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Emergency Democracy and the "Governing Composite"

AbdouMaliq Simone

The Productive City

Recent years have witnessed a substantial extension of thoughts and work on cities in Africa. Much of this work has tried to get out of the conceptual frameworks that usually render African cities as failed cities, cities always in need of something more—whether it be infrastructure, governance, or economic development. As David Satterthwaite so ably demonstrates, cities in the global South in general are caught in a series of powerful myths that represent them as more parasitic and more economically fragmented than cities elsewhere.[1] The prevailing notion is that of an urban fabric overrun, unable to accommodate all of the escalating demands made of it; of environmental degradation spawned by widespread impoverishment; and of increased social conflict among residents who find few institutional platforms to promote coherence and collaboration. In the following discussion, I emphasize the implications of trying to see the emerging fabric of urban Africa as the result of a productive deployment of sensibilities, practices, effort, and collective formations that are made possible by the very uncertainties incumbent within cities deeply punctuated by fragmented infrastructures, social contestation over the uses to be made of the city, and political regimes thoroughly made partial through their entanglement within diverse networks of exchange.[2] In particular, this essay deals with the often peculiar process through which actors come to make their mark on collective transactions and the way in which idiosyncratic constellations of such actors provide a workable balance between the provisional and incessantly mutating practices required to viably "make do" in most African cities and a sense of order, if only temporary.

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Taking a view of the essential productivity of urban effort has broad ramifications for notions of what gets valorized and how, and it reorients social economies based on inclusion and exclusion. Although efforts to expand and regularize broad-based political participation may be critical to viable urban life, the emphasis on such a formula—popular public participation as a conduit to increased democratization as a conduit to livelihood generation and the cultivation of responsible provisioning by government—tends to occlude the prolific and real political struggles waged to maintain the capacity, possibility, and right to create different ways of living in the city.[3] These practices of keeping things open are what I call emergency democracy—the disentangling of emergence and emergency is impossible, and thus the practice demands the potential resourcefulness of relatively invisible architectures of sometimes highly dispersed collaboration among actors who may or may not know they are indeed collaborating. As such, increasing swaths of African urban life are characterized by the proliferation of provisional, even experimental "municipal actions" where residents concretely upend a wide range of sectoral and social distinctions—private and public, religious and secular, local and translocal—in order to be greater involved in a broader range of lives and events. By finding ways to expand their own circuits of movement across the city (and sometimes other cities), residents bring together people and things that otherwise might remain disconnected. These webs of intersection open up new uses for ordinary objects and infrastructure, thus altering what they mean and what their value might be. This essay explores these dimensions of such emergency democracy in a major slum upgrading project in a suburb of Dakar, a marginal space in the urban geography, and the operations of a neighborhood market in Douala, Cameroon.

Some Historical Antecedents

The entanglements between civility and incivility, formal and informal, urban and rural, extraversion and parochialism, highly fixed identities and rhizomelike associations are not universal in African cities. They do, however, show up as some kind of legacy in specific domains and quarters across the continent. In the early settlement of colonial cities, some quarters manifested a fairly straightforward reproduction of village life. Others were simply transition zones for highly mobile labor. Still others reflected an intricate interlacing of trends, identities, and influences.

Older quarters of cities retained forms of local accumulation and regulation based on clearly understood and respected systems of local, commonly religious, authority—with their concomitant networks of enterprise and social welfare. Public salaries supported a heterogeneous range of extended family members, clients, and activities anchored in a logic

that livelihood was best attained through securing diverse and relevant positions within and across multiple networks. Substantiality in the urban public sphere was largely created through the sheer intricacies and entanglements of various strands of everyday life, which without such entanglements might only barely function in their own terms. In other words, the ability of households, social institutions, economic organizations, religious groups, and judiciaries to do what was expected of them (something not always definitively clear in endogenous and exogenous terms of efficacy) necessitated complex interactions along highly porous boundaries.[4]

So while a broad range of "traditional" institutions persisted, the configuration of urban solidarity, realized at primarily local, neighborhood levels, occurred through an interpretation of domains and sectors rather than through the consolidation of citizenship within well-defined and well-managed "modern" institutions.[5] Religion, business, politics, social welfare, training, mutual support, and identity claims intersected with each other, so that any modality of association wasn't really disconnected from any other.[6] While such arrangements provided multiple opportunities for problem-solving, especially the ability to compensate during times of crisis in what were largely fluid urban environments, they did often limit the generation of new forms of independent action and innovation that could be brought to the larger public sphere. The interdependencies among religion, governance, politics, family life, and business also meant that the stakes were high for any shift in the internal dynamics of any one sector. Again, the locus of independent action is constrained, at the same time as the resolution of any particular difficulty within one sector was potentially given the influences and resources of another.

