

CTD conference in collaboration with Ndjama s'enflamme en slam (Ndjamena, Chad, 22-29 October 2017)¹

Rationale

The Connecting in Times of Duress research programme² presented its results and way forward during this conference in Ndjaména. During the conference the team members met with senior researchers who were also invited for previous events during the research project (seminars/ conferences and workshops) and met with young scholars from the region. It was an intensive gathering with ample space for exchanging and venturing new ideas. Research projects that were born during the CTD project, like the Mobile Money project that was headed by Mirjam de Bruijn and Inge Butter, and the project of Jonna Both about youth in times of conflict in CAR were also represented by fellow researchers in those projects. We discussed methodology and alternative methods, and of course the three main concepts of the programme; duress, mobility and connectivity were in different configurations part of each of the panels. The discussion during the panels showed that the programme is mature as it referred to future perspectives, new itineraries for research and prospects. The three panel discussions/ debates that took place during the conference (Pan-Africanism, moderated by Remadji Hoinathy, Franc-CFA moderated by Marie-Soleil Frère & ICT and youth in Africa, moderated by Mirjam de Bruijn) and the workshops on blogging were important venues to attract a wider audience to discuss themes related to the research.

We organized this conference in a format in which different forms of knowledge production and different knowledge institutes met each other. This is a model and ideology that we developed during the research programme. It is also a reaction to the heated debates that evolved since we started the programme around the decolonisation of knowledge production (see discussions of Mbembe, Lugard lecture of Elisio during ECAS 2017, South Africa/UCT protests, (#RhodesmustFall, but also the siege of the Maagdenhuis closer to home).

Our answer to these discussions is enveloped in two sub-discussions that were present in organizational choices:

1. Recognition of the unity of the academy, that there is a world-wide system of producing academic knowledge that does not differ in Africa or Europe based universities (the BA-MA structure divided in semesters is introduced everywhere) Therefore we organized the conference in N'Djamena in strong collaboration with CRASH, an academic institution there. This unity also needs to trespass the colonial residual in terms of language barriers. By inviting

¹ For details about the programme, see <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/category/ctd-conference-2017/programme/>; see also the production of the liveblog on the site: <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/category/ctd-conference-2017/live-blog/?order=asc>

² NWO VICI programme from 2012 to 2018. NWO Ref no. :W01.70.600.001. The research team is made up of 5 PhD candidates, one affiliated PhD candidate, one Post-doc and one PI.

colleagues from both Anglophone and Francophone Africa and by holding a bilingual conference, we hope to have contributed to this decolonization as well.; 2. Recognition of different forms of knowledge production with which academics should interact much more. Especially artistic, journalistic and citizen voices should be recognized in the process of creating knowledge.

Recognition of the unity of the academy

The sub projects of the programme were situated in mobile spaces, but all geographically located in parts of Central and West Africa. During the programme the researchers visited each other's field, worked together on different topics, and also interviewed each other on the progress of their research. As such an intensive exchange on material and method was possible. The Leiden University was not the only centre where knowledge for this project was created. We held two workshops in Buea, Cameroon; and one in Texel. For these workshops we invited guests lecturers from the regions of our research. We organized two monthly seminars, where we invited scholars to share their ideas with us in a public lecture and in a Masterclass. We also used internet-exchanges to keep the team updated about each-others work. During the conference we did not discuss the organizational format of the project. This will need a separate evaluation.

As the point of gravitation of the work was not in the Netherlands or Europe, but in Central/Middle Africa (more than West Africa), it was logic to organize the end conference of the programme in Middle Africa. Chad was one of the central countries in our research, two of the PhD students and the academic coordinator have conducted research here. Also, the academic coordinator of the project had established relations with the Chadian academic field since 2001. The research centre CRASH had participated in the programme since the beginning, producing three master theses (Bruno Alhassim, Elie Doksala, Oumar Abdelbanat), and one PhD (the thesis of PhD candidate Souleymane Abdoulay Adoum was co-supervised by CRASH- director Prof. Khalil Aliou). With regards to the collaboration between academia and artists as it took shape over the course of the CTD project Ndjamen was also a central place. Didier Lalaye, visiting fellow to CTD, artist and director of Ndjamen s'enflamme had become a logical partner in the exchange between arts and academic world. Furthermore Ndjamen is one of the most prominent capital cities in the region and relatively secure, compared to for example Bangui, also a prominent city in our research project. Having the conference in the region allowed many young scholars from the region to join (subsidized by CTD, for those not living in Chad). Furthermore we avoided endless visa procedures for entering Europe. Our experiences with the quest for visa during the research project and the many that were not granted were also a reason to organize the conference in the region of research. Hence we decided to organize our conference in Ndjamen.

