "senior" illustrates this point. In his public letter addressed to the "Dean of Arabic Letters," Taha Husayn, in 1933, al-Hakim claimed to be a part of the generation of his disciples that would not exist without Husayn's caring guidance (al-Hakim 1933). In this letter, al-Hakim used generational rhetoric in the sense of historical transmission rather than rupture. In a span of two years, al-Hakim would lose the status of a disciple when, catapulted to literary stardom with his play *The People of the Cave*, he joined "the seniors". This transition of status is best attested to by the solicitations al-Hakim started receiving from aspiring writers asking him to preface their works.¹⁰

⁹The creation of the Muslim Young Men's Association in 1927, the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, and Young Egypt in 1933 was part of this development.

¹⁰It was legendarily difficult to obtain a preface from al-Hakim, who openly despised the social conventions of literature in line with his pose of the ivory tower intellectual. However, in 1935 Salah Dhihni (n.d.), a young novelist, persuaded al-Hakim to preface his short story collection *In the Eighth Rank*. While al-Hakim's preface placed him in the position of mentor, Dhihni strengthened this association when he added a second preface in which he positioned himself as al-Hakim's disciple.

As this example suggests, the notion of “senior” is defined by the capacity of providing mentorship as well as willingness to assume this role through the modern textual practices of intellectual exchange, such as prefaces and dedications. The ubiquity of generational rhetoric, which can be used either in the sense of inter-generational transmission or rupture, is largely due to the centrality of the founders of literary modernity in interwar Egypt, which includes writers such as Taha Husayn, Tawfiq al-Hakim, or ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad, who hold the power of legitimizing literary productions.

The fluctuating meanings of this generational narrative is related to the emergence of a new population of aspiring writers by the 1930s. Although these new writers considered themselves different from earlier pioneers in the field, they nonetheless attempted to locate themselves as following in the elders’ footsteps. Presenting themselves as the “generation of disciples” allowed aspiring writers to claim a part of the literary authority of their elders. However, the focus on Qutb’s involvement in the generational controversies in 1934 and 1947 shows the conditions in which the generational rhetoric may function as a narrative of historical rupture.

Intellectual Networks and the Shifting Registers of Argumentation: Generation and *Shilaliyya*

Moment One: Sayyid Qutb and the Battle of Literary Criticism in 1934: From Peers to a Mentor

The youth-led irruption in Egypt’s arts and political scene in the mid-1930s provided the conditions for Qutb’s literary breakthrough. Qutb espoused generational rhetoric as early as in 1932, in his first book on literary criticism entitled *The Poet’s Mission in Life and the Poetry of the Present Generation*. There Qutb presented himself as committed to introducing “junior poets” whose voices were marginalized by the clamor surrounding the famous “seniors” (Qutb 1996, 5–6). His commitment

to “junior poets” continued well into 1933, when he joined the Apollo Poetic Society founded a year earlier by the poet Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi. The Apollo Society functioned as a loose network of poets of different aesthetic backgrounds (neo-classicists, Sufis, Romantics, etc.) structured around the association’s headquarters, a monthly periodical and a publishing house. Qutb published four poems in the periodical and, upon joining the *al-Abram* journal as a staff writer in the spring of 1934, he used his position to promote Apollo poets as the new rising generation.¹¹

However, Qutb’s solidarity with the “juniors” of the Apollo association was not meant to last. It was soon compromised by a devastating literary battle that flared up between the famous modernist poet ‘Abbas al-‘Aqqad and the association’s founder Abu Shadi, following the latter’s review of al-‘Aqqad’s newly published poetry collection. Qutb had known al-‘Aqqad since the mid-1920s after meeting the famous poet through his uncle who hosted Qutb during his years as a student (al-Khalidi 2007, 37). Fascinated with al-‘Aqqad’s impressive personality, Qutb eventually started to define himself as his disciple (Qutb 1938, 1951), publishing most of his essays on al-‘Aqqad’s poetry and joining his literary salon (Husayn 1989a, 56).

The literary feud between the poets of the Apollo Society and his mentor al-‘Aqqad placed Qutb in a difficult position. The Apollo battle functioned as a “reality test” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 40–41), which provided the occasion to redefine the literary order. Eventually siding with his mentor al-‘Aqqad, Qutb threw himself fully in the battle. With the assumption of his public role as al-‘Aqqad’s disciple, Qutb relinquished the generational rhetoric with reference to the Apollo Society and switched, instead, to its inversed language of personal motivation, or *shilaliyya*. Suddenly denying the Apollo poets the status of a rising generation, Qutb began accusing them of cronyism, mutual self-promotion, and selfishness. As they had next to no talent, Qutb claimed, the Apollo

¹¹See, for example, Qutb’s assessment of the poet Salih Gawdat in *al-Abram*, April 11, 1934, cited in Badawi (1992, 56–57).

poets' literary success was exclusively due to the association's strategies of self-promotion in its periodical and publishing activities.¹²

In his articles, Qutb intended to disclose "the truth" of the nature of the social ties underpinning the existence of the Apollo Society. Yet, the framing of Apollo poets as both a generation and a coterie contains part of the sociological identity of the group. The poets of Apollo Society might have emerged as a generation had the battle not led to the Society's closure, in December 1934, and the subsequent dispersion of its members. The Apollo Society not only represented a possible generation, but it was also a tightly-knit group of poets, engaged in the strategies of mutual promotion through criticism, book reviewing, and publishing. The switch from the generational rhetoric to the language of *shilaliyya* reveals the way these two alternative registers function as the means of legitimizing and delegitimizing literary communities. The choice of words depends on a particular constellation of relationships in which a writer is entangled; in this case, Qutb's shift of public solidarity from his peers to his mentor.

Moment Two: Sayyid Qutb and the Battle of Juniors and Seniors in 1947: From Mentors to Peers

The "Battle of the Juniors and Seniors" launched by Qutb in 1947 allows one to observe the reversal of the argumentative registers of generation and *shilaliyya*, this time in the opposite direction. During this controversy, Qutb employed these notions to account for his shifting solidarities from his first mentors to young aspiring writers. The literary confrontation took place amid the political agitation in the wake of the World War II. The war had disrupted the foundations of Egypt's cultural and political life. With the lifting of martial law and censorship, the country witnessed a rebirth of the national movement against British colonial rule. Already shaken, trust in the parliamentary system to achieve the nation's goals dwindled still more as the collusion between

¹²Qutb waged the battle in numerous periodicals associated with the Wafd party, namely *al-Jihad*, *al-Wadi* and *al-Ushbu'*.

national elites and the colonial system became increasingly obvious (Gordon 1992, 19–32; Ryzova 2014, 250–59). In this climate, the generational rhetoric evolved. Young Leftist activists gathered in associations, publishing houses and journals used historical materialism to argue that the pioneers of modern literature belonged to a bygone age.¹³ Others accused the famous authors of having monopolized access to the publishing market, blocking their careers, exerting a cronyism of elders.¹⁴ These complaints were compounded by the general feeling that culture should be reformed to meet the requirements of Egypt's upcoming postcolonial future (Di-Capua 2018, 77–107).

Qutb joined the generational confrontation in April 1947. Since the lifting of martial law in 1945, he had been involved in various forms of activism for social justice and Egyptian independence, writing fiery articles in the press and campaigning for the public service reform.¹⁵ Reacting to the ongoing generational talk, Qutb published an article in his edited periodical *The Arab World* declaring that war had begun between “junior” and “senior” writers. Entitled “The Beginning of the Battle: Literary Consciousness in Egypt: Juniors and Seniors,” the article listed the “crimes” committed by the “seniors”: their support for the Allied Forces during the war, involvement in party bickering, and serving the entertainment industry in exchange for material gain. In addition to these socio-political failings, Qutb added an accusation of literary favoritism in which the “senior” writers allegedly promoted their sycophants—or as he put it “their tails and accompanying chorus”—at the expense of other, “honorable men” (Qutb 1951). In other words, Qutb tapped the argumentative register of *shilaliyya* to denounce the selective promotion of disciples by their mentors by the means of criticism, book reviews, or prefaces.

¹³The collective *al-Fajr al-Jadid* was one of these. See, for example, articles published in their journal by Amin Takla (2009), and Nu'man 'Ashur (2009).

¹⁴See al-ʿAqqad's response to such an accusation in al-ʿAqqad (1942).

¹⁵Qutb was particularly active in the campaign for the public service reform in the Ministry of Instruction, in which he worked. The reform was particularly needed, Qutb argued, to abolish the privileges accorded to the graduates of the Egyptian University under the pretext of their proficiency in European languages. See Qutb's article *Naqd Kitab Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (1969) and especially the articles published in his edited periodical *The New Thought* in 1948.

Qutb's involvement in the generational battle was accompanied by a shift of his public solidarities to different literary communities. In 1947, he publicly announced his breaking of "the literary school" of al-'Aqqad (Qutb 1947, cited in Younis 1995, 81). Gradually, Qutb's offensive against "the generation of *udaba*" spilled over to the majority of his postwar writings published as journal essays or books.¹⁶

The most eloquent testimony of the role the framing of literary groups in terms of *shilaliyya* plays in controversies is Qutb's public letter addressed to one of the representatives of the pioneer writers, the historian and encyclopedist Ahmad Amin. Qutb used his own example to denounce the favoritism permeating the literary world: "I have been a disciple (*murid*), in the full sense of the word, of a man of your generation whom you all certainly know," Qutb wrote, referring to al-'Aqqad. "I have been a friend to many others. I wrote about all of them without exception, and explained their opinions, presented their books and analyzed their works. Then my turn came. My turn came to author books after having published essays, articles, and poems [...]. What was the reaction of my teacher (*ustadhi*)? What was the reaction of your entire generation?!" Apart from two meager references to his work in a daily periodical and on a radio show, there was an overwhelming silence, Qutb noted bitterly (Qutb 1951). Demonstrating the significance that literary criticism had for social ties between writers, this excerpt speaks of broken expectations of promotion tied to his status of disciple.

In parallel to leading the war against his mentor's generation, Qutb strengthened his ties to literary communities of aspiring novelists. The shift of solidarities from the established modernist writers to young authors is visible, first and foremost, in Qutb's choice of literary works for a review in his literary column in the *al-Risala* magazine. From the end of 1944, Qutb began reviewing works authored by the young novelists of a collective known as the Publishing Committee for University Graduates. The launch of the Publishing Committee in June 1942, by the Misr Publishing House, was a direct response to the monopoly held by "senior" writers on the publishing market, which prevented young

¹⁶For example, Qutb criticizes Tawfiq al-Hakim in Qutb (1983, 121, footnote 1); al-Aqqad in *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, February 26, 1948; Taha Husayn in Qutb (1951). He denounced modernist writers as a generation in Qutb (1993, 100–1).

authors from publishing their works (al-Sahhar 1991, 134). Some of the Publishing Committee's members, such as Naguib Mahfuz or 'Ali Ahmad Bakathir, were the rising stars of Egypt's literary competitions, but despite this they were unable to find publisher for their novels. Their dissemination initiative, through the Publishing Committee, aimed to overcome this strain by using cheap paper and limited editions (al-Sahhar 1956).

Qutb joined the collective in 1945. From then until 1951, he used its presses to publish his books, including the two editions of his Islamist best-seller *Social Justice in Islam*.¹⁷ Moreover, Qutb attended the collective's weekly meetings, where he struck up friendships, exchanged books, and conceived common projects.¹⁸ During the following years, the circle transited, with slight changes in membership, to other sites of intellectual practice, such as the short-lived periodicals *The Arab World*, *The New Thought*, and the *Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood*, edited by Qutb in 1947, 1948, and 1954, respectively.

Writing about *The New Thought* three years after its publication, Qutb referred to it as a "battalion" (*katiba*) which had been struggling to establish a "clean society" in Egypt, emphasizing its cohesive commitment to this common goal (Sabasevičiūtė 2018). There is little doubt that the collective, which was structured around Qutb from 1945 to his imprisonment in 1954 following the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, acted as a tightly-knit group based on friendships, gestures of solidarity in the press, and strategies of mutual promotion.

It was the Committee's authors that Qutb had in mind when speaking of the "juniors" in the April 1947 article in which he declared a generational war against "seniors." Qutb's review of Naguib Mahfuz's novel *The New Cairo* demonstrates, once again, how the emergence of generational claims relates to the broken promises of inter-generational transmission. Noting the silence with which Mahfuz's novel was received by the literary community, Qutb suggested that it was due to the author's

¹⁷Qutb published the following books in the Committee's press: *Four Phantoms* (1945), *A Child from the Village* (1946), *Social Justice in Islam* (1949 and 1951).

¹⁸Most of them were published in *al-Risala* between October 1944 and November 1951. See, for example, the testimony by the translator Wadi' Filistin, who met Qutb in the Committee's weekly meetings (Filistin 2003, 283-90). Qutb cooperated with the Committee's co-founder Abd al-Hamid al-Sahhar in producing stories for children.

junior status and lack of protection. He wrote in 1946: “One of the signs of the neglect of [literary] criticism in Egypt [...] is that such a book passes without stirring up a literary or social storm. Is it because of the author’s youth?” Reminding readers that al-Hakim’s literary success years ago had been due to his placing himself under Husayn’s protection, he added: “Or is it because [...] Naguib Mahfuz and his like among the juniors do not throw themselves or their art into the hands of anyone except their readers?” (Qutb 1946a). In Qutb’s view, the arrogance with which seniors regarded juniors’ literary production amounted to betrayal of their literary mission, part of which was a duty of inter-generational transmission. Qutb’s conclusion that this duty had been betrayed contributed to his breaking from his mentors and investing in the juniors’ activities in the Publishing Committee.