As the city grew and extended into more provisional, unserviced, and informalized settlements, the conventional rules and networks that governed most aspects of life in many of the older quarters found limited applicability—with points of entry and mechanisms for survival more diffused across often competing practices and associations.[7] Everyday life depended on more provisional assemblages of resources and alliances.[8] The explosiveness of urban growth has meant that the entry into the urban system over the past decade, while remaining largely family based, was not as thoroughly controlled or inscribed in the wide net of social and family relations that formerly had situated the new urban immigrant within a more comprehensive or ordered field of activities and obligations.[9]

Intensifying economic difficulties have reaffirmed in some respects the salience of extended family networks as the primary locus of livelihood formation. Increases in the cost of health and schooling often produce a more blatant stratification of opportunities within these networks, as some children can be sent to school or provided other kinds of support, whereas others cannot. Under circumstances of economic hardship, labor mobiliza-

tion once again becomes important, as youth, in particular, "donate" their labor in return for promises of future support. In some cities, while family size through increased birthrates has declined, average household size may increase due to tendencies to form households on the basis of both kin and nonkinship relations possessing complementary skills and advantages.[10] But overall, the ability of extended family systems to manage increased economic difficulties has grown more precarious.

A critical question then becomes the extent to which the extension and substantiation of associational life in new, more diverse forms is related to the diminution of extended family capacities, as well as embodying urban survival logics and strategic approaches to urban livelihood that reflect practices that are neither rural or urban or, conversely, that constitute elements of a progressive transformation of African urban life.[11] These are not mutually contradictory possibilities, so the thrust of new research endeavors might be to more comprehensively examine what new modalities of associational life are being used for—particularly in the elaboration of new livelihoods.[12]

African residents developed specific places and domains for being specific things and for accommodating what were often contradictory needs and aspirations. There were places to keep tradition alive and there were places to be modern, places to be a kinsman and places to be a cosmopolitan urban dweller, as well as more textured and subtle combinations of these primarily artificial polarities. This process of spatializing memory, options, and alternatives had a large effect on making African use of the city as dynamic as possible.[13]

There were limits on how strict such spatializing could be. After all, different facets of African everyday life and identity had to nurture each other under often rigid colonial and postcolonial controls. Nevertheless, the establishment of clear sectoral boundaries is viewed by most urban professionals as an important step in the consolidation of effective municipal regulatory environments. To delink religious life from the political, the political from the entrepreneurial, or the familial from the public may, however, weaken African urban societies. In cities facing many different kinds of crises, this interdependency means that the resolution of any particular difficulty within one sector is potentially availed the influences and resources of any other.

On the other hand, the intermeshing of sectors may not create sufficient space for changes to take hold within the operations of individual spheres of activity, be they religious, political, economic, or familial. Without this space, it may be difficult to generate new forms of independent action and innovation that could be brought to the larger public sphere. If changes in how local politics operate are seen as having substantial effects on how religion, business, family life, and community affairs are practiced,

people will be cautious about bringing about such political change. This is because too many dimensions of life may be at stake, and independent action is limited.

The Difference between Interlocutors and Partners

Even though diverse actors can collaborate to reach heightened economic opportunities across the world, it has been another matter to use these often very sophisticated arrangements to take care of local development issues, such as sanitation, waste collection, and other aspects of neighborhood improvement.

Take the situation in Yeumbeul South, one of the sixteen localities making up the municipality of Pikine in Dakar—and a situation that has been widely documented by the Projet de Ville undertaken by the Program on Popular Urban Economy of Environmental Development Action in the Third World (ECOPOP, ENDA Tiers Monde) over the last decade. At the height of a major municipal redevelopment project in the mid-1990s, the then-mayor attempted to dominate every facet of life and development within the ward, in part by trying to play off different associations against each other. He neither supported the process of community mobilization and development nor entered the scene with specific proposals and practices of his own. Instead, he used his position as a means of distorting the dynamic yet contested and volatile process of community restructuring that was under way. Here, municipal "authority" was constituted almost by default, as the mayor played on the convergence of opportunity and vulnerability that usually characterizes a community in transition.

The shortage of potable water in Yeumbeul had been particularly acute, and sanitation problems had reached crisis proportions. A partnership composed of UNESCO's Managing Social Transformations Program, ENDA Tiers Monde, and several grassroots organizations—the Association des Jeunes de Yeumbeul pour la Promotion Sociale, the Association des Jeunes pour l'Education et le Développement, the Union des Frères de Yeumbeul, and the Association pour le Bien Etre de la Population—undertook to increase the supply of potable water in the two wards, as well as improve sanitation. The first phase of this effort, which began in 1996, provided five communal water taps and seventy-five ventilated pit latrines, as well as a system of solid waste collection via horse-drawn cart.

As these inputs were to be locally managed, a capacity building program was implemented to train local residents in maintaining the infrastructure, as well as in administering the financial aspects of the service delivery system. A community management committee and technical committee for maintenance and repair were established. This initiative introduced needed infrastructure and improved waste collection and

sanitation. It instituted important local administrative structures in order to improve environmental management and the management of extralocal services and political relations. The project also amplified challenges that were widespread throughout Pikine, as well as other cities.