Organising the conference in the region was a challenge. This challenge is rooted in the 'new order' of our world that has classified the world in safe and unsafe areas (coloured in red, orange and yellow). We considered Ndjamen a safe place to hold the conference and were confident that enough safety measures had been taken by the local organisers. But the region is part of the Sahel zone where

human trafficking, conflict, Jihadism define the colour of the maps. Ndjaména city itself had a yellow colour on the map of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but it lies on a 'red border', related to Boko Haram's activities in the neighbouring countries and around Lake Chad. Therefore we were asked to consider our travels to N'djamena under code-red procedures. In the preparation of the conference we had to fill in many forms and discuss with our employers and people responsible for the personnel in the University to see if we could go. This 'talk' about security did very much influence our team both in the Netherlands and in Chad, but in different ways. For some Chadians it was also an offence as they did all to keep our safety, and also did not see the point to place Ndjamena above Paris in terms of insecurity, especially after the 2015 attacks. In fact this classification of the world in different colour-zones could be seen as another expression of the non-decolonization of the world. After all the definition of security at stake here is formulated by the West. For the team in the Netherlands, but also for some participants from other universities who had to deal with their bureaucracy, the process of going through a code-red procedure caused a lot of anxiety and motions of 'fear'. For two participants from other universities strong bureaucratic discouragement from their universities meant the end of their participation or an alternative participation-in-absence through the preparation of a video. And in general it created unrest in the team. One of the team-members cancelled her participation after anxiety and a burn-out.

This is not only difficult for participants etc. but it demanded as well a huge time investment of the organisers and the team in the Netherlands and Chad in general. In the end one can really question if it was indeed all necessary, as the conference went well and there was no security problem of any kind. For this we want to congratulate our Chadian partners.

Knowledge production is collaboration

In the set-up of the conference we tried to live up to our ideas around the collaborative creation of knowledge and the exchange between different forms of knowledge. During the research all members of the team have been experimenting with bridging academic knowledge production to artistic and journalistic knowledge production. In the products from the programme this is visible. We were even at the birth of new journal: an e-platform 'bridging humanities'. In the conference this 'ideology' was reflected in different elements: Six artists and journalists who we met during our research were invited. The conference was foremost organized in pair with the festival *Ndjam s'enflamme en slam* that is directed by Didier Lalaye aka Croquemort, who has been part of the CTD programme since 2013. The arts exhibition in the Institut Français Tchadien (IFT), the presentation of films, and the participation in concerts, public panel discussions and workshops (especially the blogging) of the festival were all expressions of this 'bridging'. These interactions and encounters also represent the spirit of the team and the methodology that we tried to adopt. The notion of co-creation, discussed in panel 6 on the nomadic mind, was in fact reflected in the set-up of the conference-festival. Another conviction of the project is related to the use of internet, not only in the production of knowledge, but also in the continuous interaction with our informants, and the use of internet to disseminate the results of research. That is why a few team members

have adopted the writing of blogs, and all team members have worked with visuals. The website is an important publication of the project, and therefore we cherish the production of the liveblog during the festival: <http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/category/ctd-conference-2017/live-blog/?order=asc>

Reflections on the programme of the conference

Key-note addresses

Professeur Saibou Issa from Cameroon (Maroua) and professor Shamil Jeppie from South Africa (UCT) joined us with their keynote lectures. It was a nice balance between a regional and thematic expert. Saibou took us to the recent developments in the research region that gave amplify the importance the research questions of our programme. His lecture took us to a conclusion about a future of the region in which the findings of our research can be of utmost importance to mitigate the effects of violence, international militarization of the region, etc. The population of these regions will live through violence the coming years. Duress, connectivity and mobility need to be further explored in this context. The lecture of Shamil added an extra layer that we developed during the programme: memory and forgetting in relation to duress and violence. What role does memory and forgetting play in the identity dynamics of people who have lived through violence and crisis and how does it translate into duress. This has become one of the major concerns in our research and will be part of future explorations. A very interesting note during this lecture was based on the long experience in working with a community in Cape Town. The violence these people went through has coloured their life. The museum that was made from the research about memory and forgetting of this violence is a beautiful and inspiring outcome in terms of also alternative knowledge production and certainly of co-creation between academics and citizens.