Qutb’s position within the Publishing Committee points to the conditions in which a “senior” becomes part of the “juniors.” In many regards, within the Publishing Committee, Qutb was in fact a “senior” among the “juniors.” Not only was he forty while most of the Publishing Committee’s writers were in their twenties, he was also more advanced in his career and could assume the role of a mentor to his younger colleagues. By the time of his association with the Publishing Committee he was supervising a literary column in *al-Risala*, had connections in the publishing market, and was about to assume the editorship of two periodicals. Yet, in 1945 Naguib Mahfuz defined him as “a spokesperson for our present generation” (Mahfouz 1945). He reviewed his junior colleagues’ writing, wrote prefaces to their works, and attempted to place their writing with famous publishers.¹⁹ The literary critic Wadi‘ Filistin described Qutb’s presence in the circle as “encouragement” (*tashji‘*), a term which can also be understood in the sense as mentorship (Filistin 2003, 283).

¹⁹See Qutb’s preface to ‘Abd al-Mun’am Shumayyis’ *Suqut al-Qabira* (1951) and his letter addressed to Husayn in 1945 asking him to publish or at least to “write a word” on a manuscript by his junior colleague, ‘Imad al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid. The letter is reproduced in *Akhhbar al-Adab*, no. 970, 26 February 2012, 17.

Qutb's status within the Publishing Committee points again to the centrality of mentorship as a condition of intellectual circulation across the generational divide. By assuming mentorship, a "senior" can be accepted within the ranks of the "juniors," while the status of discipleship confers privileged access to the world of the "seniors."²⁰ In both cases the vertical bond of transmission has the effect of blurring the generational boundary.

Writing Oneself Into and Out of Generations: The Cases of Naguib Mahfuz and Sayyid Qutb

The Publishing Committee's collective, which both Qutb and Mahfuz referred to as the "junior generation" during the late 1940s, provides an illustration of the disintegration of generational collectives. Despite the historical significance of the role the collective played in laying the groundwork for the Egyptian realist novel, the Publishing Committee has no other presence in Egypt's literary history than as "the fathers of the Sixties Generation."²¹

Examining later, more "successful" cases of generational renewals in Egypt, such as the Sixties generation, the Seventies poetic generation, and the Nineties literary generation (Linthicum 2017, 229–61), Richard Jacquemond has noted that generational collectives tend to implode when some of their members accumulate a sufficient amount of symbolic capital allowing them to pursue their literary career on the individual track (1999, 353). This analytical framework could be expanded in two directions. First, the case of the Publishing Committee suggests that the

²⁰This observation is confirmed by other examples of inter-generational transmission in Egypt, namely the presence of the "senior" novella writer Edward Kharrat within "the Sixties generation" and, in the opposite case, the acceptance of "the juniors" 'Abd al-Hakim Qasim and Gamal al-Ghitani within "the seniors." In the first case, al-Kharrat's place within "the sixties generation" comes from his promotion of young writers through his co-edited magazine *Gallery* 69, while in the second case, Qasim and al-Ghitani "earned" their place within "the seniors" by paying tribute to them. In both cases, inter-generational transmission is possible under the condition of mentorship and of tribute. For the discussion of these cases, see, respectively, Jacquemond (2003, 207–8), Ramadan (2012, 424–25).

²¹This is the title of Muhammad Jibril's book on the Committee (Jibril 1995).

acquisition of a sufficient amount of fame leads authors to claim a place in the history of literature as heirs of the pioneers of modern literature rather than as representatives of their generation. A second observation concerns the choice of the argumentative register through which this claim is made; rather than speaking of intellectual influence, famous authors tend to slip again to the language of personal relationships and mentorship when paying homage to older Egyptian authors.

Multiple factors may explain the historical disruption of the postwar literary generation, among which the 1952 revolution and its transformative effect on individual destinies played a crucial part. Some of the Committee's authors stopped writing literature, others joined Nasser's cultural establishment, and others such as Qutb transited into the Islamist movement. But what also contributed to the disappearance of the postwar generation was the fact that its most famous representative, Naguib Mahfuz, located himself within the heritage of famous writers of the interwar period rather than crediting the Committee for his literary emergence.

In understanding Mahfuz's self-positioning regarding Egypt's literary history, Jacquemond's model of the formation of generational collectives could be combined here with the mechanism of *isnad* described by Armbrust (1996). The diverging positions that Mahfuz and Qutb occupy in contemporary Egypt's official literary history—the former representing the pinnacle of Egypt's literary accomplishment and the latter cast as the dark force seeking Egypt's destruction—exemplifies the different uses of *isnad*.

By joining the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953, Qutb effectively wrote himself out of not only the postwar intellectual generation but also Egypt's literary history at large. Rather than claiming association with Egypt's literary figures, in his post-1954 activities, he slotted himself into the tradition of political Islam. Qutb's decision to re-publish Hasan al-Banna's, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, treatise "My Will" (*Wasiyati*) in the inaugural issue of his edited *Journal of the Muslim Brotherhood* in May 1954 testifies to his ambition to connect himself to the founding figures of Islamic activism.²² This shift is clear in the direction

²² *Majalla al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, May 1954, n. 1, 1.

that his literary criticism took: the overwhelming majority of the authors whose work he reviewed and prefaced from the early 1950s onward were local or transnational Islamic activists.²³

Mahfuz took the opposite road and inserted himself into the lineage of the literary giants of the interwar period. His aspiration to make himself the heir of Egypt's founding fathers of modern literature is visible in his post-Nobel-Prize public writings. In his foreword to a collection of Husayn's letters, Mahfuz presents himself as his disciple ('Abd al-Aziz 2000, 7–11). He adopts a similar stance in his memoir edited by the literary critic Raja' al-Naqqash in the early 1990s. In its section "Writers I Have Known" one would expect to find the details of his relationship with the Committee authors with whom he had shared the miseries of the aspiring writer. Yet Mahfuz dedicates the section to discuss his relationships with the famous writers of the interwar period (al-Naqqash 2011, 73–85).²⁴

By paying public homage to these writers Mahfuz contributed to creating the *isnad* of literary modernity, into which he slotted himself. Such an act might have been determined as much by Mahfuz's personal choice as by the numerous pressures he visibly received from his contemporaries, who, by recording his memoirs or soliciting him to write a preface to the writings of interwar luminaries, pressured him to position himself in regard to the founders of literary modernity.

As a result, Mahfuz lost his identity as part of the postwar literary generation in exchange for the much more coveted position of a purveyor of literary tradition. His case invites reflection on how literary fame affects self-positioning with regard to collectives: an extraordinary literary success singles out a writer and allows him to claim a place as a heir of the pioneers. This explains the observation made by Alain Roussillon that generations in Egypt are defined by a sort of "simultaneity," with no acknowledgeable way to surpass the founding ones (Roussillon 1990,

²³In 1953 he prefaced the books by Khalid Ibrahim 'Argun, the Azhari poet and activist, the Jordanian Muslim Brother Yusuf al-'Azm, and in 1951, Qutb wrote the introduction to the second edition of the best-seller *Madha Khasara al-'Alam bi-Inhītat al-Muslimin* by the South Asian scholar Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi. Qutb's preface to Mahmud's Abu al-Wafa's collection *Anashid Diniyya* in 1953 is an exception to the rule; Abu al-Wafa was a poet and close friend of Qutb.

²⁴Namely Tawfiq al-Hakim, 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, Ibrahim al-Mazni, and Salama Musa.

250–51, cited in Jacquemond 1999, 33). What is striking, however, is that in order to claim a place in this pantheon, authors would use means based in the world of intellectual sociability, such as an assertion to discipleship. In this regard tribute features as a condition of literary authority, revealing the structural role that the institution of mentorship and the practice of tribute play in regulating Egypt's literary tradition and memory.

Conclusion

In the Egyptian context, the notions of generation and *shilla* function as two different language registers describing the writers' tendency to form solidarity-based collectives. The difference between the two lies in their performative value: while the notion of generation acts as a device to legitimize collectives in literary terms, the language of *shilaliyya* aims to delegitimize them as personal bonds, undercutting the commitment to literature as a whole. Qutb's involvement in two literary controversies in colonial Egypt demonstrates the pivoting relationship between these argumentative registers, at the core of which lies the institution of mentorship. While during the 1934 generational crisis, Qutb's aspiration to be al-'Aqqad's disciple made him abandon generational rhetoric, in 1947 the reverse occurred: the feeling that the promises of inter-generational transmission had not been fully fulfilled contributed to his decision to launch a generational war. Because of their strong performative value, the categories of generation and *shilaliyya* work as weapons adopted in reaction to a particular reshuffling of intellectual relationships within which the users of these categories find themselves.

The institution of mentorship plays a determining role in flipping these categories around. The narratives of marginalization that accompany the postwar generational claims indicate that the latter emerges when the bond of inter-generational transmission between juniors and seniors is severed. But besides the usual horizontal generational collectives of peer writers, Egypt's literary history rotates around filiation to pioneering writers who, by virtue of their direct connection to the origins of modernity, hold the power of authorizing literature. The position

of competition or discipleship that a writer adopts in relation to those who are deemed “seniors” determines whether generation functions as a narrative of change or of tradition.

The method used in this chapter can be extrapolated to the study of change in other social contexts defined by the dynamics of competition and collaboration. The majority of modern literary worlds are characterized by an ambiguity between the claim of individualism, rooted in the Romantic image of a writer as “uncreated creator,” and the tendency to form collectives, such as literary coteries, schools and generations, as a means to pursue literary activities. In the scholarship on literary milieus, this specificity of literary practice has often led to the exaggerated significance of rhetoric when analyzing cultural renewals. As a result, cultural innovations have often been studied as the succession of literary styles, aesthetics, and ideas attributed to the genius of famous individual authors. This chapter aimed to suggest a way to make use of the ambiguity between individualization and collectivization in studying change. It suggested that in order to understand how these contradictory tendencies articulate with each other, one should take a closer look into the formation of these collectives by means of textual data produced as the result of intellectual socialization in print, such as literary criticism, battles, prefaces, and dedications. The combined analysis of intellectual sociabilities and rhetorical claims can thus provide fresh insight into the microdynamic forces underpinning larger social and historical processes.

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Part III

Change in the Making



9

Spatializing Social Change: Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Upper Guinea

Anna Dessertine

On a warm evening in June 2011, Madou was drinking tea and eating beans at a bar in a mining camp near Siguiri in Guinea. Several other miners were sitting on wooden benches at small tables covered with colored plastic tablecloths. A television was showing a video clip of Céline Dion, and while some men were discussing her looks, others were merely staring at the ground, apparently thinking or waiting for time to pass. Suddenly, the bright headlights of four motorcycles illuminated the bar before quickly disappearing again. Less than a minute later, the motorcycles came back, this time from the other direction. This parade lasted more than twenty minutes with the bikers going back and forth, interrupting the miners' conversations and reveries in the café bar. After a while, I asked an elderly miner why they were doing this. He responded:

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*,
Anthropology, Change, and Development,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_9

- *They're burning gas to show that they have money.*
- *I don't really understand, I said.*
- *They're burning gas for nothing. It's just to show off. By doing that, they're showing that they don't care about money, that they have enough to waste.*
- *Do miners often do that?*
- *No. It's only the young miners. Times have changed: now it's all about cultivating image. They don't care about others, they don't care about their family, they don't care about anything. They watch video clips of naked women and think they're big guys while they actually do nothing for their living.*
- *Yet they work in the gold mines...*
- *Yeah, but for what? They're empty. Nothing counts nowadays...*

How can an apparently insignificant situation in Guinea where miners are listening to the famous Canadian singer Céline Dion while young men are showing off by burning gas help us understand social change? In this chapter I answer this question from two different perspectives.

The first is methodological, and considers the essential role of ordinary actions, or what Max Gluckman calls “social situations,” in an anthropological approach. In his pioneer article, published in two parts (1940a, b), he opens his analysis of social organization and social change in Zululand with a dense description of the local inauguration of a bridge. Based on this event, he shows how the analysis of social organization and its structure requires attention to apparently insignificant details, and how this is an indicator of broad processes of transformation.

Following Gluckman, I pay attention to what may be seen as minor or insignificant actions and show how they are charged with local meanings about social life, and how the different interpretations of these actions are crucial to understanding social change. More than mere illustrations, the everyday actions, reactions, and conversations described in this chapter gives insights into broader issues at stake for the miners. As such, they not only offer glimpses into the lives of miners but also allow for certain generalizations about change. Potentially conflictual issues crystallize through daily situations, such as diverging conceptions of modernity and tradition, access to diverse consumption practices, gender expectations, and intergenerational conflicts. By analyzing these

issues, I throw light on the empirical complexity of what may be called social change in an artisanal gold and small-scale mining context.¹

The second perspective is theoretical, and concerns the issue of space. Spaces are analyzed here in their complex interconnections (Ferguson and Gupta 1992), and not as a neutral grid to locate people, societies, countries, or cultures as in a map. I focus on mining spaces and see them as shaping an in-between setting implying new modes of relations which partly rely on those deployed in rural areas but also differ from village life in many aspects. I insist on the necessity of spatializing social change by showing how some spaces can be considered transformative because of their in-betweenness. Or, to put it differently, instead of analyzing social change only in relation to time and risking a linear analysis restoring a before and an after, I consider mining spaces as comparable to “hotspots of transition.” These, Jörg Dürrschmidt and Taylor (2007) argue, can be defined as “gravitational centers of change” where the complexity of change can be observed most vividly. What makes these hotspots of transition special is their liminal character, a notion of in-betweenness that I find particularly useful in describing the mobility of artisanal gold miners in Guinea. This chapter explores some of the (inter)actions that emerge from this great mobility and the ways it shapes the artisanal and small-scale gold mining spaces.

