Rethinking space and politics from the urban interstices: Politicization of youth through Ouagadougou's 'grins de thé'

Félix Lefebvre
CESSMA (Paris) / Université de Tours, Département de géographie,
50 av. Jean Portalis · BP 0607 · 37 206 Tours Cedex 3, France

Abstract
In Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, tea *grins* are set up in interstitial spaces, on the border between public and private. They are meetings of young people (mostly men) who gather at varying times to drink tea and chat. They constitute spaces of sociability, both refuge and resource space, where the hierarchies that usually structure social relations which are linked to age, gender or social status, are subverted without disappearing completely.

If they are not necessarily considered as political places by their users, politics is very present in the values mobilised around the *grin* and in the very practice they constitute. The *grins* can be considered as *heterotopias*, and moreover 'arenas' where public problems are constituted through collective discussion, but they do not appear as a legitimate instance of political debate. The *grin* thus represents an illegitimate arena where a 'subaltern *cityness*' is constructed. Thus, this article questions the processes of politicisation linked to specific practices of urban space, without necessarily appearing in the public space of discourse. Cityness is considered in its processual aspect, that is, as the space of the city that allows individuals to constitute themselves as political subjects.

This article also questions the existence of a *continuum* of political speech, whose public expression would depend on the possibilities of negotiations with the social order, and on the power relations that produce it. In short, it asks whether the infra-political practices of the space by the dominated allow the construction of collective actions around these questions.

Keywords
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, urban resistances, infrapolitics, subaltern cityness, heterotopia

1. Introduction

In Ouagadougou, there are 'spaces of the in-between' (Boyer, 2014) whose organisation and conditions of access protect their participants from the power relations specific to the public space, while offering a space for discussion and enunciating a collective speech. *Grins* are certainly part of this. In general, they are more or less informal groups of individuals, usually young men, who gather in a particular space. They appeared in urban areas during the 1990s, following the waves of democratisation (Hien, 2011; Kieffer, 2006). They are found in the Ivory Coast (Vincourt, Kouyaté, 2012), Niger (Boyer, 2014; Masquelier, 2019) and their practice is thought to be older in Mali (Bondaz, 2013) and the western part of the country, notably in Bobo-Di-

oulasso (Ouattara, 2003). The word *grin*, of Dioulan origin, designates a 'meeting'. In concrete terms and refers to groups of rather young people[1] who meet at variable times in a specific place to drink tea and discuss. In most neighbourhoods, they generally invest in unoccupied spaces that offer the group a certain tranquillity and relative comfort. It can be the terrace of a shop at night, after closing time or a shady place under a tree where benches or chairs can be installed.

The primary purpose of the *grin* is to 'spend time' together over a cup of tea: 'in a context marked by institutional and political violence, crisis of employment and of the urban system, these *grins* refer to a street culture created by young people at odds with postcolonial practices' (Kieffer, 2006). *Grins* constitute a space of sociability where the hierarchies that usually structure social relations are somewhat blurred without being erased. They appear to be both a refuge and a place of exchange, but also a resource. They are a space where collective identities are constructed, and services and strategies are exchanged – in particular, those of 'débrouille' (scavenging) (Hien, 2011; Kieffer, 2006). Finally, they participate as much as they testify to the constitution of the codes of the social group driving street culture in urban Africa – the Youth (Biaya, 2000).[2]

In this way, they structure a 'system of generalised exchange of services' (Kieffer, 2006), which constitutes a *de facto* hierarchy, often between dominant elders who offer these opportunities to younger people,[3] and younger people who benefit from this network of mutual aid and exchange. In this context, *grins* constitute kind of a transmission belt of the dominant practices and representations within a particular social order. Nevertheless, they are spaces where this order can be questioned and discussed owing to the familiarity that develops among them and the possibility of handling irony or jokes. Speaking out and protesting are parts of the game. The values conveyed by the elders are transformed and nourished by the influence of new values introduced, for example, by the cultural and musical exchanges that take place there. It is often in *grins* that rap or reggae young artists' lyrics are tested (Kieffer, 2006). Thus, the *grin* constitutes a social system that follows certain rules, particularly hierarchical ones, but where a new culture and new values are invented, which become the new urban cultures and values. It is a social space that does not escape the rules of the environment where it develops, but where new possibilities for negotiation and questioning of such rules emerge.

These spaces develop in a deeply unequal urban

1 In the recent scientific literature on West African regimes after the democratization waves of the 1990s, urban youth are defined, in addition to their growing demographic weight (Courtin, Guengant, 2011), by the contrast between their driving position in the processes of socio-political change in West African societies (Awenengo-Dalberto, 2011) and their subordinate position in social hierarchies, the formal labor market, and positions of power (Attané, 2002 ; Delaunay, Boyer, 2017; de Bonneval, 2011). This was particularly salient in the 2014 Burkina Faso insurgency, where youth and organisations claiming to be such were on the front lines, where their collective demand for political emancipation seemed to echo a necessary social emancipation in a country where 20-30% of those under 30 are unemployed (Roth, 2014). In this sense, the 'youth' is not so much defined by age as by the particular social position it occupies, marked by precariousness and dependence on intra-family solidarities (*ibid.*).

