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The nightlife spaces: the case of bush bars in Abuja

Gli spazi della notte: Il caso dei bush bar di Abuja

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Abstract. Night time has been constantly neglected in the field of urban studies. Most of the literature in the fields of Urban Geography and Sociology has examined the day-time temporal space, neglecting the nocturnal dynamics. In fact, for only about a decade, geographical works in the sphere of night studies have taken place. This contribution, starting from the reflections of Lefebvre (1991) who claimed that specific activities took place and still take place only at night, examines particular meeting places such as bush bars, which are typical nightclubs developed in Nigeria in recent times. Present in the capital Abuja and not only, closed during the day, they come to life at dusk and are placed in the green areas of urban and peri-urban spaces; finally they enliven the African night and, under the glow of the moon and the stars, they are also the meeting place where meetings take place and important decisions are taken, they are not only a place for fun and entertainment. The aim of the qualitative research, targeted at a sample of convenience, is to inform, to make known how in an urban space referred to a capital of an African country such as Nigeria there can be particular places of aggregation not present in the western cities that they try to imitate, both from design and skyline and in the construction of relational and social dynamics, related to night entertainment.

Keywords: Nigeria, Abuja, bush bars, public spaces, night.

Riassunto. La notte è stata costantemente trascurata nel settore degli studi urbani. La maggior parte della letteratura negli ambiti della Geografia urbana e della Sociologia ha esaminato lo spazio temporale diurno, trascurando le dinamiche notturne. Infatti, solo da circa un decennio, hanno preso campo i lavori geografici nella sfera dei *night studies*. Questo contributo, partendo dalle riflessioni di Lefebvre (1991) che sosteneva come specifiche attività avvenissero e avvengano ancora solo la notte, prende in esame particolari luoghi di ritrovo quali i bush bar, tipici locali notturni sviluppatisi in Nigeria negli ultimi tempi. Presenti nella capitale Abuja e non solo, chiusi durante il giorno, prendono vita all'imbrunire e sono collocati nelle aree verdi degli spazi urbani e periurbani; infine animano la notte africana e, sotto il bagliore della luna e delle stelle, sono anche il ritrovo dove avvengono riunioni e prese importanti decisioni, non sono soltanto un luogo di svago e divertimento. Il fine della ricerca qualitativa, rivolta ad un campione di convenienza, è quello di informare, mettere a conoscenza di come in uno spazio urbano riferito ad una capitale di un Paese africano quale la Nigeria possono esistere particolari luoghi di aggregazione non presenti nelle città occidentali che

si tenta di imitare, sia dal punto di vista planimetrico ed edilizio che nella costruzione di dinamiche relazionali e sociali, legate all'entertainment notturno.

Parole chiave: Nigeria, Abuja, bush bar, luoghi pubblici, notte.

1. Introductive notes

In the literature of the study of the cities, one of the topics in the field of urban geography is certainly the division and differentiation of the spaces within the city. The Chicago School, even in the 30s, already identified the diversity of urban space both from the spatial point of view (zones, sectors, neighbourhoods) and in terms of the denomination (ghettoisation) as well as the image: the urban landscape.

With the changes in the physiognomy of the city, the characteristics and the internal organization of the city have changed, as well as the research and theories in urban studies.

In this context, urban sociology studies (Guidicini 1982; Lefebvre 2018) on class and gender have been crucial, while more recent studies highlight other forms of difference based on ethnic relationships, sexual orientation or disability, age or education, or all of these variables.

The speed that trasforms the cities, both spatially and, above all, socio-culturally, highlights the complexity of the relations between the endogenous and migratory population, expanding and modifying their social structure.

The contribution introduces a first analysis of the social dynamics of a contemporary African city such as the new capital of Nigeria: Abuja, whose spatial and social dimension is constantly growing and changing. In particular, starting from the reflections of Lefebvre (1991) who claimed that specific activities took place and still take place only at night, we are trying to examine particular meeting places such as bush bars, which are places and nightclubs developed in Nigeria in recent times, a phenomenon not yet investigated by the literature.

In fact, the places: the bush bars, have been investigated both with regard to their connotation objective, based on the location, characteristics and function they assume, and to the meaning attributed to them.

2. Framework

The night is a recent research space in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It is a fragmented field because it can be approached in different ways, with conceptual and methodological characteristics linked to the definition of "night". Historians refer to the night in its meaning linked to the city and its urbanization over the centuries; sociologists instead focus on the social night, on the relational transformations that occur with the decline of darkness, on the area of transgression that lets perceive the night. Anthropology focuses its reflection on night-time space and time, on beliefs, on behaviours influenced by the night, while urban planning deals with the specificity of the use of places, mainly investigating the effects that artificial lighting has had on the city in recent years. Along with the geographical approach, urban planning also deals with the massive urban expansion mainly in the second half of the twentieth century, the dynamics of space-time related to lighting and the duality light/shade, an object widely covered by specialized literature (Challéat 2011; 2013).