I consider that social change emerges at the micro-level through observable action as a result of specific spatio-temporal conditions. I assume: (a) that people may experience change when they feel a gap between the ordinary meaning of an action and the meaning that the action acquires in a new context, and (b) that this gap emerges in particular in so-called liminal spaces that are defined by their own temporality and ambiguity related to their in-betweenness across social settings of expectation (Dürrschmidt and Taylor 2007). Liminality is not merely considered here as dissociation from an ordinary context but also as

¹The question of social change in mining contexts has already been investigated by the School of Manchester, mainly inspired by Gluckman's work. See for example Clyde J. Mitchell and Arnold L. Epstein's studies of the Zambian Copperbelt, focusing on prosperity dreams which the boom of the copper market and the formation of mining cities triggered among the population (dreams we can also find, as we will see, in artisanal mining camps in Guinea) and more broadly, on the flexibility with which the population successfully adapted to the new urban context Epstein (1967), regarding marriage for instance (see Mitchell 1961).

generative of change. I look in particular at specific liminality in artisanal and small-scale gold mines in Guinea. By relying on daily stories and micro-actions, I show that the liminality of these spaces is closely linked to (a) their ephemerality, due to the great mobility of artisanal miners induced by new technologies and political developments; and (b) a cultural economy in which new consumption practices transpose an experience of the “global” and the “modern” at the local level.

This chapter is based on a twenty-month period of fieldwork in 2011–2019 in a rural region in Guinea, during which I spent approximately a year in a Mande village, Guirilan, and six months in different mining camps in the Bouré area, historically known for its gold since the ninth century (Niane and Ki-Zerbo 1991), and near Mandiana.² These areas in Upper Guinea have seen a sharp increase in artisanal gold exploitation since the 2000s, partly due to rises in the price of gold between 2008 and 2012. Artisanal and small-scale gold mining in the region is historically a seasonal activity, with most miners working in the mines during the dry season (November–April) and returning home for the rainy season (May–October) to engage in farming. A third of Guirilan’s inhabitants, with men and women in almost equal numbers, were mining gold in 2011.³ At the end of that year the introduction of metal detectors led to even more mobility, as miners could prospect for gold on larger areas and would even sometimes sleep outside of the camps. This new mobility involves regular movement between the mining sites and between the village. It has also contributed to the erection of temporary markets and camps, where people meet, stay together for a while, and spend the money they have earned from their mining. As I show, the liminality of mining camps can only be understood in relation to these new forms of mobility and consumption. The situation further evolved around 2015 because of the efforts of local authorities to secure the claims of industrial mining companies to prospect certain areas on an exclusive basis. However, I come back to these last changes later on, after discussing the 2011–2015 situation.

²During the fieldwork I used a variety of data collection techniques. In addition to participant observation, I conducted two censuses in Guirilan (one during the dry season and another during the rainy season, to estimate seasonal mining mobility) and interviewed 81 young male miners.

³This estimation is based on two censuses conducted in March and July 2011.

Mines as Liminal Spaces

One of the characteristics of mining camps is that they gather people of different origins during short periods. In Upper Guinea, the camps are as ephemeral as the exploitation of the mining fields surrounding them. Some miners stay for a few days, others for months. The duration of these camps is extremely variable and their composition constantly changes. As mentioned in the introduction, I see these mining camps as “hotspots of transition” for two reasons: they can be analyzed as liminal spaces, and they create situations of social or cultural dissonance by bringing diverging interpretations of meaning and perceptions of the social reality into contact with each other (Dürschmidt and Taylor 2007). I focus here on the former, and question liminality in practice.

Arnold Van Gennep (1909 [1981]) was the first anthropologist to use the notion of liminality in his theory about rites of passage, which he analyzed as moments that mark personal or collective changes of identity. He distinguishes three distinct phases: separation, when the individual or group is distanced from their former identities; aggregation, when the individual or group is readmitted to the society with a new status; and liminality, a moment between the two. The liminal phase is presented as the moment of change, an ambiguous in-between moment when a new identity replaces previous modes of identification. This moment generally occurs in special spaces that are seen as inherently out of the ordinary: a sacred wood, for instance. This process of moving from ordinary space to extra-ordinary space makes the change of status or identity possible.

To some authors, liminality is not only associated with the ritual context, and can be experimented with in other, mostly urban areas: “Our everyday experiences of the global city reflects the liminality of its form: complex patterns of inclusion and exclusion; belonging and not-belonging; rootedness and up-rootedness; and engagement and non-engagement” (Dürschmidt and Taylor 2007, 3). Dürschmidt and Taylor argue that liminality is one of the major characteristics of contemporary society (ibid., 159). It is no longer presented as the ideal changing moment in a more general process, but as *a specific frame or condition of*

the global world, implying ambiguity and the multiple options that it offers.

One could bring this understanding of liminality closer to Victor Turner's (1974) notion of "liminoïd." However, Turner's analysis relies on a distinction between tribal and agrarian societies and more individualistic ones, with liminality developing in the first type of society and the second being predominantly liminoïd. Yet as I show below, this distinction makes little sense in artisanal and small-scale mining spaces, which emerge in what could be considered at first sight a rather rural and agrarian society which at the same time allows the emergence of unique and individualistic behaviors, confirming the in-betweenness of artisanal and small-scale mining spaces even more clearly. Hence liminality is not seen here as linked to a certain type of society but as a frame specific to the global world, with which mining spaces are interconnected. The following explores the first constituent of this frame: the ephemeral character of mines due to the unsustainable nature of gold exploitation and the miner mobility that this implies. I show how ephemeral temporality allows the rise of actions ordinarily forbidden in rural areas, starting with an anecdote concerning two women.

Coffee and Cigarettes: Challenging Gendered Expectations

In 2011, I spent two months in mining camps near Mandiana, a town about 60 miles east of Kankan. One of the camps was called Faralako and comprised approximately two thousand people, including around 20 inhabitants of Guirilan who had built their huts side by side and were sharing domestic activities such as cooking and cleaning. There were men and women, spouses and children, young and old people in the camp. Every morning, except on Sundays and Mondays, they would go to the field in working groups of four to six men and women to dig pits and lift out bags of gravel. The women stood and washed the gravel in containers in hope of finding gold.⁴ At night, most of the women stayed in their huts to cook and

⁴For more information about the organization of work in artisanal and small-scale gold mining in this region, see Dessertine (2016a) and Bolay (2016) on Guinea, and Panella (2007) on

clean, while the men often sat together in a bar. However, one of the women, Mimi, also liked to go to the bar to drink strong black coffee and smoke. Once a man from Guirilan told me: “She behaves like a man. She walks fast, she drinks coffee, sometimes with no sugar. She’s strong, you know! She’s older than us, and she was the first woman in the village to work in the mines. Before mining for gold, she looked for diamonds in Forested Guinea.”

One evening in May 2011, Mimi came back from a bar called At the Big Boss. She seemed angry. She was with a young woman from a village near Guirilan who had come to Faralako with others from the same village. While they were chatting in the bar a man walking by had spat on the ground near them while looking at the young woman. When Mimi asked her who he was, the young woman told her that they had met once before and he was angry with her for refusing his explicit advances. A man who overheard the story jumped in and said: “She’s a liar. I’m sure she had intercourse with the man. She’s always walking, God knows where she’s going. Maybe she even stole his money—girls are like that nowadays. That’s why he spat at her. It could have been worse.” Mimi answered that he could be right, but that life in mining is another world, an “open world.”⁵ The man agreed: “Mines are special, they’re like nowhere else.” When I asked for an explanation Mimi answered that gold mines are like an ambivalent ‘gate’ (da in Malinké), which can open up a world of opportunities [‘chance,’ harigε] but also a world where one runs the risk of getting lost [tunun].

Women are highly visible in the gold mines.⁶ They work in groups lifting the bags of gravel and sometimes washing it (Dessertine 2016a). Artisanal gold mining offers them a financial opportunity as well as new mobility possibilities. Their mobility tends to be strongly regulated by the other villagers, and only a few women migrate to distant locations. As I have shown in a study on the mobility of the inhabitants of Guirilan (Dessertine 2013), these women were mostly first spouses and widows involved in the long-distance trade with Bamako (Mali).⁷ Their ability

Mali. More generally, see also D’Angelo on the exploitation on diamonds in Sierra Leone (2014, 2015) and Grätz on the “frontiers” of artisanal mining in West Africa (2004).

⁵Even though we were mostly speaking in Malinké, she said this in French: “*un monde ouvert.*”

⁶Some authors report them making up 50% of artisanal gold miners, as in Mali (Hentschel et al. 2003, 31).

⁷The inhabitants of this region practice polygyny.

to migrate was closely linked to the duration of their marriage: as in other West African countries, the older a woman is the more her mobility is tolerated. Indeed, the more mobile are mostly first wives, the ones who are married for a longer time compared to the second, third, or fourth wife. However, in gold mining it makes no difference whether a woman is young or old, married or single. Thus, these spaces offer the opportunity to move for those who are not normally allowed to be mobile. This was made easier by their numerous movements between the mining sites and the village, the short duration of their stays in the camps, mostly only a few days, and the fact that the women I stayed with were mostly with working groups made up of inhabitants of Guirilan. In the mornings they did not go to the mining fields alone: they—and single women in particular—were always accompanied by their husbands, by their brothers or by older married women, even when they went to relieve themselves in the bush.

Despite this supervision of their mobility, and especially that of young and single women, staying at the gold mines allows them to act and behave differently. The description above on that point is explicit, because in the village of Guirilan women do not ordinarily sit and drink coffee with men. Some might discreetly ask the bartender for a little plastic bag of coffee, which they consume behind closed doors in their mud hut. In Faralako, women sat with men, and sometimes even with foreigners, at the café-bar. This is what makes mines special, a place like nowhere else where actions that are normally forbidden to some actors are allowed, and where normally invisible behaviors are unveiled before everyone's eyes.

The particularity of the (inter)actions that arise in artisanal and small-scale mining spaces can be analyzed in terms of what Foucault calls *heterotopia*, spaces that are “counter-sites” “where ‘normal’ social behavior is not only contradicted but sometimes inverted” (Werthmann 2010, 131), sometimes even provoking long-lasting transformations (Dessertine 2016a). Indeed, these spaces are not only places where people can act in a way ordinarily seen as inappropriate; they are also places where individuals' status can change permanently, confirming its liminal nature. Mimi, for instance, dares to sit in the bar with men in Guirilan and has acquired a specific status due to her long years working

in the mines. The villagers use certain expressions to describe her: “She’s like a man”; “She’s spent a long time in mining,” etc. It is as if her long and repeated stays at the artisanal gold mines allow her to adopt a masculine behavior, which continues when she returns to the village. Mining spaces can thus assume a liminal role because of the relationships they allow and their dynamic form, which is always being recomposed and renegotiated by the multiple back-and-forth of migrants between the village and the mining sites. To put it differently, these spaces create the conditions of change because of their ephemeral and unstable setting.

However, the dynamism and the liminality of artisanal mining spaces are neither linear nor without conflict. In Mimi’s explanation about the man who spat on a young girl with whom she was sitting in a café-bar because he was angry at the young woman’s refusal of his sexual advances, what is interesting is the first comments of a bystander: “*She’s always walking, God knows where she’s going.*” If mining spaces allow more mobility for women, there is a threshold that they should not overstep: a single woman walking alone without informing somebody with whom she shares her life in camp about it is condemned, as it raises suspicions that she is involved in a morally reprehensible behavior, such as having sexual intercourse with a stranger. Hence, while mining spaces provide opportunities to challenge gendered expectations, certain norms do not change. This shows that liminal spaces are intrinsically conflictual. They are at the core of processes of social change, giving new opportunities to subaltern actors which can have long-lasting consequences, as in Mimi’s case. Indeed, they can, as Mimi put it, open the doors to another world, offering opportunities for contestation and transformation of the existing social order.

A Doorway to a Modern World?

It was a Sunday afternoon at Faralako in May 2011, and Lansiné and his fellow villagers from Guirilan had the day off. Lansiné was preparing tea while someone spread a big carpet on the ground under a tree for them to sit on. Only Lansiné sat on a plastic chair he had bought at the nearby market. A young man, stretching and relaxing his arms, said: “Life in mining is

good!” (daman ka pi, literally “mines are soft, good”). Lansiné laughed and said “You’re young – young people like mining.” I asked him why he’d said that. He responded: “You can find everything in mining,” and the young man continued “In mining I can do a lot of things I can’t do in Guirilan. Look, first there’s a market with lots of different products. I can buy beans, t-shirts, clothes, a cell phone—a lot of stuff we don’t find in the village.” Lansiné started to explain, teasing the young man, that in mining he can spend his money directly without having to give part of it to his parents. The young man seemed a little embarrassed but did not contradict Lansiné. He started to justify himself: “Life for young people is not the same nowadays. There are a lot of expenses: good clothes, a phone, a motorbike; if you want to be respected, you must have things. Young people don’t want to be excluded anymore.” “Excluded from what?” I asked. “From the world. Mining can give us the chance to enter it.” After a while two women came with food for everyone: beans, rice with peanut sauce, and skewers of liver. The young man looked at me and said “You see? Here it’s like Europe. We have meat and different kinds of food. What do you say now?”⁸

Mining is described above as an opportunity to enter a world from which the young man had felt excluded when he was living in the village. This exclusion seems in part to depend on access to a variety of products. Miners feel that they can experience another world and leave their village life behind via new forms of consumption in the mining areas, whose markets offer a range of products that some young people associate with the European world, or at least with a form of inclusion in the global world. Mining spaces are not just liminal: they are doorways to the world, tacitly questioning the issue of modernity. Even if the young man did not express it clearly, his position toward the life in mining camps reminds of the dualism which James Ferguson analyzed in regard of the Zambian Copperbelt: “A persuasive and familiar dualism structured the way that most Copperbelt dwellers spoke about such matters. Contrasting styles of urban dress and comportment, workers said, reflected a fundamental difference between ‘town ways’ and ‘village ways’. But what they described in one breath as a difference between

⁸This rhetorical question seemed to be a way of challenging me about my lifestyle and emphasizing the fact that life in mining can provide as much as in Europe.

urban and rural might in the next become a contrast between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, ‘European’ versus ‘African’, or even ‘educated’ versus ‘uneducated’” ([1959] 1999, 83).