As resources were scarce, the initial phases of such a project are able to introduce only limited improvements in infrastructure capacity. If only a limited number of water taps can be provided, where they are to be located is important, as is who will have what kind of access to them. Certainly, an important consideration in locating such taps, depending on whether they are reticulated to natural wells or to the bulk supply system, is the ease and costs entailed. Given the costs and technical complexities, certain locations are more viable than others in engineering terms. How do these locations correspond with the most viable "social" locations within a community? How does the process guarantee that the diverse interests and capacities of the community have access not only to the resource, but to the possibilities of deliberating the disposition of that resource? These were considerations subject to intense debate in the Yeumbeul project.

The associations in Yeumbeul also reflected varying points of view, capacities, and interests. They range from the representatives of traditional authorities to more politically militant youth groups. How can often widely divergent orientations to everyday community life—with their own visions about well-being and the future—collaborate over important decisions such as the distribution of essential resources within the community? Associations are implicitly strengthened by virtue of their capacity to deliver needed services to the community. Therefore, the disposition of development products becomes a locus of competition among associations.

Resources such as water and electricity, and services such as waste collection and environment cleansing, cannot always be provided house-to-house. Accordingly, how are they most judiciously targeted in such a way that will promote efficient use and social cooperation? If grassroots management processes are the best means of ensuring a judicious public character to resource provision and use, what are the most appropriate structures to ensure efficient management?

Efforts were made in Yeumbeul to ensure broad representation on these local management structures. Much time, however, was also wasted negotiating who was to be responsible for particular facets of the project. In management, decisions often have to be made quickly and decisively. Tariffs must be collected for the use of the resource in order for it to be maintained. Having too many hands involved in the management process subjects it to excessive political considerations. Therefore, much effort was spent in Yeumbeul trying to figure out what specific actors could do best. Potential lines of equivalence among discrete tasks were drawn. If, for example, representatives of the traditional Lebu authorities were not

involved in managing the construction of latrines or financing the *charette* pick-up systems, then their roles chairing irregular meetings with the public water agency could be widely viewed as a task having equivalent importance or prestige.

Development inputs and their management change the character of a community. They change the nature of what residents have to consider in order to get water or lighting. Successful access concerns not only appropriate social considerations, but technical ones as well. These technical considerations require specific levels of education. Traditional authorities frequently lack the education to understand many of these basic technical considerations. Many cannot even read or write. They are frequently threatened when critical features of community life seem to pass from their competence and control. Those local actors with sufficient education can then use their more proficient understanding of technical matters to shape the community in ways that exceed the once relied-upon social norms and hierarchies.

At the same time, as new modalities of resource and service provision can alter these social hierarchies, they also must be respected in order to prevent subterfuge. Additionally, working through customary practices may be an effective way of convincing people to change their behaviors in ways better suited to the service provided. Improved service also means that people must pay for it. Therefore, consumers must be persuaded that the benefits of improved service outweigh the sacrifices entailed in mobilizing scarce resources for maintaining it. In localities where improvements in living conditions tend to center around various locally initiated projects and the mobilization of local funds, a saturation point is frequently reached where the costs involved in attempting to sustain these initiatives are seen as too high.

At the same time, the more "modern" associations are concerned that it may take some time before the new patterns of social behavior and cooperation establish themselves. These new patterns of behavior are necessary in order to make the most beneficial use of new levels of service provision and access to resources. In the interim, the lingering power of customary authorities could be mobilized around these new development inputs to reiterate and entrench inequitable patterns of access and use. These inequities could be particularly unfavorable to the women and youth whose activism and role in environmental management has been most critical. In these circumstances, it is important to establish some mechanisms of financial autonomy.

In Yeumbeul, an investment fund was started in order to generate income that would ensure an available pool of money to maintain these services. In order to establish such a fund, a series of income-generating opportunities was set in motion. These opportunities were targeted par-

ticularly to those whose economic circumstances would not permit even the most minimal financial contributions to service use in the future. The poor need to access independent incomes in order to contribute to enhanced levels of service delivery and development in their communities. As a result, they also become less available to the patronage or manipulation of more powerful interests within the locality.

The role of ENDA ECOPOP centered on maximizing points of contact and negotiation among actively or potentially discordant interests within the community. Once these intersections are more thoroughly entrenched in the life of the community, the direct role played by such an NGO can diminish. During the first phase of the Yeumbeul project, associations remained quite weak and vulnerable. This was the case even for those organizations that had been formally in existence for some time. Their willingness to deal with each other was also largely predicated on their sense that they had little choice but to deal with each other, given their relative isolation and lack of access to broader institutional networks. Associations have been strengthened through this development process, and they increasingly become sites of conflict themselves. There are more opportunities for individual groups to establish alliances with other institutions and associations outside the locality in order to consolidate their internal strength.