2 Although undeniably overwhelmingly male, the *grins*' audience can in some cases be more gendered mixed. A more in-depth study could perhaps establish whether the cases of diversity are linked to the specificities of certain neighborhoods or certain socio-economic categories (the author was able to note in particular a significant gendered mix for a *grin* in the close to downtown neighborhood of Wemtenga, which was composed mostly of artists and rappers. In general, it is tricky to give a clear sociological profile of *grin* participants, at least from personal observations. If certain characteristics can be put forward – a majority of men, rather young, not from the elite – each observation of *grins* tend to contradict these tendencies as women can participate, sometimes notable of the district, and some *grins* are frequented by older participants (between 30 and 55 years old, as in the case of the Camp fonctionnaire *grin*), etc. The socio-economic profiles vary, ranging from the homeless unemployed to the prosperous shopkeeper or civil servant, to the student or even the small craftsman. Some initial strong characteristics of the *grins* are now almost obsolete for their understanding, as the western origin of the participants.

3 This question of the social hierarchy linked to age has already been highlighted in previous works. These spaces thus appear to be a way of escaping this hierarchy in part, while at the same time reproducing it in one's own hierarchy (see in particular the question of the *kogho*, p. 56). The elders are identified in most works on West African urban societies as 'real power holders in the political field' (Kieffer, 2006), 'at all levels, from the family to the State' (Boyer, 2014). The *grins* therefore offer spaces for challenging these norms and proposing more equal relationships, even if they do not guarantee that 'young people do not place themselves [...] in a position of reproduction of the social order when they change status' (*ibid*).

context. The difficulties in accessing urban land in Ouagadougou are accentuated by public policies aimed at evicting vulnerable populations from central areas towards informal neighbourhoods on the periphery (Biehler, 2010). The result is an intense inequality in accessing the city's resources that is strongly correlated with economic status and age (Delaunay, Boyer, 2017). While the public debate on institutional issues was able to take advantage of an effective associative and activist network to trigger an insurrection that led to the departure of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 and a democratic transition (Bonnecase, 2015; Chouli, 2015), the issue of spatial inequalities, despite being central to the daily lives of many Ouagadougou's dwellers, does not seem to give rise to a strong structured activist mobilisation (with a few exceptions). Overall, the issue of spatial justice has not emerged in Ouagadougou as a public problem (Cefaï, Terzi, 2020), structuring a set of activist actions and discourses, as in other cities (Bénit, 2005; Bret, 2002; Gervais-Lambony et al., 2014).

Thus, thinking about the question of *heterotopic* or *abnormal* spaces (Foucault, 1984) in an objectively inegalitarian urban context leads us to consider the question of resistance to this urban order from the inhabitants. If *grins* seem to constitute a natural crucible for this resistance, then this imposes a redefinition of the political framework within the context of Ouagadougou, by taking an interest in the *infrapolitical* dimension (Scott, 1992) of urban practices, whereas the *grins* were not conceived to give rise to a direct confrontation with the authorities. Finally, it is a question of continuing the research conducted in recent years about the *de facto right to the city*, that is, a constructivist approach to H. Lefebvre's political concept (Lefebvre, 1968) which proposes to start from social and spatial practices in order to understand the emancipatory potential of urban experience outside of strict militant frames (Morange, Spire, 2017).

This article is based on a PhD study conducted in Ouagadougou between 2014 and 2016. The contribution of political subjectivation processes through urban practice studies (Bayat, 1997; Choplin, Ciavolella, 2018; Foucault, 1982) to the author's research has led to his analysis of the struggle for urban resources not through the discourses transpiring in public space, but through the practices and representations of the inhabitants, and the search for an 'autonomous use' of the space (Ripoll, Veschambre, 2005). The empirical material on which this article is based consists on the one hand in numerous extracts from biographical semi-directive interviews (about 50 in all) conducted with inhabitants[4] in 15 city districts that cover their practices and representations of space, and on the other hand, in observations of three different *grins* in three different neighbourhoods of the city (Ouidi, Camp fonctionnaire, Nonghin) and informal conversations carried out on this occasion and recorded in a field notebook.[5] The author had been invited to participate in these *grins* by various acquaintances in the field, where he tried to limit his interventions and exert influence on the subjects discussed to reduce the impact of his presence on the normal course of the *grin*.

The question is how these spatially and socially interstitial spaces constitute a milestone in the politicisation of an unequal urban space. The aim is to analyze how specific spatial practices can constitute infrapolitical modes of action against urban power relations without declaring itself a political act.

4 The participants were exclusively men, often young (under 40 years old) and of low to middle social position. However, if this is the majority sociological profile within the *grins*, it is not the only one. The language used during my invitations was French, which was spoken fluently by most of the participants I met. Nevertheless, participants normally exchanged in Moore, the language of the Moose, the majority in Ouagadougou. It should be noted that the *grins* are a practice that originated in the west of the country, and that Dioula is therefore a common language there (this is the case for the Nonghin *grin*, which essentially brings together participants from the western region of Bobo Dioulasso)

5 The survey protocol did not focus specifically on the grins, and the author only attended them casually as a guest, without suspecting that he was going to witness decisive elements in his reflection, and thus without a precise methodological device (neither observation grid, nor interview grid, nor photographs). The excerpts presented are from individual interviews conducted with inhabitants concerning their practices and representations of the space, during which they mentioned the *grins* (and then invited the author to attend). Consequently, it is undeniable that more precise data from the *grins* would be necessary to solidify the leads of this article: this is the object of the research project currently being built by the author.