The perception of light and darkness, in a language and in a geographical context, reflects the dimension of experiencing space and time. The concept of space, a subject for reflection in the discipline thanks also to the studies of David Harvey (1935-), acquires its fullness in a subjective dimension, where the actors involved define its meaning (Edensor 2015). It emerges how the place and the landscape, historically conceived, are influenced by the dimension of human experience; despite this, the investigation on this theme has been really weak, in fact, most of the literature in the fields of Urban Geography and Sociology has examined the temporal space during the day, neglecting the night; only for about ten years have the geographical works in the sphere of night studies taken shape.

The Italian geographer Maria Chiara Zerbi (1993), who argued that in the definition of landscape also played a role the imaginary and perception that we have in the relationship between man and environment and the U.S. geographer John Jakle (2001), the landscape has always been conceptualized mainly in terms of daytime use and not nocturnal, even though darkness has been re-evaluated in the contemporary age, acquiring a positive meaning linked to the commercial and recreational activities that populate the nights of the urban realities of the 21st century, just like the bush bars of Abuja, the subject of this article.

Because of the almost worldwide spread of electric light, it is difficult to imagine how the darkness for centuries pervaded the space of cities, bringing with it dangers in medieval cities; indeed, it was common to practice night patrols and secure houses. Moreover, the night, in the popular imagination, has always been the privileged spatial place of dark forces (Koslofsky 2011).

The darkness has also contributed to feeding its opposite, the light, of religious figures: the illumination is the one that strikes St. Paul on the road to Damascus, which helps the Prophet Muhammad to become closer to God, which is present in Paradise, which surrounds the Saints. Light is also associated with both mystical and scientific knowledge: for example, it is the light of reason that guides the intellectuals of the Age of Enlightenment in their discoveries and works.

The combination of darkness/irrationality has been the subject of large spaces and geographical representations: an emblematic example is the association of Africa as a "black continent" in the British colonial imagination, a characterization which went beyond the skin colour of its inhabitants, but which was intended to emphasize above all the "primitive" cultural level of these populations (Edensor 2015). This vision is also reflected in the writings of the first cultural anthropologists of the evolutionist current, Edward Burnett Tylor who, in 1871, called his work "Primitive cultures" in order to highlight the cultural and biological differences between Europeans and traditional non-European societies.

From a vision of the night as the predilection of the forces of evil, we have moved to conceive it as a place of intimacy and conviviality. As pointed out by Williams (2008), the darkness of the urban night is always socially mediated by practices and values: social struggles over what should (or should not) happen at night are the basis of the story of the opening of nightclubs in Victorian England, a country dominated by a bourgeois morality capable to disapprove even the "legs of the tables", which were considered too similar to those of women and factors triggering impure desires (Otter 2008).

The night is also the place of political space: many overthrows happened at night, many revolutions have been planned: in the dark, the minorities gathered against the power, their persecutors; in the night also happened, for much of the nineteenth century until independence in our country in 1861, the meetings of the "carboneria", a secret society that aimed precisely at the emancipation of Italy from the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Edensor 2015).

Darkness also guides men along the path of desire: this is the case of urban night, with its geography and its group of citizens: witches, bohemians, prostitutes, heretics who appear as a privileged club that disappears with the lights of day. Darkness is often associated with libido, but at the same time with cultural activities like cinema, fiction, painting and photography that evoke the charm of the night as an environment of uncertainty, a metaphor for the existence of man. For artists and writers in 19th-century Paris darkness was an element of

fascination; even in Victorian England, especially in the lounges, darkness was sought during spiritual sessions where the mediums had the task of evoking the souls of the dead, as well as during expeditions held with the aim of hunting ghosts, especially in Scotland, given the spread of popular stories about entities that lived in some castles (Edensor 2015).

The reaction to the darkness in the urban reality is also conditioned by economic and social factors: we can mention the two blackouts that affected the city of New York between the 1960s and 1980s. The first, in 1965, produced a convivial and joyful atmosphere, while the second, in 1977, in a climate of inflation, caused a strong social disorder, riots and fires (Nye 2010).

Light and darkness are two elements connected to each other, one cannot exist without the other and both modify the perception of the territory and the urban landscape. Taking up Lefebvre (1974) and the association of the night with certain activities, the bush bars of Nigeria, the subject of this contribution, are places where, thanks to the possibility of both transgressing social norms and also as places where important work meetings can take place.