Increasingly, the protocols worked out in some kind of partnership arrangements among agencies providing technical assistance, municipal government, and a thickened and more complicated tapestry of local associations for managing the political relations in communities like Yeumbeul find difficulty both encompassing the shifting alliances, but also in getting actors to "speak the same language." While different associational actors pursuing affiliations and opportunities in wider networks of action may still share a basic sense about the position of "their locality" within a larger municipal, regional, or global arena, the heterogeneity of these pursuits also makes it more difficult for them to formally concur on issues increasingly understood and mediated through multiple discourses. In Yeumbeul particularly, these have included intensified renderings of Islamism, technical planning languages, reinvoked pan-Africanism, feminism, ecological consciousness, and a home-styled cultural radicalism. Actors increasingly rely on a variety of provisional mechanisms, including much informal local networking, to transmit information and to conduct negotiations. Again, a very particular social architecture is elaborated—with a range of channels, conduits, barriers, and circumventions inside and outside—in order to attain a semblance of local coherence.

As Jacques Rancière indicates, interlocutors are not partners, in that their interchanges are not based on some common assumption about what brings them together or an idea that their togetherness is based on

advancing some common project. Rather, to be interlocutors is to open up the possibility of some alternative kind of communication that itself may generate new ways of working.[14]

Politics, Invisibility, and the Governing Composite

Eric Tchoyi is the chief of the Bepanda market. It is a small civil position equipped with a variety of ordinances, levies, sanctions, reprimands, licenses, and concessions. It is a neighborhood market, with most of the inputs derived from the major Douala markets of Congo and Madagascar. There are some exceptions in terms of produce delivered direct from periurban gardens. But there is no dearth of complexity entailed. Much of marketing is straightforward: the *commerçant* buys in some bulk, usually with others, divides the goods, transports them to a local market such as Bepanda, and retails the items at a small markup, always recalibrating the value of the convenience that such local marketing provides with the lower prices associated with securing the item at a major market. Tchoyi must preside over the allocation of stalls and the balancing of sectors, making sure that a range of goods and services can be housed across the market. He must ensure the accessibility of vendors, so that those who are hawking by foot or who line outside the official retailing spaces do not interfere excessively with the business of those who are more stationary within the interior of the market itself. He must act against excessive price-fixing, where the complicit hoarding of goods or the underpricing of them by those retailers who are working in collusion with others is used to undermine competitors. He must make sure that certain standards of cleanliness and safety are adhered to, and that revenue collection is timely and comprehensive. Again, for all of these tasks he is equipped with certain administrative powers.

However, like all kinds of economic transactions, marketing practices have also been intentionally complicated in order to derive value from attaining a more diverse series of synergies between the delivery of specific goods and services with the constraints and possibilities of particular capacities of consumption. In a place like Bepanda, available income is seldom regularized; it comes and goes in erratic rhythms of accumulation and need. As many households depend on members' remittances from elsewhere, their purchasing practices increasingly shift from a weekly or daily purchase of basic inputs—the practices that these local markets most directly addressed. In order to better capture their consumption, local retailers configure specific deals whereby purchases on credit or paid for in advance are worked out, or increasingly where a portion of money earned by the migrant is remitted directly to the *commerçant*, who releases an agreed upon volume of goods at specific intervals. Arrangements are

even made among a group of distinct retailers, all selling different kinds of goods, to bundle diverse items into a specific package that is then subject to a negotiated price with a group of households.

These complexities have been added on to a market already thick with a range of symbolic and relational economies. The purchase of a particular item, such as a kilo of tomatoes or a package of ten children's track suits, was always more than the attainment of the commodity itself. Measures themselves were always variable, depending not only on the identity of the consumer, but also on the time of year, the amount to be purchased, and the intention of the purchase itself. Even in a local market where residents are usually highly familiar with one another, most purchases are accompanied by some conversation, usually small talk, but sometimes important information and gossip about the health of associates held in common, local and city events, and the prices of many things.

Markets are thick with talk, and thus with impressions, rumors, interpretations. Potential customers are always steered toward or away from certain opportunities not only for consumption, but also for exchange—you do this for me, I will do this for you; I know that this is going on; do you want to come in on it. The *this* and the *it* may refer to places to live, goods to acquire, places to work. Everyone in a neighborhood like Bepanda is looking for small advantages, more things and opportunities to acquire for less. Whether they have any sanctioned belonging there or not, hundreds of people, neither buyer nor seller, use the market every day to make something happen, to see who they might see, to take or be taken into some scheme. Given these needs, there is much room for dissimulation; much room for making things seem as if they are real when they are not, or making them real simply through the sheer mobilizing of money, interest, or support on the part of those schemed or part of making a scheme. The market becomes the site of such incessant jockeying, of turning transactions into an opportunity to perform more than the transaction itself.

While Tchoyi's institutional toolbox provides him with some instruments that enable him to maintain some order, they are not really adapted to the complexities of the transactions for which the market provides a context. Adding to the complexity is the fact that local government, the Douala municipality, and the national state—who share at various levels in the welfare of Bepanda—provide little in the way of employment generation, livelihood formation, infrastructure, or social services. In neither policy nor programming do these levels of the state facilitate social cohesion, complementarity, knowledge production, or a viable division of labor and social stratification that does not have to be incessantly renegotiated.