As Ferguson points out, this dualist approach is further complicated by its ideological roots in modernization projects and their reinterpretations by the inhabitants of the region he studied. My informants, young and old, invoked the idea of a linear process from tradition to modernity, and mining sites seemed to be able to speed up this passage due to their role as liminal places that are neither village nor city. This liminality allows not only women to challenge gendered expectations but also young men to experiment with new forms of consumption and the performance of “modern” behavior. Like Sasha Newell’s (2012) description of young men in Côte d’Ivoire who spent their meagre resources on branded clothing, technology, and food and drink, the young miners I met were eager to show off their access to and familiarity with the modern world, enabled by their new-found wealth.

The returns from mining, however, are not stable. While I heard many stories of miners who had made a fortune, triggering local mythologies of success, most of those whom I accompanied only made a little money every day. As one miner told me, “You never know what you’re going to find—it’s like a poker game.” The imaginary of the game, and more generally of luck and gambling (D’Angelo 2015) is linked to specific understandings of money and its uses. Earnings from artisanal gold mining are perceived as “hot money” in contrast to the “cold money” earned from agriculture (see also Znoj 1998; Walsh 2003). Writing on sapphire mining in Madagascar, Walsh (2003, 302) links hot money to “daring consumption.” He argues that while cold money is linked to continuity, hot money is associated with a temporality of disruption.

Similar associations apply in small-scale gold mines in Guinea. The vignette introducing this chapter showed the heterogenous temporalities of consumption in mining areas. The actions of the young men who were burning gas to show off their quick economic success and impress others were oriented toward the instant. Older miners who criticized these youngsters as irresponsible alluded to the importance of redistribution to establish the continuity of both existing social relations such as family ties, and financial returns, since redistribution supports the beneficiaries’

subsistence and the miners' future success. Even if the tensions between these two forms of temporality—instantaneity and continuity—are a common cause of frictions between generations, the liminality of mining spaces brings them more closely into contact (Bergson [1889] 2013), and the clashes which this imbrication of relations to time provokes makes explicit dynamics of change which otherwise remain tacit. Below I show how the potential of change in mining camps is closely linked in this context to the ephemeral nature of artisanal and small-scale spaces of gold mining.

Mines as Ephemeral Spaces?

Mines are transformative, not just for those working and living there but also in their own right. Mining spaces appear and disappear, grow and decline as a result of various political, ecological, technological, and social factors. In 2015–2016, the military started systematically destroying mining camps, mostly by burning them. These interventions were officially presented as a way of securing the properties and fields of the industrial mining companies that had arrived in the region in large numbers after the Guinean government delivered many mining permits to them starting from 2014–2015 (Dessertine 2019).⁹ The result, however, was not so much the disappearance of mining spaces as the mutation and relocation of artisanal and small-scale mining activities.

These changes were heightened by an increasing mechanization of mining and the spread of the new communication technologies. The introduction of metal detectors resulted in a more random mobility which allowed miners to spend only a day or two exploring a particular field before moving on to another. They slept sometimes in the bush, sometimes in the courtyard of a neighboring household or a hut rented from a local inhabitant, no longer establishing themselves in a particular camp by building a hut. This mobility has been facilitated by mobile

⁹A new Mining Code has already encouraged the liberalization of mining permits in 2011. However, because of the political instability at the beginning of Alpha Condé's presidency between 2011 and 2013 and the Ebola epidemic between 2013 and 2015, the delivering of mining permits has accelerated only after 2015.

phones, allowing miners to exchange information on mining locations and to stay in contact with those left behind in the village. Women were mostly excluded from this mobility, either because their family did not allow it or because they chose to stay at home. Since the camps had been destroyed female miners were no longer able to resort to the protection of their own huts in the evenings, and concern for their safety had risen with the violent conflicts for the access of mining areas triggered by their militarization.

One consequence of these developments has been the masculinization of artisanal mining mobility and the feminization of their villages of origin, such as Guirilan. When I visited this village in 2017, most of the men had left to work in the mines. Some women found this a relief as they were no longer under the strict control of their fathers, brothers, or husbands, and could manage the profits from their gardening for themselves, giving them more financial autonomy. Moving between mining spaces became more masculine, opportunistic, and temporal. Cell phones, as I show below, play a central role in these new temporalities in mining spaces. However, this masculinization of mining mobility is not visible everywhere. In other villages in the Bouré region where men as well as women have been exploiting gold for centuries, another phenomenon can be observed: the rapid expansion of mining villages. Government restrictions on artisanal miners aimed to curb their mobility by allocating particular villages as mining sites and providing infrastructure such as buildings to facilitate mining and keep the miners in one place. Below I analyze these two a priori opposite trends: one leading to miners' hyper-mobility, and the other to the anchoring of mining spaces through micro-urbanization (Fig. 9.1).

Hyper-Mobility: Mine(Rs) on the Move

It has become something of a truism to say that the spread of cell phones has had a major impact on daily life and social relations all over the world. Focusing on Africa, Mirjam De Bruijn (2008, 18) calls for the study of the relationship between communication and societal change as mobile phones cause migrants on the margins to increasingly enter



Fig. 9.1 Some shelters remaining in the mining town of Banjoula. New concrete buildings are visible in the background (Photo by the author)

“a life of ‘in-betweenness’ in which they constantly have to juggle with the faraway and the new environment close by, a situation that is experienced as coercive.” This is also the case for miners, for whom mobile phones have become central to mediating between mining spaces, as well as between mining spaces and the village, in their context of increased mobility.

When I came back in Guinea for a six-month period of fieldwork in September 2012, I was struck by how many of the inhabitants of Guirilan had a cell phone. When I had first visited this village in 2006, no one owned a cell phone and many had asked me if I could bring them one. Yet by 2012 old models of mobile phones as well as smartphones were a common possession. They had become essential for the single men who went to work in the gold mines, as became clear to me when I accompanied Musa and two other young men to the gold mines in October and December that year. We did not know where to go at first, and decided to visit an acquaintance of Musa’s in Siguiri. When we arrived at his place and started making tea, Musa received a phone call. It was Lamine calling him from Balato, a place

near Siguiri known for its promising mining sites. Lamine proposed that we come and stay with him in a mud but he had rented for a few nights from an inhabitant of Balato. We therefore packed our bags and went by bike to Balato. After three days, during which we found a few decigrams of gold, Musa's phone rang again. It was Madou, another native of Guirilan, who told him about a new field near Kourémalé at the Malian border. We decided to go and packed our bags again. After two days one of the young men of my group, Sékou, received a call from his mother, who wanted him to come home to help his younger brother with the farming as he had injured his foot. Sékou left for a week, during which we continued searching for a suitable place for prospecting, and then joined us again at Kourémalé. He spoke to his mother and his younger brother on the phone every day to make sure that they were alright without him. Once, after talking to his mother, he was smiling contentedly. I asked him what was going on and he replied that he was so happy to be able to communicate with his family on a daily basis, because it meant that "We [his family and himself] are together (an bε lé)."

This story shows that cell phones have the effect of making miners' mobility speedier and more volatile. Moreover, it shows that cell phones are more than just a communication tool; they are essential actors in their mobility, enabling them to maintain a form of presence at home despite their absence. First, they can be classically analyzed as a form of mediatized presence. By calling their families, the migrants ensure a form of presence and maintain an emotional and social continuity despite the geographical distance. Second, cell phones can be used with varying degrees of success to get migrants to return home: their presence is then no longer mediatized but immediate.

These observations are common in the literature, but what seems specific in this context is how presence and social recognition are closely linked there (Dessertine 2016b). The inhabitants of this region consider being present and visible necessary to perpetuate their social status. Physical visibility is fundamental to social recognition: old people are thus expected to be visible every day, sitting in their households' central courtyard; married men cannot leave their families for more than few weeks; single men must return home the day they become head of a household, etc. These obligations, even if their application may vary, produce

different temporalities of absence depending on the individuals' age, sex, and status (Dessertine 2013). The use of cell phones seems to partly conciliate mining mobility and the social obligation to be present by giving rise to more opportunistic migration and round trips between the mining sites and the village. Hence cell phones offer new possibilities for mobility while at the same time, as in the case of Sékou, allowing forms of presence. However, even if cell phones are for some a means of maintaining good relations with the family, and more generally with the inhabitants of Guirilan, they also allow the family back in the village to pressure the migrant to fulfil her or his social obligations or return to the village. Of the 81 miners that I interviewed, 11 explicitly mentioned this ambivalence linked to cell phones and the family's ability to use them to exert pressure on them. Some miners, especially those who were not very successful at finding gold or who had spent their earnings in an ostentatious way, had partly cut their ties with their families because they did not want to return with nothing to give them.

The spread of cell phones combined with the spread of metal detectors has thus changed the miners' mobility patterns and social practices and prompted them to adopt forms of hyper-mobility. At the same time mining spaces are changing, becoming more ephemeral in certain areas and increasingly controlled by State authorities and industrial mining companies in others. Below I discuss what this means for the liminality of mining spaces, and whether they can still be seen as hotspots of change.

Micro-Urbanization: Mining Territorialization

While certain miners have become increasingly mobile, seeking to escape from the military operations to secure the claims of industrial companies on mining areas by becoming itinerants (Bolay 2016, 2017), others have become more fixed in particular mining spaces due to the increased regulation of mining practices through permits and stricter control of the mobility of miners. The military operations since 2015–2016 aimed to control mining, and mining companies have hired Guinean soldiers and officers to protect their sites. This has resulted in increased conflict over access to mining areas, with the result that the access to the sites has been drastically reduced, as shown in this conflictual social situation:

In 2019, I went to Upper Guinea near the town of Lero, approximately 40 km from the Malian border.¹⁰ I was on my way back to town having stayed in a mining village for some days, when I saw people blocking the road with rocks. They were mainly women, who were crying and shouting at the police and at representatives of the local authorities.¹¹ I stopped to ask what was going on. One of the women explained that they had been searching for gold in a field nearby and the police had come to evict them. One gendarme had pushed a woman, who had fallen and broken her arm, and beaten another. I looked at the two injured women, one of whom was unconscious with blood on her face and body. The gendarme who had done this worked on behalf of the major mining company in the area, Nordgold, and was in charge of expelling artisanal miners from company land. However, as the women repeated again and again, they had nothing left, no employment, and relied on prospecting for gold in this location to be able to feed their children. The soldiers and the representatives of local authorities who were present that day responded that this land now belonged to the mining company, which had a permit, and that they should respect the boundaries of the area that they could no longer enter legally. They gathered the women and took them to the jail in the military camp.

This example illustrates the emergence of new forms of mining in Guinea and how these are linked to the establishment of particular mining territories, legal regulations about private property and the use of State security forces to protect the boundaries of mining areas allotted to industrial companies. This territorial conception of space differs from that associated with artisanal and small-scale mining spaces: the first relies on national law and fixed boundaries, while the second is intrinsically changing with negotiable boundaries and falls within the scope of

¹⁰This fieldwork was part of a larger project on Lassa fever conducted with funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG FI 1781/1-1).

¹¹As noted, Lero is one of the areas in this region where inhabitants have been prospecting for gold for centuries. This explains why, in contrast to Guirilan, women did not interrupt their mining activities after that the military operations hindered their mobility.

customary law. While there would be a lot to say about the juxtaposition of these two conceptions of space, I focus here on how mining sites evolve as hotspots of change.¹²

The liminality of artisanal and small-scale mining spaces has been explained through their ephemeral nature which gives them their potential for change. How does the introduction of a territorial conception of space, linked to the temporality of permanence, redefine the modalities of social change? From the miners' point of view the introduction of this conception of space excludes them from land that they consider their property via customary law, and more generally from the benefits of owning gold. Camps are increasingly becoming extensions of villages, as according to the newest government regulations artisanal miners have to build a concrete building or at least a mud hut to be allowed to continue searching for gold on a given area. This anchoring of miners in space has led to the micro-urbanization of villages, some of which have tripled in size. In parallel, areas of artisanal exploitation are increasingly reduced by the expansion of legal industrial mining permits. The miners perceive this impossibility to move freely as a form of stagnation, reinforcing the argument that spaces are associated with specific perceptions of time. Moreover, it undermines the liminal character of the camps. Although it is too soon to speculate on how these processes of micro-urbanizations will evolve, it shows how the perception of time and with it, social change, is constructed by the forms that space takes.

¹²I have discussed the effects of the juxtaposition of mining spaces in more detail in previous publications: Dessertine (2016b, 2017, 2019).