3. The literature

The experience of night cities, with their geographical, social and cultural dynamics, as mentioned above, is a relatively new field of social science studies. The construction of a methodological framework related to the geography of the night is due to some authors, among whom Lefebvre, Melbin and Williams (Van Liempt et al. 2015) stand out.

Starting from Lefebvre (1974), this contribution aims to show how night space is a living space, with its dynamics and its lifestyles and it is produced, used, regulated and lived in the context of Nigeria, with specific reference to bush bars.

Lefebvre's arguments were also taken up by Williams (2008), who reworked his thinking and systematized it. Starting from the principle that the night is much more than the absence of light, he analyzed the practices related to the relationship between space and time also resuming the studies of Murray Melbin (1978; 1987), pioneer of Sociology and Geography of the night, who argued that the night allowed a more relaxed atmosphere, without the pressures of the day, and created a kind of solidarity between people in the night context. The night thus becomes a time for friendship, love, conversation and frivolity in general. In fact, night areas, such as clubs and bars, offer the possibility of violating

the social norms imposed and guaranteed during the day, offering new and interesting spaces of sociality and entertainment (Van Liempt et al. 2015).

Williams (2008) also borrowed from Lefebvre the concept of night space as socially mediated and constituted: it is formed by a social struggle between what should or should not happen at night and the related economic dynamics that constitute the urban night. We can add the support of the thought of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who, in his essays dedicated to the dynamics of power, deals with the concept of governability; this concept can be taken up in this context as the governability of the urban night is linked to gender, social status, social/spatial, ethnic and sexual issues that were central for the French philosopher.

Insisting on the theme of governability, the night, as we have seen, has always been populated by frightening characters, from the "folklore of fear"; darkness is linked to black, and black to evil, to the forbidden. In this context, the arrival of artificial light had the task of regularizing the night, bringing energy and security, wanting to put order to the reign of disorder and chaos (Challéat 2011).

Trying to carry out a process of systematization, there are generally four focal points of research concerning the studies of geography of the night: 1) The changes in meanings and experiences of darkness and night; 2) the evolution of the night economy; 3) the regulation of night dynamics; 4) The modalities of evening outings of young people (Van Liempt et al. 2015).

The first sector has already been dealt with previously (see section 2) and concerns the perception of darkness as the opposite of light in the various historical epochs instead, the economy of the night, is a space for current reflection, especially connecting it to the cities in the post-industrial reality.

This paradigm is the result of the neoliberal vision of the last fifty years, which has affected the United States and England, thanks to conservative governments that have marked the two countries. The night economy was born to respond to a security problem present when cities are populated at peak and working hours and then emptied in the evening, so institutions developed policies to revitalize and popularize the urban night; today, it is associated with the presence of cinemas, theaters, bars, clubs, cultural festivals and other places of nightlife (Shaw 2010; 2014; 2015). Night-time regulation can be seen as the downside of the nightlife economy because, at the same time as the nightlife venues open up, the risk of violence, alcohol abuse, vandalism and loud noise is increasing.

Gabriela Pulido Llano in the Volume *El mapa "rojo" del pecado. Miedo y vida nocturna en la ciudad de Méxi-*

co 1940-1950 (2016) describes the Mexican capital as early as the 1940s, an expanding city, how expanding were the "places of vice", and how much the catholic church and the media did to face the problems related to prostitution, night-time noises, the high level of alcohol abuse that affected the younger generations of boys, not girls and women in general, who had not yet been adequately educated and lived mostly in the family home.

Actually, instead, alcohol consumption is an indicator also considered for the study of gender issues. In fact, in the last twenty years, female consumption has significantly increased, a sign of an era in which, with some exceptions, women are considered equal to men, and therefore capable of consuming the same amount of alcohol (Van Liempt et al. 2015).

In the most economically advanced countries, both in the West and in the East, the dynamics of free time are undoubtedly linked to the night. A phenomenon that has evolved as university education has increased, it is also closely linked to the dynamics of integration: the main players in the urban night determine dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, of lifestyles, creation of meanings and practices linked to the attendance of bars, restaurants and nightclubs (Jiang 2017).

Always linked to the evolution of Western cities, there is also the situation of young students living at night in suburban areas, such as in the municipalities further away from Paris in the Ile-de-France region, such as Montereau-Fault-Yonne. Catherine Didier-Fèvre's study (2018) shows how the increasing lack of public services leads young people to meet in the homes of friends who reside in the same area, rather than in collectives. In addition, if they decide to go to the city or shopping malls, they are often accompanied by their parents or return home the next morning waiting for the first train departing from the center of the capital.