2. An *other space* between public and private

2.1. A space that brings the collective word into play

In the interviews, residents mentioned that the *grins* were popular places to meet and debate. Attending some of these *grins* helps to realise their importance in the production of a collective discourse on the urban environment, among many other subjects. In fact, almost everything is discussed. Political topics are far from being the majority as people talk about their day, discuss sports, and exchange job and networking opportunities. That said, in times of political unrest – during the weeks leading up to and following the 2014 insurgency, in particular, the *grin* can quickly turn into a political agora where topics of concern to residents are publicly debated. The political vocation of the *grins*' speech is often felt in the name that youth groups choose for themselves, although this is not systematic.[6] In Nonghin district, Christian's *grin*, for example, is called the 'Youth Palace': 'It's like the National Assembly, everything is discussed here!' (interview Christian, Nonghin, 29/05/2015). Perhaps more subversive and provocative, the *grin* that Aristide attends in his home district of Ouidi nonetheless bears a name loaded with political meaning: the *Azawad*.[7] Christian confirms that while the *grin*'s vocation does not directly provide a space for political discussion, pre-existing tensions are readily apparent:

> "In the grin here, we talk about it [about the neighbourhood's problems], we discuss, we talk about everything. Often, debates are very heated. [...] Until a certain time of the night, we discuss. " (Christian interview, Nonghin, 29/05/2015)

If, like most, the *grin* in which Christian participates is constituted around a well-identified social group, that is, young people between 20 to 40 years of age, mostly from the western region, and without stable employment – the group can expand for certain debates:

> "Pretty much, it's the same generation [but] often there are 'dads' that come and talk with us" (*ibid.*).

Christian presents it as a way of gathering the opinions of the whole neighbourhood:

> "What I told you is my point of view. If you come back and you find that it's crowded, you are going to get everyone's perspectives. " (*ibid.*)

If Christian fails to mention the inevitable power struggles that arise in each *grin*, and the limited representativeness to which they claim, then the *grin* is perceived as a kind of democratic ideal where every point of view is exchanged. This symbolism can be found in the speeches of most of the interviewees who attend the *grins*. Aristide presents it by insisting on the openness of the place and the freedom of the discussion that takes place there:

> "Anyone can come to Azawad. You come, you discuss. We talk about everything, we drink tea... It's quiet! " (interview Aristide, Bassinko, 11/04/2016)

This ideal of horizontality does not exclude a well-defined distribution of roles among participants. Before going to the *grin*, Aristide asks the author to accompany him to buy tea and sugar at the nearest store. This role can change depending on the financial means of each person but is usually done by the same person. In some cases, the tea may be paid for by someone outside the group, usually a relative of a group member, or even an older brother or sister, whether or not a former group member, and it is often another member of the *grin*, usually the youngest, who prepares the tea. In general, there is one *kogho*,[8] often the eldest, or a member of the group who is recognized for his

6 While the two *grins* mentioned in the following lines have a name with a political meaning, this name can also refer to much broader (less directly political) topics, corresponding to the different concerns of the participants such musical references, especially to rap ('les fils du Wu Tang' (Wu Tang Sons), 'Positive Radikal', etc.), references to location ('Grenoble City' located on the outskirts of the Reemdogo music garden, partly financed by the city of Grenoble), etc. (Kieffer, 2006).

7 From the name of the Saharan territory located essentially in northern Mali (and partially in Niger and southern Algeria) whose independence is claimed by various Tuareg armed separatist groups, sometimes associated with jihadist groups.

8 *Kogho* means 'big brother' in Moore.

social success or wisdom, who acts as leader.[9] With respect to these roles and their conditions, the *grins*' unity is upheld and everyone respects the conditions (Kieffer, 2006).

Grins are also distinguished by the spatial conditions that lead to their installation. They take place exclusively in the street, which makes them obvious meeting places. If their access conditions respond to precise codes,[10] they are held in public spaces and in full view. They are recognisable through certain codes, such as the teapot on the brazier, which distinguishes them from the rest of the space and from any other grouping. Thus, the *grins* are on the border of the interiority or exteriority relationship which brings 'into play the question of power and its control' (Boyer, 2014). Just as the discussions that take place such as stage free speech and equal exchange in a highly-normalised and hierarchical social setting, the open/closed spatialization of the *grins* makes them transitional spaces between the norm and alternative speech. In this way, they constitute a kind of 'spatialization rite' (*ibid.*: 8) which is defined as 'the implementation of an apparatus with a symbolic purpose that constructs relative identities through mediating alterities' (Augé, 1994). The *grin* produces anot*her space*, a *heterotopia* (Foucault, 1984) that creates a group that is united and identifiable as such, despite the hierarchies that may pre-exist, where a collective discourse can be expressed. In this regard, it should be noted that the participation of women, frequently in the *grins* although always a minority, also constitutes a subversion of the gendered order of space, marked by the unequal sharing of tasks, and therefore of spatial practices between men and women. This relative mix might be associated to the non-negligible place of women in the 2014 insurrection; one of the triggers was probably 27th October Women's March (Hagberg et al., 2015). This unequal gendered spatial order can be contrasted in Burkina Faso with the active participation of women in community life, through the many women's associations (Ilboudo, 2006), as well as in political life in general (Rouamba, 2011).