Conclusion: Understanding Social Change Through the Analysis of Spaces

This chapter began by considering social change from a spatial rather than the classical temporal perspective, without excluding a temporal perspective on the emergence, perpetuation, and disappearance of specific mining spaces. Mining spaces are constantly changing and being reconfigured, and this is why I first analyzed them as liminal and transformative as they allow for new kinds of behavior and practice. Within such liminal spaces men and women can experiment with behavior normally condemned in their villages, and can experience new forms of consumption normally associated with the “modern” world. These spaces are central to the changes in a migrant’s status, not merely in economic terms but also, symbolically, as a representation of an “elsewhere.” In gold mining, this “elsewhere,” qualified as “Europe,” “modernity” or “the West” becomes tangible. In this context, miners seem to move between places and at the same time between imaginary spaces. Indeed, the mobility of gold miners is analogical to them to a movement between new rural spaces and the “modern” world as they imagine it, introducing a time jump and an access to another temporality. In that sense, the spatial changes inherent in the mobility of mining activity and the changing character of mining spaces contain a temporal dimension, perceived by the miners as a social change.

Nevertheless, since the introduction of industrial mining permits and the systematization of military operations of expulsion hinders the mobility of miners, the feeling of stagnation it triggered has led to the waning of what could have been considered “hotspots of transition” (Dürschmidt and Taylor 2007), meaning that the perception of space is also a perception of time, and that spaces shape how people see and feel social change. Thus, social change should no longer be understood according to a linear reading of time but as bound to spaces where diverse temporalities are imbricated (Bergson [1889] 2013) and where the individuals have the opportunity to perform and experience change.

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10

The Affects of Change: An Ethnography of the Affective Experiences of the 2013 Military Intervention in Egypt

Maria Frederika Malmström

Nuur was the first person who told me, in the fall of 2016, that she continued to experience the past in the present. She said that during this time the streets were telling her a story that was different to what I saw and experienced in Greater Cairo. As soon as she went out of her apartment and downtown she could sense and see dead bodies from the tumultuous revolts from the past. “The streets are talking to me,” she said, and she tried to explain: “We see other things in the street. So many layers...”

The overall subject of this book is how to study change. While other contributions use narratives, objects, institutions, or particular events to

¹The selected ethnographical vignettes and some sections on my mode of analysis in this chapter are discussed further in Malmström (2019).

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Y. Berriane et al. (eds.), *Methodological Approaches to Societies in Transformation*, Anthropology, Change, and Development, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65067-4_10

make sense of change, I want to take a different approach and explore the role of emotions, feelings, and ambience in the way change is experienced, embodied, and materialized—just like how Nuur felt how the streets of Cairo had changed in the aftermath of the revolution in 2011.¹ This approach is particularly relevant when analyzing change in the making in the midst of violent uprisings when conventional research is not possible. With the inquiry into the events of 2011 and beyond in Egypt this chapter discusses and reflects on the affective consequences that resonate with the various phases of political crisis and transform everyday engagement with the material world.

This focus on affect is part of a broader epistemological turn away from language and its critique of post-structuralism's inability to recognize the pre-discursive forces that also shape the body and the way we experience and understand the world. The framework of affect theory allows us to assess societies in flux by rethinking the relation between body and mind. The question that I consider is: how we can ground such an analysis in empirical research? Like Navaro-Yashin (2009) and other anthropologists, I suggest doing so by exploring the materiality of affect. By that I mean questioning both how material surroundings provoke emotional responses and how affect is materialized in the body. Such a multi-paradigmatic theoretical approach takes into account both affect and materiality that enables me to formulate new questions and thoughts as well as to develop a methodology of research in an extraordinary, constrained political environment.

The precarious security situation in Egypt during the years of crisis prevented researchers from conducting a structured kind of inquiry. As a result, knowledge produced during this volatile time is mostly fragmentary. This chapter seeks to bind fragments together by drawing on the emotions, observations and sensory experiences of my interlocutors and myself. It asks, how do emotions (or effects of affect) move between bodies, objects, places, and spaces in relation to time? I will argue that by looking into the intimate connections between bodies, things, and the cityscape of Cairo we can throw new light on the temporality, frequency, and rhythm of change.

Although the events I describe in this chapter took place in January and February 2011, July and August 2013 and the fall of 2016, my analysis draws on fieldwork carried out during a number of stays of several months' duration between 2013 and 2018 as well as on my continued interactions with my interlocutors through phone calls and conversations via social media and e-mail when I was outside Egypt. The afterlife of the failed January 25 Revolution is key to situating the temporal layer in which this research took place, since every afterlife of a critical event (Das 1995) "influences present-day social practices and creates new affective worlds" (Škrbić Alempijević and Potkonjak 2016, 108). The story of Nuur indeed shows the importance of bringing temporality and duration into the analysis of how people experienced that aftermath of a revolution, and how after rapid transformations and trauma, they may live in two times at the same time.

I have known many of my research subjects since the early 2000s; they are Cairene women and men of different generations and social strata, mostly well-educated, and with different, and often changing, orientations in relation to Islam. Some have no religion, some are Sunni, some combine Sufism and communism—at the moment (cf. Schielke 2015). Most identify as Muslims but choose a bohemian lifestyle and a private relationship with God, actively negotiating social and religious contexts. They frequent local coffee shops and alternative bars in downtown Cairo. The women and men are, in their own view, critical, Left-oriented, and politically aware, sometimes referring to themselves as intellectuals (*muthaqqafin* for men and *muthaqqafat* for women) or the new bourgeoisie. They include poets, writers, film-makers, actors, musicians, and dancers with varying and generally uncertain incomes, often also working outside their vocation to survive. Others are journalists, lawyers, scholars, and human rights activists. In light of the politically sensitive nature of the subject matter here I have decided not to provide any further information about them to ensure their safety.

The Rhythms of a Revolution and Its Aftermath

To begin this exploration of materiality, affects, and rhythms, I would like to introduce a love story that was significantly shaped by the revolutionary events of 2011² and their aftermath:

Early February, 2011: Downtown Cairo

On February 2, 2011, the day of the Battle of the Camels, when pro-Mubarak thugs on horses and camels attacked protesters in Tahrir Square (BBC 2012), Fatma was standing in front of the Egyptian Museum with Hani, whom she had met just before the failed revolution of January 25, when a young man standing beside her was shot in the head.

Maria, he got shot in the brain, nobody knows who did it... after the 28th there were no police, they didn't exist... Who sent the snipers?... nobody knows ... some guys who belong to the police or criminals paid by Mubarak...

Someone asked her to hold the back of his head, and she remembered that it had felt strangely soft. She could touch his brain. It was all over her clothes. The young man died in her arms. At that moment she sensed a strong sexual arousal. As she recalled this experience she also told me that this was the one time in her life she had ever expressed in words that she wanted to have sex (see Malmström 2019). She had whispered to Hani. "I want you, NOW."

Later in February, 2011: Downtown Cairo

Fatma had difficulties talking about when Hani left her for the first time. But once, she did: she told me that after the eighteen days they had "lived on the streets" and had been shot at at least four times (the snipers missed),

²The so-called Arab Spring was a series of anti-government uprisings that spread across the Middle East and North Africa from late 2010 onwards.

Hani had left her. She did not understand. Fatma began her story with the following words:

I felt as if my head was being squeezed by a stone, and something heavy was lying on my chest. I had a high pulse, but low blood pressure.

Fatma did not leave her bed or eat for ten days. She lost a lot of weight. Hani called one of her daughters and begged her not to let Fatma slip out of his hands, saying that he would never let her go.

January, 2015: Downtown Cairo

In January 2015, after four years of ups and downs following the dynamics and rhythms of oppositional politics in Egypt, the relationship between Fatma and Hani was over. She finally left him. His last words were, “You will come back to me.” Fatma told me that that would never happen and said with sorrow in her voice, “I will never forget him, even though he’s mortally injured me.”

A striking aspect of Fatma’s narrative is the parallel between her arousal at the start of her relationship with Hani triggered by holding a man with a mortal head injury and the ways she physically experiences her separation as her head “being squeezed.” Above and beyond, her narrative shows the various intensities of love that follows the political rhythm as well as the constant uncertainty of the floating days and nights that encompass revolutions and the intense embodied lived memories of the insecure political bodies that may return unexpectedly in new contexts.

Many of my friends spoke about passion of varying intensity: intense love during the intense moments of the uprisings, the “death” of that same love during “slow” periods, and the rebirth of passion (with the same person or another) during new politically intense periods. Both women and men recounted certain urban spots, often with dreamy eyes and a touch of nostalgia in their voices. Something similar happened when they talked about the clothes they wore (they were “sacred”), the taste and the scent of the food they ate, or the energy and euphoria

they sensed from the crowd in the iconic Square or elsewhere during, for example, the first eighteen days of the 2011 uprisings.

These accounts show that bodies, objects, and places play a crucial role in how events and changes are experienced. They also show how different rhythms are involved. By combining a focus on the materiality of affect (Besnier 1990; Coole and Frost 2010; Grosz 2010; Harman 2010; Massumi 1995, 2002) with what Lefebvre called rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre 2004; Lefebvre and Régulier 2004), we can reach new insights about transformations that unfold during fierce uprisings in relation to both individuals and collectives. As Lefebvre (2004) points out:

The body consists of a bundle of rhythms, different but in tune. It is not only in music that one produces **perfect** harmonies. The body produces a **garland** of rhythms, one could say a bouquet, though these words suggest an aesthetic arrangement, as if the artist nature had foreseen beauty—the harmony of the body (of bodies)—that results from all its history. (Lefebvre 2004, 20)

Lefebvre understands rhythm as a way of reading a space and as the repetition of a measure at a certain frequency. Strongly relevant to the analysis of social change in relation to revolution and war, which the above and below ethnographic brief accounts make explicit, Lefebvre and Régulier (2004, 77) point out that “We are only conscious of most of our rhythms when we begin to suffer from some irregularity.” This theoretical take offers a novel approach to societies in potential change at “an exceptional time” (Scott 2014, 34), and insights into public affect and its transmission during periods of low intensity and moments of forced stability (Fig. 10.1).



Fig. 10.1 Devices of resistance, May 2013 (Photo by author)

The Massacre and the Trauma

Exploring the changes related to individuals and collectives in their relation to rhythm, as we can see with the examples of Nuur and Fatma, has political consequences (cf. Mahmood 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2002). The body acts, talks, and influences but with other means than common language. The body is also evidence, and can be de/re-formed by events, as other scholars have stated (Scheper-Huges and Bourgois 2004). Bodies

set into collectives as in demonstrations may also make political struggles tangible, sometimes reaffirming and sometimes contesting forms of domination.

As an example, let us turn to summer 2013. On August 14, 2013, the sit-ins in Cairo at Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda were dispersed by the Egyptian military, in what Human Rights Watch (2014) identifies as one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history. The Rabaa al-Adawiya and al-Nahda sites were occupied by thousands of supporters of ex-President Mohamed Morsi, who had been ousted on July 3, as well as by others protesting the military's political intervention. The dispersal of the sit-ins turned out to be both the beginning and the continuation of the state's fight against what it perceives as (global) terrorism. Afterwards, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the current President of Egypt, was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister, also retaining his post as Minister of Defense. He immediately addressed the nation on national television about the need to fight terrorism, continuing the strategy used by former Egyptian state leaders to weaken political opposition, and not least the Mubarak regime, which "had staked its international legitimacy on its claim to be acting as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood" (Hirschkind 2012, 50).

Grand narratives about massacres always involve a conflict between different interpretations of different ideologies—in this case, two institutions with two different narratives about Egypt's history and future: the modern nationalist movement and the revivalist Islamist current—and the manipulation of consciousness. Who has the right to speak on behalf of history? Who has the right to exist?

What I call a collective body of trauma developed quickly during these first days of horror among the politically active Egyptians I know, both in continuation and in disruption with their affective experiences since the January 25 Revolution. A clear majority of my interlocutors who were politically active during the uprisings and lived through both joy and despair talk explicitly about their own and others' tangible affective responses to politics as depression, denial, anger, fatigue, and a sense of hopelessness that developed following the summer of 2013. They also note how psychiatric medication became commonly prescribed

thereafter, not only among themselves, to help people to cope with the everyday.

Here is an example: Kamal, a young male protester, who, among many others, was shot in the eye by Central Security Forces snipers who targeted protesters' heads from November 2011 onwards. He was still deeply depressed when I talked with him many years after the incident. He was convinced that his eye had been unable to be part of his body any longer and had been forced to leave it because of the protesters' massive political failure from 2011 onwards. He underscored the indivisibility of his individual body and the failure of the revolts. He resisted to use "the fake eye" for a long time during the novel "slow time" in Egypt, maybe because it not only reminded him about the collective failure during previous intense time, but that he, by accepting it, let the new regime (and its victory) enter his own body. Here, we can see how Kamal is linking his personal tragedy both casually and symbolically to the political failure as a way of making sense of it while claiming a greater meaning for it.

Sensing Change: A Study of Change Grounded in Empirical Research

An open question, here, is how the trauma resulting from the 2013 massacres could affect so many persons simultaneously. It is in this regard particularly that the empirical appraisal of materialities, affects, and rhythms proves an important heuristic tool for ethnographic research. The days that followed the massacres of August 2013 were extreme embodied lived experiences because of the silence during the first days, and soon thereafter the pitch black of the curfewed nights, were total opposites of the loud sounds of war during the daytime. This sharp contrast between the sounds and the changes in rhythm during the day and the lack of sound during the night resulted in a general lack of citizens' ability to navigate, because everything had changed in relation to sound, and also, dramatically, to sight, scent, touch, and taste. Cairo nights are normally very loud with the noise of traffic, street vendors, coffee shops, and various types of people strolling around the streets.