Overall, the literature on the dynamics of urban night, both geographical and sociological, determines the construction of lifestyles, movements related to the social life of individuals, students or not, who in recent years have faced the consequences of economic growth by creating a new space, that of the urban night, moving the economy, sometimes feeding stereotypes and vices, but at the same time ensuring a moment for life, influenced by the cultural components present in various parts of the world.

4. The case study space

Between the 1970s and 1980s the Nigerian government decided to create a new capital to replace Lagos,

which was characterized by a lack of housing, unsustainable urbanization, traffic congestion, overburdened and decaying infrastructure and services, and poor quality of the environment. So, it was identified a virgin space for the new capital, geographically in the centre of the country, more neutral and less "marked" by the colonial past.

At the end of the 1970s, a competent authority, the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), was created to oversee the planning, design and development of the new capital and its territory.

The formulation of the Abuja Master Plan was articulated and it identified seven principles that should have supported the design philosophy of the new capital: the conditional is used because in reality Abuja has not become that great model capital of Africa.

The seven principles mentioned above are: equal access; equal citizenship; environmental conservation; attractive city; functional city; regional development; national economic growth. The first two principles contain the true philosophy of the political project of the new capital that marks the difference between the old and new course of the troubled history of the Nigerian State.

Abuja, the new capital of Nigeria since 1991, has been perfectly "planned" at the centre of the national territory to give an important symbolic value to a multi-ethnic dichotomous society like the Nigerian one.

The logic that led to its construction is similar to that which accompanied the birth of Brasilia, capital of Brazil: a fundamental role was played by its central position within the country, at a geographical, social and political level, given its neutrality with respect to the different ethnic groups that populate the territory (in Nigeria there are more than 300 ethnic groups, which include more than 400 dialects).

This was a complex and articulated planning that in the realization phase was characterized both by the creation of stereotypes, in imitation of Western cities, and by symbolic elements and places (Varani 2014)

The city designed largely (Phase 1) by the Japanese architect K. Tange for a population of approximately 25.000 inhabitants in the early stages of construction, to date has a population of as many as 3.607.066 (estimation 2018)[1]. In the central area there are the National Assembly, the Town Hall, the National Institutes of Culture, and other government offices. The main activities, being an urban centre in continuous expansion, are commercial and buildings construction, as well as administrative and representative activities, which are common in a capital (Fig. 1).
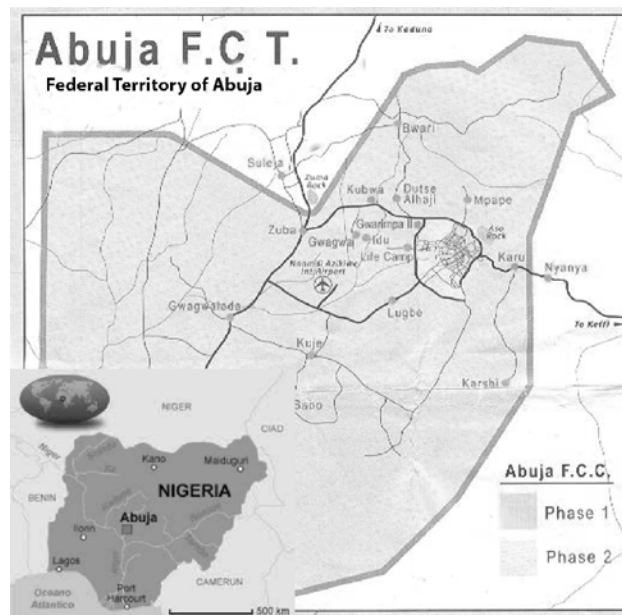
Figure. 1. The city of Abuja and Nigeria. Elaboration by the authors. Source: https://www.nairaland.com/254191/abuja-maps.

The lack of any evidence of the past and an artistic heritage has been compensated by the modern sacred buildings: the great Mosque has impressive proportions and audacious lines like also the particular Cathedral of Christianity, which were deliberately built opposite each other in the heart of the capital, the Centre Business District, to witness the intent of the Nigerian government, as a testimony to the laicity of the country[2].

Among the numerous building works realized for the construction of the city, we remember the buildings always projected by the architect K. Tange in the modern Central Area that design a Skyline. Moreover, there are The Millenium Park Abuja, a public park of about 32 hectares, opened in December 2003 and designed and built by the Italian architect Nicoletti. The park is the only public meeting place in the city, since there are no meeting points, except for the so-called "non-places" (Augé 2009), represented by supermarkets and shopping centres in imitation of western capitals and cities.