The *grin* has its own regime of representation that is different from all the space representation regimes competing in Ouagadougou. This does not mean that it is not subject to the influence of such because 'heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (Foucault, 1984). In Foucault's writing, historically, these spaces, both open and closed, refuge and place of passage, serve to spatially manage 'crises' (ritualized spaces that gather individuals to go through a crisis: adolescence, gestation, old age, etc.) or 'deviations' (sick, insane, prisoners, etc.). If such spaces emerge, then, it is in some way to solve a problem. The fact that each user of the *grin* presents it by insisting on the function of dialogue and exchange leads to the belief that these spaces are there to make up for a lack of dialogue within the youth.

In this sense, the *grin* assures the political role of urban space by allowing exchange in a society where the youth lacks spaces of their own:

> "In the neighbourhood, there are places for recreation, but they are not for everyone. So we meet around a tea and we chat with friends. […] There is no place where young people can meet. There is no youth centre, there is no sports field, no soccer field… There is nothing!" (Christian interview, Nonghin, 29/05/2015)

Political discussion as well as the exchange of work opportunities or artistic creation make these spaces the vector of 'the plurality and abundance of possibilities of which the big city is the theatre' (Fouquet, 2013). Both a refuge and a resource, the *grin* allows for 'the juxtaposition in one place of several spaces that would normally be, should be incompatible' (Foucault, 2009).

9 This position does not include any privileges within the group other than not having to buy tea from the store and prepare it.

10 Whatever my respondents say, anyone passing in the streets does not settle in the *grin* without reason.

2.2. A spatial and social interstice

A wooden bench, a few cinder blocks as seats, a dusty flaming tree, a few glasses, and in the centre, on a small charcoal brazier, a thin teapot in which a strong mint tea is brewing. It is in this configuration that almost every day at the end of the afternoon ('à la descente', the exit of the offices), the few participants of the Azawad grin meet. There are usually no more than three or four on average, but this number increases during the evening by friends passing by. The flaming tree is next to the outside wall of the courtyard of Bernard, the *kogho*, an artisan in his thirties who is permanently dressed as a football player (soccer being his favourite topic of conversation at the grin). The wooden bench comes out of his house, as well as the teapot and the brazier. Thus, the *grin* is a form of extension of the interior of his courtyard. It is not held in the courtyard, reserved for relative family intimacy, but on the street, in full view of everyone, and available to friends and acquaintances who wish to join in.

It is common in Burkina Faso, as in many countries of the South (Houssay-Holzschuch et al., 2007), for public space to be invested as an extension of private space in order to carry out household chores, set up a temporary business, or organise a festive event. The grin is one of these forms of 'in-between' spaces, neither completely public nor completely private. It is both an intimate space for discussion and a public ceremony, where the exchanges that take place are both protected from too much publicity and from the gaze of elders in the family yard. It is not intended to be a public discourse, but to be in the public eye.

The grin of the Camp fonctionnaire neighbourhood is notable in this respect. This neighbourhood no longer exists, destroyed as part of the ZACA project, a major urban renewal project for the city centre in the early 2000s. Fifteen years later, the ruins are still present and nothing has been rebuilt. The former inhabitants of the neighbourhood, scattered throughout the city after their eviction, meet almost every evening for a mint tea on the sidewalk in front of the wasteland that was their neighbourhood. It is not a demonstration, a sit-in, or a political meeting (even if politics is a subject of conversation like any other, and especially in the evening when the author is invited). The goal is mostly to get together with friends, to have a good time together and to keep the community bond alive. However, by being held in this precise place, the Camp fonctionnaire's grin bears witness to the memory of the neighbourhood and keeps it alive as a public space. The grins are therefore held in these urban interstices, a piece of sidewalk, the shade of a tree, the terrace of a business, at the border between private and public, and constitute paradoxical spaces, restricted groups summoning the gaze of all. In this, it is at the same time spatial interstices, taking place in the folds of the public/private border, temporal interstices, between twilight and dawn, the working day and the return to the family intimacy, and social interstices, out of the traditional social hierarchies without however contradicting them frontally.

While the spatial organisation of the *grin* is important and systematic – every *grin* is organised in much the same way – territorial attachment is not invariably a defining feature of this type of institution. The *grin* may always be held in the same place, but it is not strictly speaking a space to be defended, and it can be mobile. The Azawad sessions are usually held under the tree adjacent to the family courtyard of Justin. However, on some evenings, the *grin* moves a few meters away, to the dimly lit cement terrace of the small store owned by one of the *grin* members. Therefore, the *grin* does not set as a goal the appropriation of space, even though it brings into play the question of appropriation through the construction of a public space for discussion and through the themes addressed (spatial problems related to the neighborhood, the street, the city, etc., can be discussed there).

In sum, the *grin* space is not fetishized, but rather responds to a basic need to overcome socio-spatial inequality: the difficulty for young people to access meeting places.

3. A *continuum* from *grin* to activism?

3.1. In Silmiyiri, from the *grin* to the *Cibal club* via the residents' association.

There are bridges between *grin* and more concrete political actions. The *grin* is not necessarily destined to be just an outlet, containing subversive words, and allowing them to be expressed. The line between the way collective concerns are expressed in the *grin* and mass political action is porous. During the author's fieldwork, he was able to study at least one example of a *grin* that served as the basis for the formation of a more political association and then a *Cibal club*[11].