During the summer of 2013, Cairo felt more like an unframed territory (Malmström 2014a).

If the researcher and the researcher's interlocutors experienced affective politics together through the sonic materiality of war, for example as I did during the summer of 2013 in Cairo, how can scholars grasp these affective forces and changes in rhythm, and what does my self-ethnography enable us to say about broader schemes of change? How does the empirical evidence provide researchers with conclusive data about changes at the level of my close surroundings in Egypt? Let me give another brief account from mid-August 2013 in Egypt to illustrate.

It was during the "Day of Rage"—which was also the protesters' slogan in Egypt on January 25, 2011—the day the Muslim Brotherhood asked its supporters to take part after Friday prayers in a nationwide demonstration against the security forces' violent dispersal of the sit-ins earlier in the week. I was staying, as always, in a female-led household in central Cairo: We—a couple of women of different generations—were still completely ignorant of the details of what was going on and what the next step would be. We not only heard and felt but also smelled the fear in the air, which consisted partly of the odor of our anxiety-ridden bodies. The vibrations of war terrified us all and clearly affected us. Even if we did not understand it yet, I think our fear was constantly increasing due to the totally altered rhythm of the Cairo we knew. In addition to erratic gunfire from different types of firearms, we were bombarded by voices booming through megaphones, sirens, helicopters that circled again and again overhead, and by the roar of military jets passing repeatedly over our heads.

For my research, I tried to go out as much as possible during the following days, engaging in "sense walking," a methodology by which I tried to experience the streets in an intersensory way, not focusing on my sight. An intersensorial approach mobilizes all the means we have to perceive our surroundings. It is an imperative starting point if we wish to adequately understand affect, for, as Connor explains, "the senses are multiply related; we rarely if ever apprehend the world through one sense alone" (2004, 1). However, focusing on only one sense at a time

(sound walking as methodology³) can be employed as a way of experiencing changes in the materiality of affect of vibrations, or changes in the everyday rhythm, since even though it is impossible to shut down our other senses, it is possible to consciously focus on listening to the alterations of the empirical soundscape.

As shown in the examples above, sound is of particular interest for grasping affects. Instinctively we understand the sounds of violence, aggression and fear; we run away, take cover, protect ourselves, retaliate. We also intuitively recognize the sounds of tranquility and safety. We move through these forces of affect as we move through the world (Malmström et al. 2015). In looking at resonance, vibration, energy, and sound, we are simultaneously profoundly material and intensely ethereal. Furthermore, if we are attuned to vibration, sound is all a question of motion and rhythm.

How is it possible in the context of contemporary Egypt to grasp circulating forces of affect, and why is affective politics relevant to the study of change? We may share the same affect, but the tangible emotions that follow may be similar or differ since we belong to different classes, genders, generations, etcetera, and we each have unique lived experiences.

Nevertheless, I contend that dramatic changes in rhythm enable us to see broader schemes of social and political change, in which Egypt may be seen as an example of an autocratic regime that uses materiality such as the absence or presence of sound to induce citizen dependence on the “new” state authority. The alterations in rhythm from hectic and fast (perceived by people as *normal*) to slow (perceived by them as *surreal*) with interruptions of extreme intensity (perceived by them as *abnormal*) transformed the active political Egyptians I know in a particular way during 2013 that has political consequences today. The old rhythm has never returned. In my view, that is a permanent change.

Today’s rhythm under President Sisi is “normal” on the surface, but it is unpredictable. Politically active Cairenes are trying to follow the constantly changing rhythm to be able to navigate their cityscape. (The

³The members of the World Soundscape Project under the leadership of composer R. Murray Schafer coined the concept in Vancouver in the 1970s.

state's intentional alteration of rhythm is discussed further below.) In 2011, and even in 2013 before the massacre, they had striven to create a new home, but in the summer of 2013 these Cairenes were displaced from their own city. My interlocutors in Egypt today perceive the past and the present as clear and interconnected, but the future is often reimagined as lost (Scott 2014).

As a result, the military did not heal the collective body of trauma. Quite the opposite: it created a deep national gash in the same collective body, an ugly wound that is still bleeding. I contend that employing the lens of the materiality of affect and rhythmanalysis, in relation to empirical data from the summer of 2013 in Egypt, can provide us with conclusive data on dramatic rifts in the social and political landscape.

I do not think the new military state authority sought to reinstate the pre-revolutionary rhythm or to return the sonic rhythm to “normal”; instead the autocratic regime suppressed all expressions of discontent, in stark contrast with the 2011–2013 period when the sound of shouted slogans were ubiquitous for instance, even in the games of children. As a result, the military created, via sound and material surveillance, its own “static” rhythm which left no space for any breath of opposition or free speech. The extreme disruption of the sonic rhythm during 2013 brought a change in Egypt and was the first step in the current military's social transformation—however, this was not the social change that the revolutionaries of Egypt had fought for in 2011, but its absolute opposite.

Through brutal interventions and the sonic alteration of everyday rhythms, the military regime destroyed the potential for harmony and created confusion among Cairo's citizens. On the basis of my experience of the events of 2011 and of their afterlife, I contend that it is vital to identify and attend to the vibrational politics of disruption and the affective mobilization of bodies in rhythm as a phenomenon that can be exploited by contesting forces as a form of political violence (cf. Malmström 2014a). As one of my interlocutors said, Sisi does not give the people space, as Mubarak did; instead he “strangles” every Egyptian; any unwelcome sound of opposition is destroyed by force. The state knew how to utilize rhythm and manipulate time: it cut up the rhythm and broke up time in ways unfamiliar to Cairo.

Further, with the escalating nationalism and polarization of the post-Mubarak era, suspicions ingrained in the economic, political, and social dispossession characteristic of the neoliberal policies of the later Mubarak era (Elyachar 2005) have, according to the Egyptians I know, been further embedded in people's experiences and expectations of their environment today. There are countless examples of materialized experiences of suspicion devised by the military regime in today's Egypt, such as sophisticated new surveillance and control technologies (Amar 2013), spatial governmentality including blocked streets, watchdogs, and checkpoints at night (cf. Ghannam 2013; Ismail 2006), and, on politically sensitive anniversaries of the revolutions, futuristic face-obscuring masks, new uniforms for security personnel and new armored vehicles, especially in downtown Cairo but elsewhere in the country as well. The uncertain security situation in today's Egypt, interventions by the security police and national paranoia have all mutated into a world of suspicion. Highly contagious, this suspicion continues to escalate in urgency. People have become hypervigilant. What has developed is a local culture of old-new paranoia (habitual during my 2002–2003 fieldwork) that is materializing in the cityscape. During the autumn of 2017, for example, I experienced something novel, because this time, many Egyptians explicitly warned me not to speak about politics in public or to be extra careful while using my phone. They even gave me the advice to change my smartphone to a simpler version because it is safer in relation to monitoring. Even more important was not to bring any phone at all if I planned sensitive interviews. I have been warned many times during previous fieldworks, but this time I was told to take extra care, because "we all are monitored," not just our telephones, but also in coffee shops and other public places. Hence, I realized how this world of suspicion became reflected in the things we use and the places we visit.

Assets and Limits of the Methodology

My axis of analysis offers an alternative interpretation to those provided by more logocentric narratives of the 2013 events in Cairo, but the framework of affective politics may further be used to elaborate new

thoughts, reflections, and inquiries about Egypt's collective body of trauma among politically active people. In my opinion, it provides important insights into non-discursive dimensions of change. It grasps change at the very moment that it happens, as well as alterations in bodies' and cities' rhythm via the transmission of affect between relational bodies, scholars' bodies included.

Shifting or combining theoretical approaches, however, entails new methodologies, challenges, and inquiries. For example, it is impossible for the researcher to conduct interviews during uncertain and violent rapid events, but it is possible to listen to her or his own and others' bodies and surroundings and to use subjective and collective affective experiences in field, since forces of affect flow from the individual to the collective, and vice versa.

Thinking and writing about sensory knowledge and emotive elements is not easy: the blurred binaries of the knowledge of being and feeling have their limitations. Of course, the researcher must take notice of her or his own body's lived experience of affect, but how does she or he read the transmissions of affect between bodies, collective bodies, and the material surrounding? Furthermore, how can the lived experiences of bodies be interpreted if the researcher does not also use narratives and interviews? If we are not self-contained in terms of our energies, and if the transmission of affect comes via interaction with other people and our environment and has a physiological impact, how will we understand these processes and their consequences?

Employing rhythmanalysis in combination to more usual methods of ethnographic inquiry means that the researcher must listen to and think with her or his own body in lived temporality—lived experience being key—including hearing, smelling, touching, seeing, and tasting the traces that mark out the (changing) rhythms. In this specific context, regarding touch in relation to motion, the late Merleau-Ponty (1968) talks about both tactility and touch, both of which are related to vibration and rhythm, as mentioned. This is the first step to grasp change in the making.

Emotions resonate with the material and the sociographical environment. My approach is combined with other methods of inquiry, as the ethnographic examples I gave show. I combine the study of

affective experiences and rhythmanalysis with other research tools, such as interviews and narratives to explore, for example, how memories are preserved and communicated through affective relations to specific objects (Povrzanović Frykman 2016).

My argument here is that employing my mode of analysis in relation to extraordinary uncertain events is reproducible in anthropology, as I have discussed in this chapter. My point of departure has allowed me to investigate the meaning of the abrupt changes of rhythm that the revolution and its aftermath produced in Cairo's landscape. It raises questions about change, repetition, identity, difference, contrast, and continuity (Stuart Elden, in Lefebvre 2004). My selected methodology allowed me to listen to the houses, the streets, and the city of Cairo, and not least to individual and collective bodies. If we start by inquiring into affective experiences and explore in dialogue with my interlocutors the changing rhythms of relational resonant bodies, things and societies, the analysis will add to our knowledge about change.

Concluding Remarks

... this human body is the site and place of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature) and the social (often called the cultural), where each of these levels, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, therefore its space-time: its rhythm. Whence the inevitable shocks (stresses), disruptions and disturbances in this ensemble whose stability never guaranteed. (Lefebvre and Régulier 2004, 81)

This chapter has reflected on how bodies, matter, urban place, and space are intimately linked to each other, and how changes to the familiar rhythm of the every day create disorientation and anxiety. It has explored how bodies, things, and the cityscape influence one another, and how the materialization of certain clusters of affect is linked to notions of an imagined new nation or the loss of the same. The body is acted upon by other subjects, by (non)living materialities, places, spaces, and the

un/conscious self. Thus, the body is constantly formed in relation to different assemblages through its lived experiences.

However, as scholars we will never be able to grasp affect in the making; we can only grasp its concrete sensorial outcomes, that is to say the effects of affect (or emotions). Examining the material consequences of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa region, today as well as in the remembered past, may allow us to address key methodological issues in qualitative research in innovative and creative ways. As Lefebvre (2004) notes, there is always a rhythm where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure.

Recognizing the variations in the rhythms of different categories of people and embracing their embodied political experience is a significant field for examination, given that political actions are expressed and acted out through the body (see also Malmström 2014b). Even objects such as wooden tables, pencils, or mirrors move with the movements of the Earth and in response to intense vibrations close by. Hence experience is embedded in materialities which contain movements and energies: materialities which alter rhythms (cf. Lefebvre and Régulier 2004) and which therefore it is crucial to encompass in our understanding of the world.

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11

Funeral Reforms in Taiwan: Insights on Change from a Discourse Analytic Perspective

Urs Weber

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the way Taiwan's written media justified the state's introduction of funeral reforms in the second half of the twentieth century. Situating this case study within the broader sociopolitical context of contemporary Taiwan, it illustrates how discourse analysis can be used as a tool for studying change.

Discourse analysis, as it is presented and applied in this chapter, aims at examining the discursive dimension of the process of reforming and changing funeral practice. It reveals how state authorities promoted new ideals and values concerning funeral practice, and argued for the need of reforms in a field of practice in which traditional rituals played an important role. Since the 1980s, a series of corresponding reform measures, laws, and regulations were implemented on the national and local level.

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Change thus appears in this case as a consequence of political decision-making processes and reforms. The discourse analysis allows for grasping the public reasoning about reform measures regarded as necessary in the eyes of the authorities, journalists, and experts appearing as voices of the discourse. Since the discourse took place in mass media, the newspaper articles as textual data allow for an analysis of the discourse since its emergence in the 1970s.

The state's intervention in funerary practice marked a discontinuity in Taiwan. It came as an expression of the state's increasingly critical attitude toward religious funeral practices. In 1983, it enacted a new law, the Grave Establishment Administration Act (*Fenmu shezhi guanli tiaoli* 墳墓設置管理條例), and in subsequent years, local authorities implemented measures to deal with Taiwan's land shortage and lack of space for graves due to its high population density.¹ State and local authorities saw the prevalent practice of in-ground burial as land-consuming and expensive, and spoiling Taiwan's scenery, and saw geomancy, an important practice for choosing the grave spot, as superstitious.

The state's attitude to religious funerary practice was articulated via a public discourse in the written media. During the second half of the 1970s, the funeral reforms became a frequent topic of newspaper reports and articles. Journalists supporting the state's position reported and commented on the funeral reforms, and state institutions and authorities' statements containing criticism of ritual funerary practices were cited which served as both the justification and the reasoning behind the planned and the implemented reforms.