At present, it can be seen that there has been a failure to implement the public space proposals that charac-

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[1] Source: http://population.gov.ng/

[2] Despite the fact that Nigeria is a lay state, in the entire northern area of the country, Islamic influence is very powerful and pervasive and continues to influence the language, clothing and social customs; 12 federal states in northern Nigeria in addition to the Islamic religion as the dominant religion have proclaimed the Shari'ah as the law of government.

terized the Master Plan and therefore failed to meet the main objective of the planning concept of "City as Public Space" expected for Abuja. Moreover, the militarization of the surroundings of the "Three Arms Zone" area and the apology for public access to Eagle Square, the only public space in the Central area, which had become inaccessible while it was initially intended as a meeting place has been used for military and government activities and it has created an atmosphere of "stronghold" in some parts of the Central Area[3].

As in all the great capitals, in Abuja there are so-called universal activities and other more particular ones related to Nigerian culture and habits. These can be classified into three main categories: socio-cultural, commercial and political.

Socio-cultural activities include: socializing (for example meeting old friends, relaxing after work); eating and drinking; taking small family walks; light sports (table tennis, billiards, football, jogging, etc.); dancing, singing, etc. This category can also include various religious activities.

Commercial activities include: purchases in shopping centres and markets, sales activities in the same spaces, but also informal spaces less widespread in the Central Area, more in the neighborhoods of the city and very popular in the suburbs.

Finally, political activities include: state/civic receptions; ceremonies, military parades, rallies and protest demonstrations.

In a multiethnic and multicultural city such as Abuja there are therefore different recreational needs and there is a demand for different public spaces, as well as the multiple use of those already available.

An informal space that has always been used by Nigerians regardless of ethnicity, and in part even from status, has always been the bush that literally means forest, but which has then acquired different social and environmental cultural connotations.

The bush has always been a place where users can have a little shade during the hot sunny days, a little shelter from rain (not the strongest), privacy and discretion at night.

The prototypes of the current bush bars had these characteristics: improvised meeting places under the trees with a fire burning at night and something to drink during conversations.

The growth of Abuja, both from the urbanistic point of view and the population that initially was essentially

formed by local officials and politicians and by foreigners employed in multinationals, companies and foreign embassies, has been accompanied by an increase in the multicultural Nigerian population coming from rural areas close to the Capital but not only, who were attracted by new job opportunities.

This increase in population is not matched by public spaces and meeting places because, as already mentioned, in part they have not been planned and if they had been built, they have not been used later on as meeting places.

Therefore, the bars overlooking the swimming pools, pubs and halls inside the famous hotels (Hilton, Sheraton, Fraser, Valton and others) have become meeting places for white and black men belonging to a political and economic elite, or bars, cafés and ice-cream bars inside the Mall Center, for the middle classes of little businessmen, government employees and not; unfortunately, the last type remains closed by night.

Evening and night are the best time moments to talk about business in Nigerian culture[4] and not in British culture, a culture that had a great impact and still has, at least partly, in the country.

The culture of the night is partly due to the Islamic-Arab culture from North Africa that has crossed the Sahara and has penetrated since ancient times the geographical area that we now recognize as Nigeria, strongly influencing the indigenous cultures of the northern areas of the country.

The nightlife in the capital Nigerian is quite rich, but the premises that support it are not many as of today. There are several nightclubs and some discos in the Central Area, in particular in high-class residential districts such as Maithama or even Wuse (Figs. 1, 2).

This is the meaning bush bars have in the city: a need for culturally recognised public space.

The original bush bars are closed during the day, come to life at sunset and are located in the green areas of urban and peri-urban spaces to enliven the African night. They are also a meeting place for making important decisions, not only a place of leisure and entertainment.

Foreign visitors or European immigrants are attracted by these particular meeting places, many of which are closed to them.

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[3] The square is well prepared for the production of musical performances, cultural festivals and some sporting events, all of them very popular uses (Ikoku 2001).