In the neighbourhood of Silmiyiri, an association was formed by several of its residents in the wake of the 2014 insurgency, with the aim of defending their interests. Here, the political discourse that gives coherence to a collective precedes and motivates the production of a community of spatial interest, as Georges explains:

> "FL: And do you ever have meetings here in the neighbourhood with residents to discuss things that are common to the neighbourhood? Planning? Sanitation for example?
> G: Yes, because after the events of last October, we saw the need to create a certain cohesion at the neighbourhood level. We took the initiative to establish an association. So people [...] came to me one evening to see if they could hold a meeting under the tree next door. " (interview George, Silmiyiri, 17/05/2015)

In this case, the awareness of collective interests regarding spatial issues was somehow born out of the political substrate of the 2014 social movement, acting as a ferment. The latter seems to have brought to light the need to work towards a 'cohesion' of the neighbourhood. Concretely, it is a matter of finding solutions to various local problems related to the management of space, which are not provided by State services. In other words, it is about a collective organisation of the inhabitants becoming aware of their existence as a community, and consequently of their common interests as a community, to act against the spatial inequalities they experience:

> "G: Currently, we are finalising the papers of the association to have the receipt of the association, the recognition. It is the association "Vivre ensemble"[12], which will work on sanitation, etc. We have even considered a list of activities: cleaning, sanitation, as well as some public structures.
>
> FL: Because there were gaps in the neighbourhood? Some things that were not being done?
>
> G: Yes. To be able to do these things officially, you have to have the papers. If, for example, you say we're going to come and clean up, you have to introduce yourself, you can't say "we're an institution in the making". However, if you go with the receipt, it is still much more credible. " (*ibid.*)"

Indeed, Silmiyiri is a neighbourhood that was progressively subdivided in the 2000s, very far from the city centre and that suffers from a lack of facilities and planning, as its inhabitants say. Therefore, this inequality is conscientized, that is, objectified as a social problem (Cefaï, Terzi, 2020). Organised collective action involves a search for credibility and a competence increase in administrative matters which makes it possible to appear as a legitimate interlocutor for the State. Setting up a neighbourhood association makes it possible to obtain the 'receipt' which constitutes the real political birth certificate of Silmiyiri as a community of inhabitants. Georges insists several times

11 The *Cibal clubs* (for 'CItoyens BAlayeurs', or 'citizen sweepers') are local activist groups born under the impetus of the *Balai citoyen*, whose members meet by similarity of activities (journalists, students, etc.), but more generally by geographical proximity (Banegas, 2016, Gorovei, 2016). These have the particularity of attracting a public apparently close to the one found in the *grins* and give themselves among other functions the purpose of encouraging and aggregating political discussions. Like many *grins*, they are named according to a precise political symbolism, although more official and codified (their names correspond essentially to recognized political leaders and intellectuals, African or not: Thomas Sankara club, Kwame N'Krumah club, Cheik Anta Diop club, Che Guevara club, etc.).

12 'Living together'.

on the seriousness of the organisation of the association: 'we have a board of seventeen members with two auditors' (*ibid.*).

Georges himself agreed to take on the presidency of the association, because he was able to bring the credibility by virtue of his status as a former civil servant of the Ministry of Health and as an executive in an American NGO. This tends to show that the structuring of a collective discourse on the scale of a neighbourhood struggles to erase pre-existing social inequalities, where a notable of the neighbourhood naturally takes the head of the structure. However, he maintains that he did not ask to become president, and that it was the residents who 'co-opted' him and then 'reappointed him as president' (*ibid.*). This position has an impact on the association's actions. On the one hand, he brings his competencies and reputation in order to structure and give credibility to the association: 'I made the statute and the internal rules for them' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the association cannot function against his own interests, especially in terms of reputation. Georges remains very cautious about politics and does not want his position to lead to his being identified as an opponent:

> "If it's not political, I'm in, but if it's political... I wouldn't want to intervene one day or be interpreted as anything. They told me that no, it's not political, it's a structure that will work for the well-being, for social cohesion... When they came, to reassure me, they invited me to come and assist, so I came, I assisted. As we went along, I shared my position with things. "(*ibid.*)

In a way, the socio-political dynamics of the neighbourhood leads to the social movement built around spatial issues to follow the interests of the dominant. The logic of spatial appropriation is based on social rivalries for the control and occupation of space (Tissot, 2010). Furthermore, the dominated have fewer resources that allow them to speak out. During the survey, the most privileged inhabitants (owners or those with a stable job and a good salary compared to the general level) do not hesitate to hold a politically engaged discourse. This can be seen as freedom of speech, but it also means that their socio-spatial position allows them to express themselves without fear of losing their social or economic capital. Moreover, this capital allows them to formalise this discourse.

Thus, the associations whose vocation is to defend the claims of the inhabitants concerning spatial inequalities in the public arena come up against two interrelated stumbling blocks: the desire to keep away from political contestation, and the need not to jeopardise the existing power relationships. However, while this association may characterise a form of political avoidance (Eliasoph, 1998), it is also an example of an attempt to transform a hidden transcript into a public one (Scott, 1992).[13] While Georges presents the association as having emerged as it is, Malik, a young hardware dealer from Silmiyiri, and then Isidore, an artist, confirmed in informal discussions the idea that the association emerged from a neighbourhood *grin* - which still meets. It is in the context of the political effervescence of the pre-insurrection period that the idea of setting up an association emerges. It will allow the collection of concerns in another context – wider than that of the *grin*.