In terms of the rules and regulations that officially govern the market, things then have to get out of hand in order to really work. In other words, clear demarcations among sectors, buyers and sellers, licensed

and unlicensed retailers, mobile hawkers and stationary *commerçants*, and locals and strangers cannot really stay put in order for any transaction to exceed the surface appearances necessary in order for some surplus, profit, or advantage to be garnered. The generation of such surpluses creates a market of ambiguities. It is not always clear what actually is being gained, who is actually working together, or who is actually making money, coming out ahead. There are so many settlements of past obligations mixed with hedges on the future — transactions geared toward cultivating the possibility that at a future time, loans might be made, large quantities of rice might be accessed for a very low price, individuals might be available for sexual encounters, or wealthy visiting uncles might be introduced to aspiring young students — that it is seldom clear what is being bought and sold.

What governs this ambiguity, keeping things that must get out of hand from getting too much out of hand? As Tchoyi himself indicates, he must depend on the rule of the invisible in order to do his job. This invisible sometimes entails various facets of divine intervention or sorcery but has, according to the chief, a more quotidian dimension. Tchoyi is the chief of the market, but he is able to be chief only through a dispersal of administrative power through a composite of actors whose identities may shift but whose characteristics remain somewhat stable. In other words, the "real" chief is a hybridized entity of local residents, whose combined actions and features are able to get the bulk of participants in the market to see all that transpires according to a basically shared, if flexibly drawn, point of view.

At a certain point each day, as Tchoyi would point out, a local healer would pass through the market to buy herbs. According to the time of day, this visit would correspond either with that of a young man who headed a local youth development committee taking particular interest in organizing young boys who worked the three-wheel carts that transported goods between markets, stores, and households; or with an owner of a series of buildings contiguous to the market whose family owned large tracts of land in Bamenda, a Bamileke town in the northwest of Cameroon from which many families in Bepanda had their origin.

These latter visits also coincided with those of a Madame Ngouna, who over the years had parlayed her dominance of local cassava retailing into a series of flour processing workshops across Douala and who returned frequently to Bepanda to buy small items such as lingerie or toothpaste from a large number of retailers simply as a symbolic gesture, and a sergeant in the gendarme who would buy large quantities of sweets to hand out to children coming out at the end of their school days as an occasion to lecture them on the need to get a good education, and who was widely viewed as someone powerful enough to keep the neighborhood relatively

free in recent years of the arbitrary military raids that had been a common feature throughout the prior decade. The paths of these personalities all would cross, usually daily. Who they spoke with and how became key topics of speculation, and the instructions, advice, or admonitions they would give acted as momentary anchors to the pursuant conversations those in the market would have with each other. The words of these personalities themselves were not as important as the fact that they were able to mobilize attention, first by the inordinate attention that these individuals paid to each other, and then as a means of engaging particular buyers and sellers in the market that they would otherwise not notice.

Crucial to this process is an economy of generosity applied and withdrawn. Given the intense needs of a mostly impoverished community, the availability of offerings of goods and services that go beyond what can be afforded has long been an instrument that solidifies affiliation and loyalty. It provides the platform from which individuals might sustain a sense of hopefulness, a sense that it is possible to go beyond what is presently experienced. So when such generosity is withdrawn, individuals are left disoriented. They will find it difficult to access the support and collaboration of those who remain the recipients of generosity or aspire to it.

Such generosity has become even more significant as the criteria of equivalence in transactions are being stretched to encompass larger demands and more domains. For example, at funerals, weddings, and birthing ceremonies, extended family units now frequently will be asked to provide a specific quantity of meat, rice, alcohol, or services such as influence with government officials or sex as a guarantor of keeping those attending the ceremony from the consequences of witchcraft. One can observe requests in the market for idiosyncratic quantities of items, especially on days when a major ceremony is occurring in the neighborhood. So .63 kilos of chicken gizzards may come to equal 3 large bottles of beer; or 3.66 kilos of rice come to equal a two-paragraph letter of introduction from a local chief to the principal of a secondary school. At times these numbers have specific meanings in terms of people's ages, addresses, or other, more opaque, references to numerology. But the terrain of equivalence is being stretched, and a form of mutual extortion comes to characterize more daily exchanges. Within such an environment, then, an economy of generosity is all the more important.

For those Tchoyi sees and relies upon as constituting the "governing composite," there is little in their official positions that warrant them either individually or collectively from being eligible to assume such temporary power. Each possesses a particular capacity that provides them a basis to exert some authority—whether it be land ownership, customary ties, successful businesses, or influence among a certain group of the local population. But Bepanda has other, often more powerful local figures—local

chiefs, Bamileke entrepreneurs, politicians, religious leaders, or mafia heads, for example. Although each of these personalities Tchoyi identifies has a reputable and substantial position, they are all, with the possible exception of Madame Ngouna, tangential to the activities of the market itself. These are not the major wholesalers and producers; these are not the movers and shakers of the big entrepreneurial networks that control the big production and distribution networks.