[4] Often, at the level of a nation state, it is assumed that there is a prevailing social culture and a homogeneous existing lifestyle but this hypothesis would be simplistic. In the case of multi-ethnic Nigerian. Although in general, only as a socio-political expedient, have been identified and proposed as "representative" three large ethnic groups: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, different from each other; moreover, there are dozens of other minority groups whose culture is far away from being a minority (Osasona 2012).
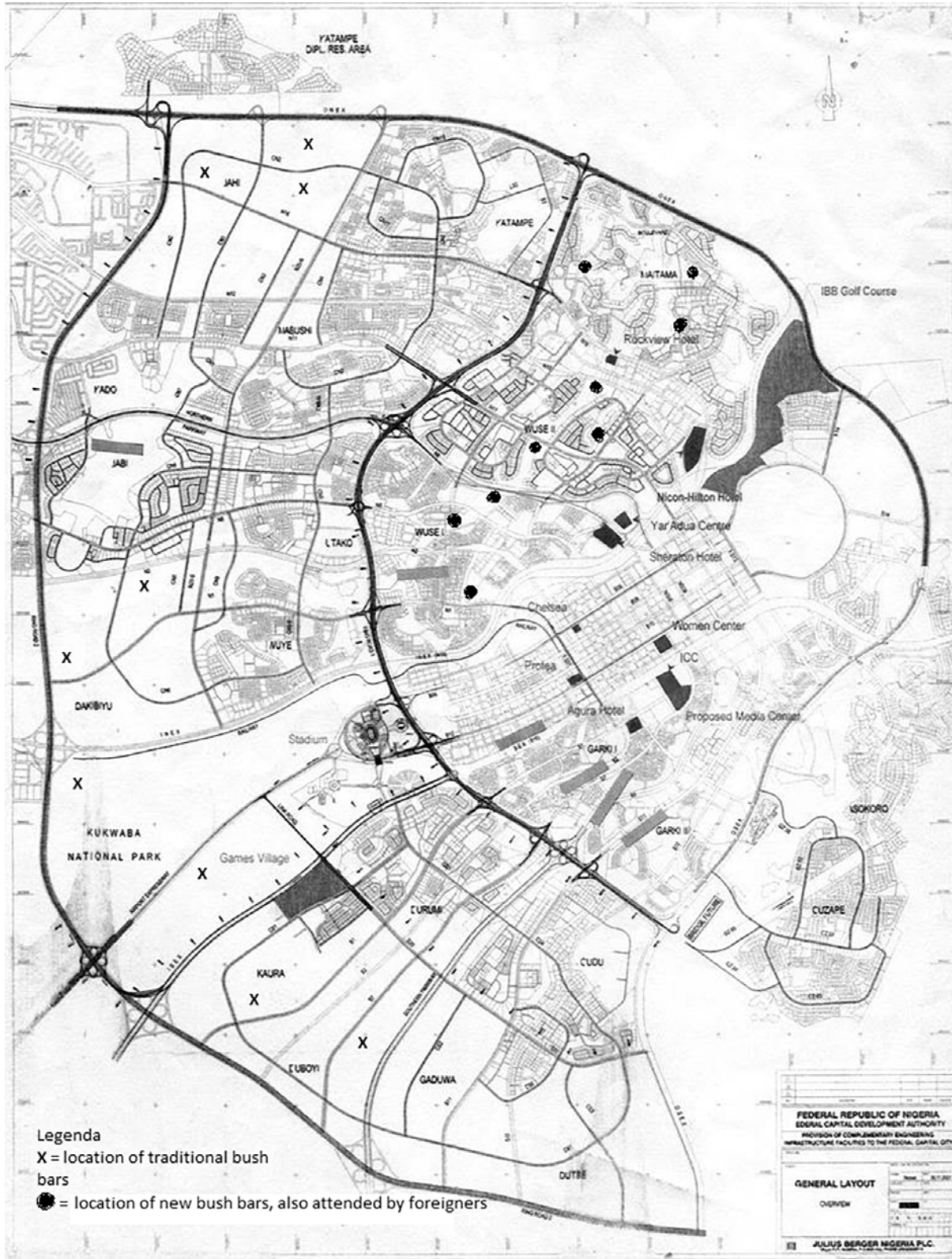
Figure. 2. Location of bush bars in Abuja. Elaboration of the authors. Source: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-8LhZnO27DN0/VHsw8TCV0iI/AAAAAAAABBnk/UHWXXIu9THY/s1600/Abuja_map_large.jpg.

Others, on the other hand, have undergone substantial changes in their interior design (they have fixed and non-removable structures), they have opened up to foreigners and increasingly attracted customers with improvised live music and strong, tasty cocktails, giving life to what is now commonly known as Abuja's *movida*, a bit like the European *movide*.

5. Methodology

The current research is fully inserted in the context of the Social Sciences and therefore the reference methodology is a qualitative one, more adapted to identify reasons, opinions and trends that can be hidden from the numerical data of the quantitative research. Since the research was carried out in a socially "closed" context, it was not possible to use the face-to-face technique as it had been hypothesized, but the meeting with the subjects has been mediated by the use of a questionnaire, which is a useful tool to find some basic statistical data on the attendance of bush bars. After this first phase, we proceeded with the real semi-structured interview that allowed us to identify more details and greatly improve the quality of the data obtained.

Therefore, we have partially resorted to the observing participation (Clifford 1992) and therefore not guided precise hypothesis, as required by the socio-spatial context.