Malik confirms the experience of the association was quickly felt as a failure:

> "We were having meetings to try to figure out what was wrong, to fix it together. However, for now, it has stopped. But there were many of us." (interview Malik, Silmiyiri, 17/05/2015)

If the precise reasons for the discrediting of the association are difficult to discern (Malik is not very talkative and is not fluent in French), Malik and Isidore will then participate in the launching of the 'Cheick Anta Diop' *Cibal club* in the neighbourhood, which brings together about 50 inhabitants, mostly young men (but also many women and a few old men). Spatial issues are certainly not at the centre of these clubs' concerns. They were generally absent from the discourse at the time of the launch of the 'Cheick Anta

13 'The theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group would wish to have things appear. […] I shall use the term hidden transcript to characterize discourse that takes place "offstage", beyond direct observation by powerholders. […] It consists of those offstage speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript' (Scott, 1992).

Diop' club, and in the insurrectionary period and the short post-insurrectionary period corresponding to the research fields. In general, the discourse focused on the issue of Blaise Compaoré's departure and the return of democracy in the fragile context of the transition. However, the *Cibal clubs* regularly carry out local actions in their neighbourhoods, such as street cleaning, reforestation, and the organisation of debates on the bangs of markets. These activities show a willingness to be active on the daily issues of the inhabitants, and therefore necessarily on urban issues, and not only on national politics. Moreover, since the insurgency, the *Balai Citoyen* has been able to interfere with public debates on spatial issues. The discourse that the movement develops on corruption has allowed it to position itself on topics such as the trafficking of land plots, leading to a call for a national audit on subdivisions in 2016 (koaci.com, 08/04/2016), and in general, for 'transparency' in subdivision operations (aouaga.com, 23/08/2014).

3.2. Towards a bottom-up approach to politics

Certainly, we do not have the elements to trace the logical path of local claims from the hidden transcript to the public transcript in Ouagadougou. It is therefore out of the question to define a *continuum* of public speech that would logically go from the *grin* to the *Cibal club*[14] via the neighbourhood association. This schema would be too simplistic, hide many other possibilities, and give meaning to the different bodies, especially to the *grins*, that they do not claim. However, it is still interesting to observe these different public discourses over a limited time, which also shows the possible developments in Ouagadougou. What is important to remember here is that the *grin* remains a space of the in-between, where speech that 'questions the spatial and social norms imposed by the elders, holders of power at all levels, from the family to the State' (Boyer, 2014) is constructed. This speech remains confined to the *grin*. The *grin* allows for the release of a protesting speech specific to a dominated group (youth), but the question arises as to the formalisation of the protest, and the concrete effects of the speech, which is often intended not to leave the *grin* setting. One can ask to what extent the alternative speech carried by the *grin* has the 'efficiency on the reality of their position of dominated' (*ibid*). This brings us back to the difficulty of transforming hidden speech into public speech, which requires procedures as 'it is very likely that the hidden transcript will be produced for an audience distinct from that of the public transcript, and under different conditions of power' (Scott, 1992).[15] The discrepancy between speech and its conditions of production in a space like a *grin* and in direct political spaces capable of carrying public speech such as *Cibal clubs* tells us more about 'the impact of domination on public transcript' (*ibid*: 19), and the actual conditions of enactment.[16]

From this perspective, F. Boyer suggests 'observing the attitude and discourse of these young people outside their *fada*[17] with regard to what happens within the *fada*' (Boyer, 2014), and to wonder about the mechanisms of knowledge circulation and ways of being between the different 'worlds'. If within the *grins* an alternative speech and alternative social relations are invented (concerning the questioning of the hierarchy linked to age), we must ask ourselves if this alternative can infuse and spread beyond the *grin*, or if the change of place also corresponds to a return to traditional statuses and to the reproduction of the social order.

4. Conclusion

The practice of speech within the *grin* must be seen in the context of Burkina Faso's semi-authoritarian regime, where public speech is risky, but where the State tolerates intermediate spaces of controlled freedom that must allow political exchanges while neutralising their scope (Hilgers, Mazzocchetti, 2010). *Grins* appear to be spaces of free speech, including regarding the elders, as long as they do

14 This is especially true since the *Cibal clubs*, despite their undeniable popularity, are not unanimously supported by Burkinabè youth. We should not risk setting them up as the natural, or even the only, way for popular collective demands to emerge.

15 "What is certainly the case, however, is that the hidden transcript is produced for a different audience and under different constraints of power than the public transcript" (Scott, 1992).

16 For example, it is difficult to assess what the social movement that gave rise to the 2014 insurgency owes to the *grins*, while it is simpler to connect it concretely to the work conducted within the *Cibal clubs*.

17 The *fada* is the Nigerien equivalent of the grin.

not lead to the effective questioning of social hierarchies. This raises the following questions: are they only outlets for the social frustrations of youth, or spaces where ephemeral hopes are born and immediately extinguished? On the contrary, are they safe places where resistances are discreetly elaborated, waiting for the right moment to burst into the open?

It is necessary to underline the paradox that the study of resistance to inequality constitutes here. To try to understand the political claims of the inhabitants on the space appears all the more complex, as this reveals a particularly diffused imprint of power, and especially the power of the State. What we call resistance often consists not in directly confronting power or oppression, but rather in trying to get the best out of the game and to bend the urban space to its demands. This complex reading inclines us to look for resistance not in speeches or acts claiming to be political, but rather in practices and ways of being-in-the-city, or in the infrapolitics (Scott, 1992). This is what the *grins* highlight: if there is political discourse – and we have seen that the *grin* is clearly linked to political speech – it is above all the result of a particular practice of space. The *grin* is, in fact, a simple practice linked to spatial organisation: it is about young people meeting in a pleasant place to exchange opinions and services. The presence of this type of speech in the public space immediately gives it a political aspect that does not fail to assert itself. The *grins* have naturally become places of political debates, proto-agoras or 'parliaments of the street' (Banegas et al., 2012). However, at its core, it is partly a practical organisation, particularly to compensate for the lack of socio-community infrastructure that allows young people to meet in the neighbourhoods. Basically, it is indeed a place of 'leisure' before being a political place. It was born out of a social and spatial injustice – the lack of freely accessible meeting places for the youth.