Already during the Chinese Republican period (1912–1949), the Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* 國民黨, GMD) had taken a secular attitude to reform funerary practice. After the Nationalists' retreat to Taiwan in 1949, however, the state's attitude to religious funeral rituals took on a different dimension. The island's geography and population development constituted a new context in which funeral and burial rituals became a focus of state criticism and regulation, leading to the implementation of concrete reforms.

¹Hanyu Pinyin is used to romanize Chinese words and expressions except for place names for which alternative spellings are commonly used, e.g., Taipei, Changhua.

How do we grasp the extent and scope of this change? How far did the arguments and rationales used by the promoters of these state-led changes indicate a break from previous norms and practices? How were the reforms perceived and articulated by social actors? This chapter argues that a discursive analytic perspective is a useful method for tackling these issues, and that applying this perspective on the rationales and arguments in favor of such reform and regulation allows a better grasp of the extent to which the state's position and its public articulation disrupted the tradition of conducting elaborate mourning and burial rituals.

Analysis of the public discourse on funerary practice reveals both the rupture and the continuity of the articulated funerary practice norms and representations. From a diachronic perspective it appears that a moment of discontinuity did take place: this can be traced back to the 1970s, when the first discursive articulations on the state's position appeared in newspaper articles presenting new values and priorities concerning funerary practice, although some of these ideas and semantic patterns had originated in the Republican period. The first intensification of the discourse occurred in 1983 with the enactment of the Grave Establishment Administration Act. From then onwards, the discourse in the press displayed a high degree of continuity and inner consistency. In its analysis of this period of apparent continuity, this chapter privileges a synchronic perspective, exploring the regularities of the discourse and the principles contributing to its inner structure. Following Foucault's understanding of discursive formations, this synchronic analysis reveals four sub-formations: first, the measurement of space in quantitative terms; second, the economy of cremation; third, the beautification of cemeteries; and fourth, arguments against geomancy, which was labeled superstitious. The discursive voices emerging from these sub-formations are those of state and local authorities, experts, and journalists commenting on the reform measures.

Analysis of the four sub-formations reveals that the change to funerary practice was depicted as unavoidable, particularly with reference to the limited amount of land available, making it necessary to replace the customary ground burial with cremation and either subsequent storage of the ashes in funeral urns in columbaria or natural burial. Change is

also visible in the discourse on state authorities' priorities for funerary practice and the values that it communicated in this regard. These priorities, values, and norms displayed a secular character: the discourse made clear that state and municipal authorities prioritized space-saving measures and frugal, economic funerals, and a green landscape free of graves declared desirable values. Furthermore, a particular pattern in the discourse criticized geomancy as superstition and a contradiction in the age of science. The changed priorities for funerals show signs of the secularization of funerary practice. This chapter discusses the notion of secularization as a central term in social-scientific debate with regard to the funeral reforms.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, the funeral reforms in Taiwan are contextualized historically in the section "[Funeral Reforms in Taiwan and Their Historical Context](#)." The section "[Methodology](#)" presents the methodology, discourse analysis, and the section "[The Data: Press Articles](#)" presents the data. The four sub-formations of the discourse are analyzed in the section "[Funeral Reform in Public Discourse](#)." The section "[Secularization](#)" discusses the notion of secularization as a meta-narrative in which the funeral reforms can be located in a broader sociopolitical context, and the conclusions are presented in the section "[Conclusion](#)."

Funeral Reforms in Taiwan and Their Historical Context

Before the Nationalists began to regulate funerary practice in the context of Taiwan's land shortage and population density in the second half of the twentieth century, the Nationalist Party had already sought to regulate and reform funerary practice during the Republican period on the mainland, albeit without success. In 1928, a new law was enacted to establish public cemeteries in every county, with standardized graves and an egalitarian ideal, but it was not fully realized due to the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Furthermore, a project promoting cremation faced intra-party controversy and was not implemented (Fang and Goossaert 2008, 56).

After 1949 and the GMD's retreat to Taiwan, the attempt to reform funerary practice continued: in 1983, the Grave Establishment Administration Act was enacted prohibiting the establishment of graves outside of officially registered cemeteries, which had previously been a common practice (Xu 2001, 105). A second turning point came in 2002 with a new law on funerary practice, the Mortuary Service Administration Act (*Binzang guanli tiaoli* 殯葬管理條例). A new measure included in this was the promotion of natural and sea burials. By the turn of the millennium, the cremation rate exceeded 90 per cent in large cities, and the government was eager to adopt further measures to deal with the land shortage.² After 2002, local governments promoted sea and natural burials, with the ashes scattered at sea or buried in a biodegradable bag in designated spots under trees or in flowerbeds, so that after a few months the same spot could be reused for the next burial. A pilot tree burial project was established in 2003 in Taipei's Fude Cemetery, with further areas for tree and flower burial in other cities in subsequent years.

These reforms and new measures introduced by the government and implemented by local authorities stand in contrast to previous burial practices. Ground burial was still the most popular practice in the 1980s.³ Ethnographies demonstrate the ritual importance of ground burial and the importance of spatial arrangements in the context of burying the deceased. Ahern (1973, 175–90), for example, gives a detailed account of the extent to which geomancy (*fengshui* 風水) was considered relevant by the inhabitants of a village in northern Taiwan: they regarded the *fengshui* of a grave as an important factor that determined fortune or misfortune for the deceased's descendants. Ahern's ethnography differentiates between the villagers' knowledge and specialists' geomantic theories: professional geomancers regard *fengshui* as an automatic operation, meaning that if the forces and configurations around the grave are balanced, benefits will ensue automatically, while for the villagers good *fengshui* was about the ancestor's comfort in the grave,

²In Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, the cremation rate was reportedly as high as 95 per cent in 2002 (*People's Livelihood Daily*, December 29, 2002, A02).

³The Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior reported that the countrywide cremation rate was 18 per cent in 1986 (*United Daily News*, March 31, 1992, 6).

and the ancestor him or herself was the source of subsequent fortune or misfortune.

These considerations were not included in the articulations of the state. Ritual practices and geomancy became objects of criticism due to their perceived superstitious basis and negative effects on spatial planning. Before discussing this, the methodology of this study is described.

Methodology

Studying Change with Discourse Analysis

While the laws and regulations on funerals provide insights into the state's aspiration to reform funerary practice due to the shortage of land, the state's attitude found more explicit and detailed expression in the public discourse in Taiwanese newspapers. As a methodical tool, discourse analysis reveals the rationales and justifications of the institutions involved.

The discourse, which began toward the end of the 1970s and around the time of the enactment of the Grave Establishment Administration Act in 1983, included a bundle of arguments referring to different social values and semantic patterns and aimed to promote a new ideal in funerary practice. The discourse displayed a high degree of continuity. The problem of the land shortage and the question of how to bury the deceased was discussed throughout the period under investigation until 2014. At the same time, studying the public discourse reveals changes caused by the state's intervention, as the rationales appearing in the discourse explicitly criticized and rejected certain formerly prevalent funerary practices.

Discourse

What is a discourse? Among the different notions of "discourse," Michel Foucault offers a number of concise characteristics. Although he does not provide a unified theory, different texts of his nevertheless provide

clear indications of how discourses and discursive formations can be understood and analyzed. With regard to methodological considerations, Foucault's definition of discursive formation is particularly useful:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation* [...]. (Foucault 1972, 38; emphasis in the original)

This definition puts the focus on statements as the basic elements of discursive formation. Statements are on the one hand singular units or events of interest for the discourse analyst, but on the other must be seen in relation to other statements. Statements are thus always part of a series or networks of other statements (Foucault 1972). Foucault (1971, 58–59) mentions not only regularity as a characteristic of discourses but also contingency, discontinuity, dependence, and transformation. He uses the expression “discursive events” and emphasizes that any analysis of discourse must take small events into consideration in the analysis of long-term phenomena. The emphasis here is on not only the regularity of discourse but also singular events whose contingency and discontinuity add another dimension to the analytical perspective. This means that discourse analysis has to focus on singular discursive events on the one hand, and on the regularity of the discourse on the other.

The last point concerns Foucault's idea of internal and external procedures of control: discourses are subject to procedures of control and limitation. A discourse can be internally controlled and organized, for example through systems of classification, ordering or distribution, or it can be controlled externally, for example, through prohibition, or through division and rejection as in the opposition of reason and folly, or the will to truth. An important factor here is the notion of exclusion: in any given discourse, the procedures of internal and external control are also mechanisms for excluding possible alternative voices (Foucault 1971, 10–47).

The Data: Press Articles

The articles for analysis were found in three Chinese-language newspapers: *The China Times* (*Zhongguo Shibao* 中國時報), and *United Daily News* (*Lianhe Bao* 聯合報) which includes *United Evening News* and *People's Livelihood Daily* (*Minsheng Bao* 民生報). *The China Times* was first published as *Credit News* (*Zhengxin Xinwen* 徵信新聞) in 1950 (Li 1977, 4), while the *United Daily News*, the product of a merger of three newspapers, was founded in 1951.⁴ *People's Livelihood Daily* was produced by the *United Daily News* group from 1978 to 2006 (Feng 2016, 237, note 2).

The sample used for this study comprises articles published between 1950 and 2014. These articles stem from two large private newspaper groups, both of which were not only pro-GMD but also had the largest circulation of newspapers in Taiwan until 1996 (Batto 2004, para. 24), and have been in continuous circulation since 1950 and 1951, respectively.⁵ Analysis of their articles can therefore provide a representative picture of public discourse in government-conform reporting on policymaking processes until 1988, when the control of the press was abolished. For the analysis of the press articles, it was an empirical question as to what extent the chosen newspapers also articulated the state's attitude to funeral practice after 1988.

Under the authoritarian rule of the GMD, and until January 1, 1988, the mass media in Taiwan was controlled by the state via a range of measures containing a threefold limitation (Batto 2004, para. 5–7): a limited number of registered newspapers were permitted, with a limited number of pages, and a limited area of distribution by assigning each newspaper only one printing place.

⁴Following Berman (1992, 124), this merger was a reaction to difficult economic conditions for newspapers at that time.

⁵The founders and bosses of the *United Daily News* Group and *The China Times*, Wang Tiwu and Yu Jizhong, both of whom had previously served in the Nationalist army, became members of the GMD's Central Standing Committee between 1979 and 1988 (Batto 2004, para. 9; Feng 2016, 220).

Funeral Reform in Public Discourse

What are the results of discourse analysis? According to Foucault's notion of discourse, a discourse analysis can focus on three factors: its regularity, its external mechanisms of control, and the internal principles around which it is organized.

The general regularity of the discourse was found in the argumentative structure of problematizing ritual practices. This argumentative structure enables the definition of the specificity of the discourse: in the formation of statements in which ritual funerary practices appear as a social problem. Besides the commentaries by journalists, state and local authorities were the relevant institutional discursive voices contributing to the image of funeral rituals as problematic. The chosen newspaper articles make it clear that external control of the discourse was applied through state control of the press until 1988, and, moreover, through the self-positioning of the chosen newspaper groups as pro-government.

The third aspect of the analysis, the internal principles of the discursive formation, is analyzed below. Four different sub-formations can be distinguished, each organized via different semantic patterns of criticism or problematization of funerary practices: spatial planning, with reference to Taiwan's land shortage and lack of space for graves; the economy of cremation; the beautification of cemeteries; and statements labeling certain practices superstitious.

The Measurement of Space

The first discursive sub-formation concerns spatial planning. One of the most frequent arguments for the introduction of cremation was that Taiwan, and particularly its large cities and metropolitan areas such as Taipei, is one of the world's most densely populated areas. The resulting shortage of land was leading to a situation in which there was not enough space for graves. In the newspapers sampled, this argument, which is highly consistent throughout the discourse, can be traced back to the second half of the 1970s.

The reference to space as a finite entity that can be measured and planned significantly contributed to a view in which the funeral reforms were an unavoidable necessity. Of special relevance in this regard were arguments based on numbers and statistics: the size of graves can be quantified and compared to the area of a columbarium, allowing calculation of the surface area required for a certain number of deaths per year. In 1977, for example, *The China Times* cited research statistics showing that, during the past five years, there had been roughly 70,000 deaths per year, and with the size of an average grave about two *pings*, this meant that the annual surface area required for traditional ground burial amounted to nearly 47 hectares a year (*The China Times*, March 31, 1977, 6).⁶ Due to the rapid population growth, the article predicted a situation in which “the living and the dead will compete for land,” a prediction that also appeared repeatedly later in the discourse.⁷

The Economy of Cremation

Another discursive sub-formation consisted of the ideal of economic and frugal funerals. Officials and parliamentarians repeatedly argued against ground burial as too costly and saw cremation as an economical and frugal alternative. In 1981, a top provincial administration official, for example, suggested that promoting cremation would allow citizens to not only save money but also economize on land (*sheng qian sheng di* 省錢省地, *The China Times*, April 4, 1981, 26). In 1983, Taipei’s Department of Social Welfare was cited as stating that “In view of saving soil and money, citizens should generally adopt cremation” (*The China Times*, February 8, 1983, 27). Ground burial was also presented as a practice that was not only time-consuming but also inconvenient: buried mortal remains take several years to decompose, and families often had to hire a geomancer when building a grave. Cremation avoided all of

⁶This was probably not a realistic estimate. As a research report by the Ministry of the Interior in 1985 showed, many graves occupied a surface area of three to five or even six *pings* (Ministry of the Interior 1985, 30–33). A *ping* 坪 is a unit of area, originally introduced by the Japanese government, and equals 3.306 square meters.