The procedures that make up their precise role in the Bepanda market are not so clear, nor are the precise qualifications that make them eligible for fulfilling such a role. They are not so easily identifiable as the purveyors of certain actions, interpretations, impressions, knowledge dissemination, or mobilizations to which the market gives rise. In other words, given the volatility of markets as sites for the generation of surplus values and collaborations of all kinds, they are potentially dangerous places for the production of untamed socialities. While the "governing composite" may, as claimed by Tchoyi, keep such sociality from really getting out of hand, the dominant political interests of the city will see in the market always a potential countervailing force to its rule — and with good reason, as markets have been sites of insurrection in Douala in the past. As such, those who are at least implicitly steering market transactions and particular negotiations in specific directions, even if simply by constituting points of reference through which circulations of conversation, interpretation, and performance pass, most strategically operate by virtue of not being readily identifiable by official political power. Thus we have Tchoyi's version of the invisible hand of the market.

Such invisible governance, while relying on this composite of actors, will, as Tchoyi's own account of his history as market chief demonstrates, experience some degree of interchangeability. Different actors will make up this composite, all having some kind of larger credibility that can be easily and widely recognized, but not directly derivative from specific positions of authority, not rooted in a specific formula whereby the composite is a homegrown version of an intersectoral partnership — one part customary authority, one part business representation, one part civil society, and so forth. At times the "network is cut"[15] and specific people, embodying the crystallization of multiple transactions, stand out and appear to be the drivers of influence and change.

In the composite at hand during my discussions with Tchoyi, each participant was propelled into the market by specific consumption needs — herbs, lingerie, and candy, for example. In part, these consumption needs were particular enough to make each stand out as a particular kind of "regular customer" and a regularized interruption from a norm of buying that was, in turn, being substantially reconfigured and particularized to the diverse consumption profiles of households in the community.

But Tchoyi also indicates that each of these people embodies a wide series of connections to various facets of life in Bepanda, through their own personal histories, networks, and affiliations, so that their mutual coincidence in the market provides a site and occasion for there to be a symbolic condensation and then rendering of the coming together of these various facets of life in a way that is visible to those who spend a great deal of their lives in the market but not to those who have reoriented their political and economic lives to standing outside and above it. What is mobilized is the common sense that something significant is taking place, and that this mobility of actors making up a governing composite brings buyers and sellers in the market into particular connections by positing the possibility of understanding just what may be going on in the scores of negotiations, provisional accommodations, deals, bargains, and complicities taken not in their entirety, but in multiples that exceed the one by one. In order to subsist, the players in the market need to understand the complex games, so in this way, they are ready to pay attention.

Given the heightened state of ambiguity the market produces, where goods and services, as well as individuals, are being converted into uses of all kinds, where the acts of buying and selling become more particularized, and where each transaction attempts to attain some surfeit of meaning and possibility, there exists the potential for the parochial—the reterritorialization of interactions within smaller domains of familiarity and trust—even though such narrowing of the circle of affiliation may go against the grain of the extensionality required by limited resources.

The politics affected by this governing composite facilitates circulation, keeps things open in a way that provides a measure of focus and stability—some kind of guarantee against the openness of transactions simply dissipating without the consolidation and scale necessary to make things happen—whether those things be the assurance of steady supply of food, of transporting goods from one place to another, of pooling money and time to access things cheaply and in some sizable quantity, and importantly, of keeping people in some kind of concerted action and thus being able to reach larger swaths of the city, in terms of more people, more space, more possibilities.

These market politics, informed and sometimes haunted by the intersecting political and economic practices that shape, enliven, and constrain specific possibilities of actions, are sometimes cited as important references and sometimes kept out of view. Cameroon was built from the agglomeration of two distinct colonial legacies, British and French, anglophone and francophone—an amalgamation that appears stabilized at times by the embittered remembrance of its accomplishment. Fear of the social disintegration exemplified by many other African countries has produced a politics of inertia, where the preservation of an image of

political stability secured through the regime's highly visible practice of seeming to involve as many actors as possible in matters of policy and decision making means that few decisions are actually made. Everyone thus becomes convinced that invisible forces are behind any significant endeavor. For most citizens it is not clear how anything happens, and in the rampant expansion of the sense that things are not what they appear to be, there is little confidence in any form of mediation that would enable residents to have a working sense that specific actions they undertake are likely to produce certain results.[16]

Inertia permits a facade of normality, allowing a level of economic accumulation that fuels a practice whereby elites from diverse regions and ethnicities can feel they have a stake in maintaining the system, but where any other substantial social development flounders. Any effort at sustained contestation seems haunted by the murky political machinations of the past, in part because the independence struggles of the 1950s and 1960s are not talked about.

For example, the Unions des Populations du Cameroun (UPC), the key anticolonial and reunification movement in the prelude to independence, is seldom mentioned. As colonial administrations shifted sizable populations to key plantation areas, there were particularly large numbers of francophone émigrés within areas under British control who supported reunification as a means to minimize their foreign status and, with local support, largely tempered countervailing tendencies expressed by some anglophone members of the southern Cameroon elite to deepen an articulation with Nigeria. When the UPC was outlawed in French Cameroon in 1955 following violent anti-French demonstrations, the party commenced a long and vicious guerrilla struggle. The UPC, in an adamant attempt to erode the various local institutions that helped underline the colonial divisions, was often ruthless in these efforts, estranging much of southern Cameroon.