This is not to deny the political significance of the exchanges that take place within the *grins*, but to remind that the simple fact of meeting there is a political act. The practices, as a result of the interaction between the city dwellers and the unequal spatial situation they face are already political acts. To participate in the *grin* is to play with the spatial devices of power, to acknowledge an unfavourable balance of power, and to propose a strategy to escape the situation. The term 'strategy' is used here deliberately in reference to Certeau's reading of it: 'it postulates a place that can be circumscribed as a proper and be the base from which to manage relations with an exteriority of targets and threats' (De Certeau, 1990)[18]. The *grin* thus represents an illegitimate arena of public debate, where a 'subaltern cityness' is constructed above all (Fouquet, 2013).

The *grin* is a way of appropriating the city, and thus, of increasing one's 'urban skills' (Berry-Chikaoui, Deboulet, 2000). 'Rather than living passively in a city perceived as foreign, certain marginal populations [...] physically mobilize in the space of the city, claiming a place in urban and national society' (Choplin, Ciavolella, 2008)[19]. In this sense, *grin* appears as a resource. By occupying the space, *grin* participants play with the rules of the game and open up a space of possibilities in the city. The symbolic geography proposed by these groupings is invested with political significance in the face of a rationalisation of official spatial policy that does not encourage these practices. This political symbolism is not necessarily experienced as such, but it allows for the creation of one's own representations, based on one's own space that generates one's own practices. In this sense, according to M. De Certeau, it is a question of constructing an autonomous space that allows one to move from tactics, poaching, and cunning to strategy, that is, thanks to the construction of a space of one's own, the development of a 'global project' in one's relationship to space: 'tactics are determined by the absence of power, just as strategy is organized by the postulate of power' (De Certeau, 1990)[20]. In the *grins*, the inhabitants produce 'arts of doing' that aim to acquire power over the space.

In sum, by participating in the *grin*, residents exercise a *de facto* right to the city, that is, 'the way in which city dwellers [...] transform their way of being in the city, and thereby contribute to the construction of a social and spatial urban order, through the daily repetition of gestures, the transformation of social ties, the practical adherence to collective rules, the ways of occupying and appropriating

18 translation by the author.

19 translation by the author.

20 translation by the author.

space, etc.' (Morange, Spire, 2017)[21]. The use value of the street produced by bodies such as the *grins* will thus perhaps end up being confronted head-on with the exchange value conferred on it by power. Only the modalities of confrontation remain to be determined.

Bibliography

- Attané A., 2002. Identités plurielles des hommes mossi (Burkina Faso) : entre autonomie et précarité, Nouvelles questions féministes, 21, 14-27.
- Augé M., 1994. Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains, Aubier, Paris.
- Awenengo-Dalberto S., 2011. Sénégal : les nouvelles formes de mobilisation de la jeunesse », Les Carnets du CAP, 37-65.
- Bacqué M.-H., Biewener C., 2013. L'empowerment, une pratique émancipatrice ?, La Découverte, Paris.
- Banegas R., Brisset-Foucault F., Cutolo A., 2012. Espaces publics de la parole et pratiques de la citoyenneté en. Afrique, Politique africaine, 127, 5-20.
- Banégas R., 2016. Mobilisations citoyennes, répression et contre-révolution en Afrique, Revue Projet, 351, 6-11.
- Bayat A., 1997. Un-Civil Society : the Politics of the "Informal People", Third World Quarterly, 18, 53-72.
- Bénit C., 2005. La difficile définition de la justice spatiale à Johannesburg. Un processus de démocratie participative, Annales de la recherche urbaine, 99, 48-59.
- Bret B., 2002. Justice et territoire : une réflexion à partir du cas brésilien, Strates, [online], Hors-série. URL : https://journals.openedition.org/strates/531
- Berry-Chikaoui I., Deboulet A., 2000. Les compétences des citadins dans le Monde arabe. Penser, faire et transformer la ville, Karthala, Paris.
- Biaya T. K., 2000. Jeunes et culture de la rue en Afrique urbaine (Addis-Abeba, Dakar et Kinshasa), Politique africaine, 80, 12-31.
- Biehler A., 2010. Enjeux et modes de constitution des espaces publics à Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), PhD thesis, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.
- Bondaz J., 2013. Le thé des hommes. Sociabilités masculines et culture de la rue au Mali, Cahiers d'études africaines, 209-210, 61-85.
- Bonnecase V., 2015. Sur la chute de Blaise Compaoré. Autorité et colère dans les derniers jours d'un régime, Politique africaine, 137, 151-168.
- De Bonneval E., 2011. Contribution à une sociologie politique de la jeunesse. Jeunes, ordre politique et contestation au Burkina Faso, PhD thesis, Université Montesquieu, Bordeaux.
- Boyer F., 2014. «Faire fada» à Niamey (Niger) : un espace de transgression silencieuse ?, Carnets de géographes, 7 [online]. URL : https://journals.openedition.org/cdg/421
- Cefaï D., Terzi C. (ed.), 2020. L'expérience des problèmes publics, Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris.
- Choplin A., Ciavolella R., 2008. Marges de la ville en marge du politique ?, Autrepart, 45, 73-89.
- Choplin A., Ciavolella R., 2018. Gramsci et la città futura africaine. Les citadins subalternes et leur initiative politique, in: Fouquet T., Goerg O. (eds.), 2018. Citadinités subalternes en Afrique, Karthala, Paris, 107-132.
- Chouli L., 2015. L'insurrection populaire et la transition au Burkina Faso, Review of African political economy, 143, 148-155.
- Courtin F. Guengant J.-P., 2011. Un siècle de peuplement en Afrique de l'Ouest, Natures Sciences Sociétés, 19, 256-265.
- De Certeau M., 1990. L'invention du quotidien. 1- Arts de faire, Gallimard, Paris.
- Delaunay D., Boyer F., 2017. Habiter Ouagadougou [online], Paris : IEDES – Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. URL : http://iedespubli.hypotheses.org/monographies-sud-nord
- Eliasoph N., 1998. Avoiding Politics: How American produce apathy in everyday life, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Foucault M., 1982. Space, Knowledge and Power («Espace, savoir et pouvoir"), in: Foucault M., 2001. Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988, Gallimard, Paris, 1526-1548.
- Foucault M., 1984. Des espaces autres, in: Foucault M., 2001. Dits et écrits II. 1976-1988, Gallimard, Paris, 1571-1581.
- Fouquet T., 2013. Les aventurières de la nuit dakaroise. Esquisses d'un art de la citadinité subalterne, in: Diouf M., Fredericks R., 2013. Les