Observing participation, as is well known, is used when there is little knowledge of the social phenomenon on which we intend to investigate and on which there is a tangible distance between the researcher and the object of the research. It can also be used when the phenomenon turns away from extraneous looks, in a private context. In the case of this research, both conditions existed. In addition, privileged informants have been used, without whom field work would not have been possible. In this context, the city is understood as a space of differences and cannot be analysed only with the traditional variables that allow us to evaluate the evolution of its functions, nor with the "visual" techniques that allow us to "photograph" the objective characteristics of places and their material signs, although they are very significant in themselves. It emerges the need to complete the analysis conversing with the subjects who live in the city and / or who use it or parts of it with different expectations and with different experiences. For this reason, in this first part of the research we tried to bring out the different points of view in the use of bush bars by investigating different categories of subjects, distinguished by generation, ethnicity and level of education trying

to find information on the relationships that characterize them and on the meaning of the places that make up and constitute their social life at night.

Through the method of semi-structured interviews, an attempt has been made to find information on these places of the night.

The research was essentially based on a direct survey, aimed at a convenience sampling (Etikan et al. 2016) of both insiders, i.e. residents and born in Nigeria, and outsiders, namely foreigners with places of birth in other African countries or abroad and who for personal reasons and work have moved to Abuja.

6. Commentary on interviews

The multiplicity and heterogeneity of the subjects interviewed (exclusively men because women rarely attend traditional bush bars, except for some European or American) leads to highlight how difficult it is to reduce them to closed categories. Also because, first of all, it takes into account the object of the survey: the bush bars and, in the secondary analysis, that different subjects live different relations with places, according to individual or group needs and to the values attributed to them.

The empirical analysis was not easy in the administration of questionnaires for several reasons: the distrust in the administrator because of female gender while the population interviewed were males, the particularity of the object of investigation, as well as the personal sphere involved in answering the questions.

The research was conducted in the summer of 2018 by a white woman on a convenience sampling of black males: this consideration may seem to be perceived by non-professionals as insignificant or the result of a backward-looking view of the colonial past, but in fact, it influenced the development and outcome of the research itself, in a context of sub-Saharan Africa as the Nigerian one. In fact, the difficulties encountered in the field can be included in the wider sphere of gender issues, even more so if the territory of investigation is located in a country of high complexity as Nigeria[5], which is the

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[5] Nigeria, despite being the richest country in Africa thanks to its oil fields, is characterized by deep conflicts and internal struggles. The presence on the territory of almost 180 million inhabitants (according to the World Population Prospects 2017, in 2050 the population will exceed that of the United States), the great extension, the ethnic variability where the three main groups stand out, Hausa Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, constantly fighting for power, the presence of a predominantly Islamic north and a center-south predominantly Catholic and huge economic gaps between rich and poor, make the country difficult to govern and unstable.

Figure 3. The questionnaires given to the people interviewed. Elaboration by the authors.

- Nigerians (22)
- Italians (14)
- Other Europeans countries (20)
- Other African countries (5)
- Chineses (2)
- Russians (2)

Figure 4. The numbers of the interviewees. Elaboration by the authors.

complexity of a delicate geo-political context in which the socio-cultural dynamics are still strongly influenced by practices, rituals, beliefs and ancestral traditions that have always placed the woman as the last link in a complex social chain. Nigeria shares with all sub-Saharan Africa the condition of inferiority of women, both in terms of rights and in social terms.

For reasons of privacy and security, the specific names of the places where the interviews have been carried out cannot be provided.

The questionnaires have been administered to a population (convenience sampling) of 65 male individuals habitually resident in Abuja.

From a first analysis of the subjects, it emerges that the majority is of Nigerian nationality (22), while, in second place, Europeans (20) and 14 Italians. This data makes us reflect about the number of Europeans and Italians who are present in the city of Abuja, mainly for work reasons; the questionnaire was also filled in by 5 people belonging to other African countries and by two Russians and two Chinese; the Chinese presence is by now an invasive and important in many African countries.

The answers show that about 90% of the participants know the bush bars (60 out of 65) but not all of them
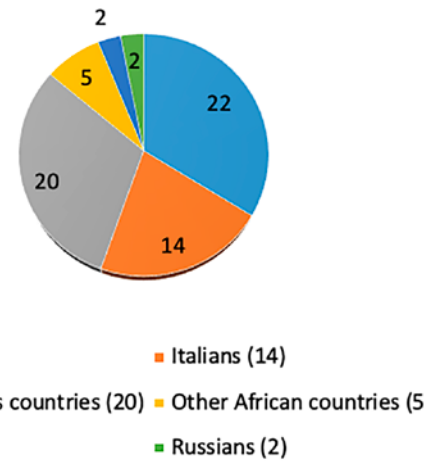
attended these places, in fact, almost a third (17 out of 60) say they have never been there.