⁷Citations from the newspapers are my own translations.

these inconveniences, and ancestor worship might thus be simplified (*The China Times*, February 8, 1983, 27). Some years later, Taipei's Mortuary Services Office (*Taipei Shi Binzang Guanli Chu* 臺北市殯葬管理處) made a similar comparison, maintaining that cremation could save considerable effort, whereas in-ground burial required the bereaved family to purchase a coffin, hire a geomancer, and collect the bones, and conduct a second burial seven years later; all of these expenses could be saved by choosing cremation and storing the ashes in a public columbarium (*United Daily News*, April 18, 1991, 15). The idea that cremation would save money, time, and land is presented throughout the discourse, with similar statements found repeatedly during the 1990s and since the year 2000.⁸

The Beautification of Cemeteries

The third rationale appearing in the discourse consisted of arguments against ground burial due to its effects on the aesthetics of the landscape. Since the geomantic positioning of graves involved families individually choosing a spot for each grave, tombs can be scattered over hillsides, placed close together, or positioned in a more isolated manner, contributing to what was seen as a chaotic outlook. Even in public cemeteries where the graves were placed in rows, the perception in the public discourse was often that they were not orderly. In 1999, on the occasion of Qingming, grave-sweeping day, two members of the Taipei City Council were cited in an article commenting on a Taipei public cemetery: “The graves are chaotic, and as a result tomb-sweepers cannot find their ancestors’ graves” (*The China Times*, April 10, 1999, 18).

In the second half of the 1970s, plans were begun for cemetery and burial reforms that would eventually lead to a new design for cemeteries oriented toward a Westernized model. According to this ideal, the graves

⁸That people should economize on funerals was not an entirely new argument. As Hetmanczyk (2018) has shown, expensive funerary practice has been a matter for controversy in Chinese history for centuries. While a classical question was whether a luxurious funeral was a duty of filial piety, the debate received a new framing after 1912, when political economy—comprising a whole range of different economic theories—was introduced as a new order of knowledge in which funerary practice was now evaluated from an economic point of view.

should be placed neatly in rows in a green and park-like environment. “Turning cemeteries into parks” (*gongmu gongyuanhua* 公墓公園化) was an expression repeatedly used throughout the discourse, in many instances related to the reforms. In 1976, the term appeared in a ten-year plan for the beautification of cemeteries (*Taiwan Sheng gongmu gongyuanhua shi nian jihua* 臺灣省公墓公園化十年計畫) issued by the Government of Taiwan Province and its Governor, Xie Dongmin (謝東閔). A pilot scheme was established in Changhua County, and in the following years several more such projects were started in different cities and counties (for the project and its development, see Xu 2001, 104).

An important reference point for this purpose was the Western cemetery. Taipei’s Department for Social Welfare, for example, stated in 1997 that “according to the policy of ‘turning cemeteries into parks’, cemeteries should be designed like those in Europe and the United States, with a green lawn and the graves deep underground, with standardized gravestones aboveground” (*People’s Livelihood Daily*, June 19, 1997, 22).

Anti-Superstition

The fourth sub-formation can be distinguished by its arguments against practices labeled superstitious (*mixin* 迷信). The most prominent subject of this critique was geomancy. As it was central to ground burial, with families hiring a geomancer to define a spot for the grave that should ensure an auspicious future for the deceased’s descendants, many parliamentarians and public officials saw the popularity of geomancy as a major obstacle to the further promotion of cremation. In this context, it was repeatedly labeled superstitious.

In 1982, *People’s Livelihood Daily* commented that cremation was the best solution to Taiwan’s land shortage, but it was not yet sufficiently popular. The commentator saw the reason for this as the popularity of “superstitious geomancy” (*mixin fengshui* 迷信風水), which he contrasted with the age of science:

Among the people believing in *fengshui*, many think that if the grave is well situated the descendants will be protected and guaranteed good luck; otherwise, the next generation will experience misfortune. We are now living in an age of science, but since the existence of supernatural beings and the protection granted by ancestors is difficult to prove scientifically, many people think it is better to keep believing. (*People's Livelihood Daily*, March 17, 1982, 6)

Geomancy was not the only practice criticized as superstitious. An article in 1991 commented on a practice at public funeral centers in Taipei where citizens chose an “auspicious day” (*jiri* 吉日), according to the traditional Chinese calendar, for the funeral procession to take the coffin from the funeral center to the crematorium or grave, which could be costly and elaborate. The journalist condemned the belief in auspicious and unlucky days for this as superstition, and expressed the hope that the measures introduced by the Mortuary Services Office in Taipei, reducing the fee for funerals planned on “unlucky days” and raising it on “auspicious days,” would have a positive effect and might lead to the end of superstition (*The China Times*, September 25, 1991, 12).

How new was the use of the term *mixin* (superstition)? It became popular at the beginning of the twentieth century toward the end of the Qing Regime, when a new discourse emerged centering on new terms related to religious practice, among them the distinction between religion (*zongjiao* 宗教) and superstition (*mixin*). Both terms were neologisms in Chinese, imported from Japanese neologisms. *Zongjiao* meant religion in the Western sense of a tradition with a distinct doctrine and an organized, church-like structure, and was used to denote the realm of the acceptable, while practices marked as *mixin* were subject to anti-superstition campaigns (Goossaert and Palmer 2012, 50–51).

The distinct characteristic with which the notion of *mixin* appeared in the discourse in question was not so much the contrast with the positively connoted term “religion” as its use in labeling practices regarded as hindering the funeral reforms, particularly the introduction of cremation. The opposition between geomancy and scientifically inspired concepts for funerary practice supported the continuation of the use of

mixin in the last quarter of the twentieth century in a new discourse in which funeral reforms in modern Taiwan took place in the context of spatial planning.⁹

Secularization

The emergence of a secular funerary practice vocabulary and the explicit critique of funeral rituals articulated by the state authorities suggest an analysis of the changes in funerary practice as a form of secularization.

Secularization is among the most prominent terms in the social sciences, but there is controversy about whether it should be understood as an inherent feature of modernization. Some scholars describe secularization as a consequence of modernization processes, while others, referring to the American context, emphasize religious competition as the decisive factor for the question of religious vitality. For them, the decline of religious practice in some European countries was less a result of modernization than of state regulation and church dominance. European countries, in their view, lack religious competition (see Gorski 2003 for this debate).

For an analytical perspective on the situation in Taiwan, it is helpful to distinguish between different connotations of the notion of secularization. Following Casanova (2006), the term secularization can denote the decline of religious beliefs, the privatization of religion, or the differentiation of non-religious societal spheres and their emancipation from religion. This analytical distinction is important in the context of religion in Taiwan and its evolution in times of economic development and democratization, processes generally associated with modernization. Authors such as Clart (1995/1996) and Katz (2003) have found that religious practice did not decline after 1949, and greater economic development and more wealth meant that even more temples were established and older temples were replaced by grander ones (Jordan 1994, 142). A

⁹Concerning the terminology, two aspects stand in continuity with the early twentieth century: the subsumption of geomancy as superstition on the one hand and the opposition between superstition and science on the other. Both terminological pairs were already present in the early twentieth century, as Goossaert and Palmer (2012, 50–53) have shown.

look at the statistics on registered Buddhist and Daoist temples reveals continuous growth in their number throughout the twentieth century, from 3661 in 1930 to 5531 in 1981 and 9707 in 2001 (Katz 2003, 396) and 11,999 at the end 2017 (Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). Although it can be difficult to determine the exact use of designations such as “Buddhist” and “Daoist” in the Taiwanese context, there has nevertheless been continuous growth in the number of temples over the past 90 years.

A detailed analysis of secularization of Taiwan’s religious field cannot be included here, but the growth in the number of registered temples indicates that the term “secularization” cannot be applied without reservation, as temples are places of public ritual and religious practice. How then can the notion of secularization be useful in the given case? Casanova’s (2006) third aspect of secularization, the differentiation of societal spheres, is of primary interest here. Besides Casanova, other authors also mention societal differentiation as a core element of secularization (see for example Bruce 2002, 8; Luhmann 2002, 278–319).

Differentiation became evident in the discourse analysis: the rationales and solutions brought forward in the public discourse showed that the state was seeking to reform funerary practice using arguments from outside the religious field. The rationales at stake did not refer to religious content, nor did they particularly involve religious rituals. On the contrary, the view of religious and ritual practices as problematic was brought forward in various ways as a reason for planning and implementing reforms pursuing secular objectives.

A further aspect of the secular aspect of Taiwan’s funeral reforms was their similarity to funeral regulations in other regions of the world. In some Asian regions, for example, funeral reforms were similarly implemented in response to land shortages. In Hong Kong, cremation had been encouraged by the colonial government since the 1960s and had been increasingly accepted, with the cremation rate rising from 35 per cent in 1976 to 68 per cent in 1993 (Teather 1999, 410). In Singapore, in the 1950s and 1960s, a state discourse on land use conflicted with Chinese geomancy, as the state regarded burial grounds as an impediment to the economical use of land and the development of the nation state (Yeoh and Tan 1995). In Japan, cremation has been promoted since the Meiji period: although the Meiji government declared a ban

on cremation in 1873, voices arose in favor of it, and the ban was lifted only two years later (Bernstein 2000, 298). Scattering the ashes after cremation emerged as a new practice in the 1990s (Kawano 2004).

In regions such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan, where ground burial practices have been challenged and/or cremation was promoted, the discursive frames were all influenced by a Western or Westernized perspective as a result of the presence of colonial powers, as in Hong Kong and Singapore, or an attitude orientated toward Western practices, as in the case of Japan. During the Meiji era, pro-cremation voices in the 1870s were already oriented toward Europe and the United States at a time when the first cremation societies were being formed there (Bernstein 2000, 320–22). Cremation as a modern project in Asian regions was then to a large degree a project of Westernization. This was also the case in Japan, where cremation, already known as a Buddhist practice, was promoted by the Meiji bureaucrats based on secular rationales such as hygiene (Bernstein 2000).

This means that Taiwan followed the global spread of cremation as a modern project as found in other regions in the West and Asia. The Taiwanese institutions' discourse on funeral reforms and the policy-making process were explicitly inspired by and orientated toward those of other countries. In a Taipei City Council discussion in 1995, for example, the commissioner of the Department of Social Welfare, to which the Mortuary Services Office belonged, demanded that the City government should follow the examples of Singapore, Hong Kong, and Japan and introduce a regulation setting a temporal limitation for the use of grave plots in public cemeteries (*People's Livelihood Daily*, August 4, 1995, 22). In other instances, the authorities involved traveled abroad to study other countries' funeral regulations. In 2001 an official of the Department of Civil Administration of Taiwan's Ministry of the Interior was cited expressing admiration for various methods of natural burial in a newspaper article reporting on his visit to Australia and New Zealand (*People's Livelihood Daily*, January 10, 2001, 4).

The emergence of a new state rhetoric with secular rationale on funerals was therefore part of a global pattern. Secularization, in the sense of the emerging presence of a secular state, is not a local invention of

Taiwanese institutions but part of a larger, transnational process and the diffusion of ideas on funeral reform derived from Western ideals. The secularization of Taiwan's funeral reforms is thus to a large degree the result of Westernization.¹⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed a discourse in the written media in which state rhetoric on funerals appeared from the late 1970s onwards. Discourse analysis was presented and applied as a method for examining social change and continuity by revealing ideals and values the authorities introduced into the field of funerary practice, and analyzing the rationales by which they argued for change and funeral reforms. On the one hand, the justifications for and rationale behind the reforms appeared with a high degree of continuity and consistency in the decades after the 1970s, while on the other their appearance also marked a discontinuity and a break from the religious rituals prevalent at funerals, as the state's rhetoric was based on secular justifications for the reforms and was critical of the use of ritual. Following the writings of Foucault, it has been possible to discern four different discursive sub-formations, the analysis of which has led to conclusions about the discontinuity in the field of funerary practice in Taiwan, locating this social change within the broader sociopolitical context.

A salient feature of the discursive articulations is the presentation of the reforms as unavoidable, in particular with reference to the limited space available for cemeteries. Arguments based on numbers in this context contributed to the objectivity with which the necessity for the reforms was presented. The discourse reveals in detail how secularization took place in the context of funeral reforms. The state's priorities for

¹⁰In Western regions, on the other hand, comparable secularization tendencies can be observed in mourning and funeral practices. As Lüddeckens (2018) has shown, for example, death rituals in Switzerland are becoming increasingly detached from the institutionalized (church) context. Instead, independent celebrants offer rituals designed using symbology that is open to interpretation by those of different religious and non-religious persuasions. The Swiss independent celebrants invoke a kind of natural religion: "Nature is communicated as the entity that encompasses the living and the dead, life and death" (Lüddeckens 2018, 117).

these reforms were dominated by a rationalized perspective on the space available and on funeral behavior that did not include elaborate rituals or the use of geomancy for siting graves. This perspective found expression in claims that space-saving practices such as cremation or natural burial were necessary, and adhered to science as a desirable standard, criticizing geomancy as superstitious and incompatible with the scientific age. Part of this communication of new values for funerals was an orientation toward Westernized ideals, particularly green, park-like cemeteries modeled on those in the West, and natural burial inspired by Australian practice. The secularization realized in the funeral reforms can be contextualized within broader transnational developments. The regulation of funerary practice in the context of spatial planning, the introduction of cremation, and the resulting changes in ritual practice occurred in similar ways in different regions around the globe, and Taiwan's state authorities sought inspiration for its funeral reforms from developments in other countries. Analysis of this discourse has thus allowed the contextualization of Taiwan's reform measures and attempts to induce changes to its funerary practices in a broader, global context.

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