The pro-French political forces that would inherit a newly sovereign Cameroonian state, always lukewarm to reunification with anglophone southern Cameroon, supported it primarily as a means of weakening the UPC. The international community basically forced a decision upon the anglophone areas whereby independence could be attained only by joining either Nigeria or Cameroon — a choice that had little popular support. Eventually, the marriage was with Cameroon, but only because the impression had been widely cultivated that southern Cameroon would keep most of its governance institutions. What prevailed instead was a political disposition wherein the south was systematically marginalized, and the vision of the UPC to generate national institutions that would cut across ethnicity and region was wiped out.[17] Today, the UPC is barely mentioned, as if a cross-cutting articulation of diverse Cameroon citizens

cannot be constituted as an objective of politics either in a more closely integrated national state or through federalism. If the aim of politics cannot therefore be either the enhanced autonomy of regions or greater national integration, what can it be? How are people to organize their sentiments and alliances?

In Douala, and particularly in Bepanda, the challenge faced by the locality is that the state itself, in order to intersect with neighborhoods where markets continue to renovate their practices and thus reinvigorate their status as sites of quiet yet persistent contestation, attempts to appropriate this mode of invisibility. The state attempts to penetrate into the very intimacy of everyday life by acting as if it is in charge of a kind of invisible circulation. In other words, that it possesses a capacity to bring the mundane, traceable activities, contexts, and relations relaunched daily by residents to seemingly impossible intersections with unseen forces, unknown lives, distant places, and a whole range of unspeakable occurrences.

The state has managed to convince many that it rules by sorcery, that it is able to control through deploying invisible powers that take what is discernible to residents and connect it to unknown events, people, and situations. The state plays on a basic fear incumbent in urban life: residents who navigate the city never can be sure how their own existence may be implicated in the narratives of others. They can never be sure whether their immediate positions and actions inadvertently place them in some line of fire—on a trajectory of some conveyance capable of taking them out. As the possibilities of mediation—the possibilities to convert differences of intensity, of disorder, into clearly defined sets of locations, corresponding entities, and fields of reliable interpretation—diminish, the sense of potential harm increases.

Yet cities, no matter how depleted and fragmented, still constitute platforms for trajectories of incrementalism. Houses and limited infrastructure are added onto bit by bit; the mobilization of family labor buys time for a small business to grow; migration is used as an instrument to pool together savings in order to start a new economic activity; mobile work crews are formed to dig wells, help with construction, or deliver goods until they make enough contacts to specialize on one particular activity. Incrementalism can produce unacceptable stratification, which can be seen across most neighborhoods in Douala, where some houses attain the status of villas while proximate ones seem to remain permanently incomplete. Certain actors and groups are able to organize labor, money, and contacts to finish roads, complete water reticulation projects, or electrify their compounds and neighborhoods, while others languish. Incrementalism, long an important element of urban development policy across many cities, can provoke intense social conflict.[18] Yet it still embodies the capacity of residents to use what they have and what they are doing as a base to further elaborate and

diversify urban social economies, as well as reflect particular interrelationships with larger scale infrastructure and communication networks.

The Bepanda market is a critical locus through which negotiations around the inputs of goods and services are made, incorporating particular possibilities and practices of incrementalism. The ability of a mobile governing composite to draw in and recalibrate the attentions and affiliations of those using the market becomes an important tool in keeping the various manifestations of the incremental from becoming overly fragmentary or polarizing and keeps a broad swath of residents in play.

Emergency Democracy

The prevailing policy frameworks regarding impoverished cities in the global South conventionally bemoan the absence of municipal structures adequate to socializing sustainable and appropriate uses of the urban environment and to enroll residents into predictable and transparent management practices. The lack of "good governance" is proffered as something nearly always self-explanatory. Yet the situation cuts both ways. Mediations that might have ensured the ability of residents to mark out daily continuities and the sense that the efforts they made were headed somewhere, linking residents, land, built environment, social economy, and institutionalized decision making, have worn away, leading to widespread conviction as to the arbitrariness of events and power. It is difficult for more and more residents to get a sense of what could be done. At the same time, the weakening links connecting actions to specific connotations and objects to specific utilizations permit the appearance of multiple thickets of operations, where the many elements that pass through markets, households, public spaces, derelict buildings, institutions, transport stations, and ports are reworked, recombined in heterogeneous ways that both compromise the integrity of the traditional responsibilities of these domains and interpenetrate in ways that both dissipate and extend their efficacy. Residents make themselves available to be taken into a wide range of schemes, often without any clear sense of what the payoff will be—yet, nevertheless, a hedge on the future—as they take others into fleeting operations in which they already are participants. Thus constant incorporation—to seize and be seized—is the predominant game. Objects and experiences, as well as their valuation, are realigned, and their actualization gives rise to more unanticipated possibilities. New forms of calculation and risk are entailed, as it is not clear to participants on what basis any given decisions are to be made; ambiguities are promoted as they are also furiously sorted through in efforts to produce the impression of clear answers and a clear way forward. So while the performativity of urban space and actors may be enhanced, these intensities engender capaci-

ties that are not easily translatable into the languages that demonstrate accountability, efficacy, and productivity to a larger world of multilateral relations. The emergency is not diminished even if it is lived through.