21 translation by the author.

arts de la citoyenneté au Sénégal. Espaces contestés et civilités urbaines, Karthala, Paris, 131-157.

- Gervais-Lambony P., Bénit-Gbaffou C., Piermay J.-L., Musset A., Planel S., 2014. La justice spatiale et la ville. Regards du Sud, Karthala, Paris.
- Gorovei D., 2016. Le rôle des mouvements citoyens dans le processus électoral en Afrique subsaharienne. La cas du « Balai citoyen » (Burkina Faso), Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review, 16, 511-537.
- Hagberg S., Kibora L., Ouattara F., Konkobo A., 2015. Au cœur de la révolution burkinabè, Anthropologie & développement, 42-43, 199-224.

- Hien O.P., 2011. The Young of the « grins de thé » and Public Speech Delivery in Burkina Faso, Communication at Aegis congress, European Conference of African Studies, Panel « Oratory in Assembly », Uppsala.
- Hilgers M., Mazzocchetti J., 2010. Révoltes et oppositions dans un régime semi-autoritaire. Le cas du Burkina Faso, Karthala, Paris.
- Houssay-Holzchuch M., Fleury A., Hancock C., Gelézeau V., Sanjuan T., Sabatier B., Teppo A., 2007. Une géographie des espaces publics dans les pays intermédiaires, Research report, Centre géophile.
- Ilboudo M., 2006. Droit de cité. Être femme au Burkina Faso, Éditions du Remue-ménage, Montréal.
- Kieffer J., 2006. Les jeunes des «grins» de thé et la campagne électorale à Ouagadougou, Politique africaine, 101, 63-82.
- Lefebvre H. (2009 (1968)), Le Droit à la ville, Economica, Paris.
- Masquelier A., 2019. Fada: Boredom and Belonging in Niger, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

- Morange M., Spire A., 2017. « Droit à la ville », Hypergéo [online], 26/04/2017, consulté le 08/01/2018, URL: http://hypergeo.eu/spip..php?article698
- Ouattara M., 2003. Le grin : rires et blagues à Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, Editions L'Harmattan, Paris.
- Ripoll F., Veschambre V., 2006. Introduction. L'appropriation de l'espace comme problématique, Norois, 195, 7-15.
- Roth C., 2014. Entre rêves de grandeur et pragmatisme. Les jeunes en milieu urbain au Burkina Faso, Journal des africanistes, 84, 80-105.

- Rouamba I., 2011. La participation des femmes à la vie politique au Burkina (1957-2009), PhD thesis, Université du Québec, Montréal.
- Scott J. C., 1992. Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts, Yale University Press, New Haven & London.
- Tissot S., 2010. Quand la mixité sociale mobilise des gentrifieurs. Enquête sur un mot d'ordre militant à Boston, Espaces et sociétés, 140-141, 127-142.
- Vincourt S., Kouyaté S., 2012. Ce que «parler au grin» veut dire : sociabilité urbaine, politique de la rue et reproduction sociale en Côte-d'Ivoire, Politique africaine, 127, 91-108.

Press articles

- « An 1 du Balai Citoyen à Bobo : «Nous resterons mobilisés jusqu'à ce qu'on nous dise qu'il n'y a pas de référendum, de Sénat, de pouvoir à vie au Burkina », *aouaga.com*, 23/08/2014. URL: http://news.aouaga.com/h/33071.html
- « Burkina Faso : Le Balai Citoyen demande un audit des lotissements pour démasquer les «voleurs au col blanc» », *koaci.com*, 08/04/2016. URL: https://www.koaci.com/article/archive/2016/04/08/burkina-faso/politique/burkina-faso-le-balai-citoyen-demande-un-audit-des-lotissements-pour-demasquer-les-voleurs-aux-cols-blancs_97509.html