The second part of the questionnaire aimed to know the habits of the frequenters of the bush bars which, overall, are visited, by the majority, between 1 and 5 times a year (29 out of 43) and between 6 and 10 (14 out of 43); therefore, it can be affirmed that almost all of the population considered (convenience sampling) goes to the bush bars between 1 and 10 times a year. The reason is to be found in the fact that these meeting places, in a Nigerian context, are a sort of return to tradition, while, in general, they also generate interest and curiosity in Europeans and foreigners.

Other information also emerge: the majority of interviewees go to bush bars in company, many of them to enjoy an evening with friends (23 out of 43), while a

How many times a year are bush bars frequented by the interviewees?

- 1 and 5 time a year (29)
- 6 and 10 time a year (14)
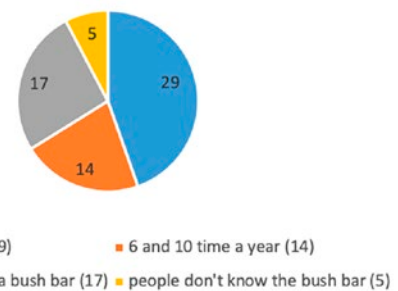- people never been in a bush bar (17)
- people don't know the bush bar (5)

Figure 5. The frequentation of bush bars. Elaboration by the authors.

fair percentage (18 out of 43, the 41,8%) uses the places for business meetings and discussions. Only 2 out of 43 people say they go alone.

Finally, only a few of them (8 out of 43) prefer a particular place rather than another, but all (43) claim to attend the bush bars in the capital Abuja and not in the surrounding territories; this suggests that they are mostly present in the cities and not in rural areas, where the use of being in the true bush and around the fire still remains.

One of the interesting facts that emerges is that bush bars are also the location of work meetings and this underlines how the passage of time and the same conception of it, is deeply different in the African continent compared to Europe, where the evening is conceived, except for weekends, as the time of rest and not as part of the working day.

7. Conclusions

The phenomenon of informality, well known to everyone who visits any African city, is often the result of a rapid reception of the population and rapid economic growth. But it is also linked to the inability of institutions to develop systems and models capable of managing and guiding both urban expansion and the design of shared public spaces.

The sustainable approach to the design, implementation and management of urban communities has an enormous capacity to overcome urban inequalities and prudent management of resources, but it is also the key to the survival of cities.

The research, which had as its protagonist a sample of convenience, was very difficult for the reasons we mentioned in the previous paragraph (see paragraph 6), which are related to the gender of the researcher but also to the difficulty of finding information for reasons of privacy and the general distrust of Africans towards Europeans, whose roots are in the colonial past.

Moreover, the difficulty of finding information is also due to the fact that this was the first Italian university research dedicated to bush bars in the Nigerian capital, where the inhabitants are not used to interact with Europeans except for work reasons. In the future, if the social and geopolitical dynamics of the country change, it will be easier for researchers to carry out work in the field and investigate more deeply the birth and development of spaces of aggregation such as, for example, bush bars.

This work, peculiar to the subject matter: an original meeting place such as the bush bars that arise from the historical, social and emotional dynamics of the Nigerian population. Architecture is also a consequence

of this, straddling cityscape and mindscape (Amendola 2003), in that the city was conceived to give a new face to the country, to distance it from the British colonial past. The path that has been attempted in the research shows how in the capital's territory the public sphere and pleasure are bound not so much to places, which are understood as public spaces (with the exception of the Millennium Park), as to large malls and shopping centres (see section 3).

In this context, even bush bars have evolved over the years, in fact, from traditional meeting places, some of them, especially those located in the Central Area, have begun to be frequented by foreigners, and also, by mobile structures, have characterized themselves as real places on the Western model, becoming among the protagonists of the urban night of the capital. In a constantly expanding city like Abuja, they assume the character of heterotopias, taking up the term of human geography invented by Foucault (2000), as they can be understood both as physical and mental spaces, linked to the meaning of the word meeting for traditional societies, which historically takes place in the evening around the fire. From the analysis carried out it emerges that this "space of encounter and dialogue" is symbolically identified in meeting places such as bush bars.

The research wants to frame, in a first analysis, the current situation but it is not certain that in the future the bush bars and Abuja itself can change further, changing the architecture and the same conception of spaces, after all, taking up a famous expression of the French poet Charles Baudelaire (2016, 119) *la forme d'une ville change plus vite, hélas! que le coeur d'un mortel*, the city, like human beings, will always be subject to evolutions and continuous substantial and structural changes that happen very quickly, faster than the feelings that reside in the hearts of men.

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