A long and detailed political history is at work here, although I clearly gloss this history that has continuously deferred state formation and turned much of Africa into entrepôt economies.

With the absence of maps or the plethora of incomprehensible ones, everyday life can become an incessant state of emergency, in a doubled sense of this term. On the one hand, *emergency* connotes a state of alarm. It is a rupture in the organization of the present where normal approaches are insufficient, where what has transpired in the past threatens the sustenance of well-being at the same time that it has provided an inadequate supply of resources in order to deal with this threat. Emergency leaves no time for accounting, no time to trace out the precise etiology of the crisis, for the sequence of causation is suspended in the urgency of a moment where recklessness may be as important as caution. The past brings the community to the brink, and at this precipice what can there be to remember?

At the same time, *emergency* describes a process of things in the making, of the emergence of new thinking and practice still unstable, still tentative in terms of the use to which such thinking and practice will be put. This is a present, then, able to seemingly absorb any innovation or experiment, a temporality characterized by a lack of gravity that would hold meanings to specific expressions and actions. There are no bearings and disorientation is guaranteed. Yet the crisis is dissipated: there is no normality to refer to, no experience of something unraveling, even though there is also no guarantee that the community will not return to the very place from which it started. So *emergency* connotes both the end of certain flexibility of interpretation, of the ability to put off until another day a reckoning of commitment and conviction now found to have been the wrong way to go. At the same time, this state of emergence enables, however fleetingly, a community to experience its life, experiences, and realities in its own terms—this is our life, nothing more, nothing less. Thus much of the process of remaking urban everyday life lies in an attention to the gestured, contingent, and shorthand annotation instead of the memorial; exchanged glances and murmurs rather than documents; deportments, practices, and trades—all a kind of emergency democracy.[19]

The city is a constant reminder of what could be but isn't. For some, extraordinary efforts are made, with generosity and ingenuity, to articulate the disparate people and things around them in compositions of opportunity. If what is attempted does not always work or seldom works, at least things are kept open, and there is sufficient evidence generated about the worthiness of effort. But such attempts are done in the face of others for whom the memory of what might have been possible is continuously effaced

in the escalating dramas of desperate transactions played out in narrowing arenas. As the old conventions of making oneself a real person seem either to no longer apply or are under apparently permanent seizure by calcified political and social interests, many fellow residents are seen less as resources or virtuous elements than as blockages to a better future that already — through machinations of religious devotion, cultural entitlement, or inflated personal destiny — has one's name written on it.

So emergency democracy is not the configuration of a representational voice, and it does not so necessarily render residents or their practices more visible. In other words, the social architectures that residents put together using their time, bodies, inclinations, tools, and all the material stuff that exists around and within them to reach and connect to public necessities such as water, opportunities for income, or good times fade into a larger world of operations. These architectures — not easily mapped out with their ever-shifting topographies of openings, closures, circumventions, retreats, and dissimulation — are both material and ephemeral, infused with shifting tactics but also a concrete shaping of bodies and places. They are conduits, connectors, spinning out unanticipated by-products and opportunities.

These experiences in Dakar and Douala demonstrate the mobilization of effort that continuously attempts to put the possibilities of certain stabilities at risk — in contrast to investing in circumscribed, defensive posturings based on the localization of everyday actions and the tight specification of attributes required for making affiliations — so as to configure more extensive possibilities of collaboration. What is particularly risky about such maneuvers is that there are no apparent institutional mechanisms that could sustain the collaborations that ensue, thus relegating them to an almost incessant provisionality. The locus of regularity tends to be constantly relocated into a preparedness to do different things in different situations, and to simply move on to the next opportunity, dealing with whatever it brings. It is not so much that urban residents here embody some deep-seated aspiration to "be all over the place." The dissipation of formerly relied-upon structures of mediation that linked individual, household, locality, and city has forced residents into such opportunistic actions. But once ensconced within them, a field of participation is opened — contested, often injurious, often without discernible gains — yet a field that is being replayed, and where constellations of power, if not upended, become more porous and tentative. In this way an emergency democracy is at work in the regimes that settle in to emergency as a mode of rule. Perhaps ironically, the aspirations for the city — as a place where it is possible for people to exceed the terms of existence previously known to them, as well as their particularistic identities of ethnicity, territory, or religion — are partially actualized in the very inability of the nation to do the job it was supposed to do.

Notes

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19. Thanks to Professor Rob Stone of Goldsmiths University, London, for making this point.