The art exhibition

A major element in the exchange between academics and artists was the composition of the exhibition: 'Living under duress/vivre sous contraintes'. This exhibition was curated collaboratively by an artist, Salma Khalil, and a researcher, Catherina Wilson. It was a colourful expression of the theme of our research. Six artists/researchers participated: Salma Khalil (Chad) presented a collection of pictures depicting the impossible work of female stone breakers in Ndjamená; Sapin Makengele (DR Congo) exposed through drawings, paintings and even an installation different types of duress, but also liveliness and hope; in her four pictures Inge Ligtoet (The Netherlands) relates to the contrast between dreaming and belonging, on the one hand, and the material realities in Enugu (Nigeria), on the other; Didier Kassá (CAR) illustrates the creative and resilient character of the Centrafrcain in his collection entitled la débrouille; Chrisly (Tchad) who satirically comments on his country also shared his work; finally Sjoerd Sijsma (The Netherlands) presented a video about the perseverance and resilience of the Central African refugee students in KinshasA,

a video he made with Catherina Wilson while visiting her research-field in 2015. It was an event that underlined the multilateralism of the exchange between artists and researchers. In the sense that artistic creation is knowledge production, but researchers too, can express themselves in artistic ways. Moreover, the exhibition invited other artists and academics to relate their work to the other. It was a call to curate together and to open up the walls of the academy.

(re)Thinking the concepts of the programme CTD

Evasion... mobility

Mobility has been a central notion in the programme. We have meant different things with it. It is geographical mobility in space and in time, it is mobility of choice, and mobility of force, it is mobility of the mind. In each study mobility has its own explanation. What we tried to grasp is the notion that is laid down in the mobility paradigm, where society is seen as being constructed on dynamics of mobility and not on dynamics of sedentarism/fixation/non-flexibility. As such mobility has been as well a philosophical, or if you wish an epistemological, concept that helped us to think differently about the building blocks of a society, always in motion. But it has as well been an entrance to write and interpret differently about 'strategies' employed to make a living: both livelihood and mental/ontological strategies.

The introduction of the term evasion as a related concept to mobility was the challenge in the opening panel of the conference. What does it mean if mobility patterns and dynamics are explained in terms of evasion? This brings the reflection to the combination of duress and mobility. The papers in this panel on evasion partly explained the concept in geographical terms, also as escape from (violence); and as avoiding; but it was certainly also understood in its connotation with social and political evasion/escape/avoidance. An important note was the impossibility of evasion in relation to duress, which touches on the psychology of non-evasion in relation to Duress, the emic of violence and hardship. This specific psychology can be found in the study about refugees of both Adamou Adamou and Catherina Wilson. It is as well a useful way to describe the aspirations of the Nigerian youth as explained in the study of Inge Ligtvoet. The photography of Salma Khalil that was exposed in the art exhibition made reference to evasion: The portrayed women have no way to escape a livelihood of harshness.

During the panel other interpretations of evasion came across; of the Fulani 'rebel' Baaba Ladde, whose rebellion is a form of evasion, and of evasion as an explanation to the nomadic forms of pastoralism, that are often romanticized.

Virtual community: empowerment

Increasing connectivity as a result of advancement of technology (smartphones, mobile money) has been an observation during our research period. It seems an obvious fact, but it has enormous consequences. Following the communities that were formed in this connectivity was one of our methods and questions at the same time. The question is of course whether community building takes place through these new connectivities and if so how and when and for what? Often

these new connectivities are related to 'empowerment'. The papers concerning these concepts were confirming the hypothesis that there is a relation between connectivity, community building and forms of empowerment. But first of all what is a community in the connectivity age? Are people exchanging humorous messages on a regular basis a community? In the case of Chad: the communities formed on the net often have an ethnic orientation. But communities are also formed around the organisation of a festival, or familial events. Sometimes these communities are a continuation of already (off-line) existing forms. The example of mobile money communities is an example: around financial transactions communities can exist, but also the financial transactions reinforce certain social ties, i.e. family, tontine. The reasons of existence of these communities then are very different and hence the form of empowerment they enhance will also vary. From financial to political to social empowerment. Is this empowerment also related to the 'glue' that keeps them together? And to what extent are these communities that have similar moments as communities 'off-line'? And what is the relations between off-line and on-line communities?

Connectivity: resistance

Are certain forms of connectivity also forms of (social or political) resistance? One of the popular ways to explain the CTD programme has been to phrase the question; 'can we speak of an ' Arab Spring-like' tendency in in sub-Sahara Africa?'. During the course of our programme we have seen changes in youth/movements in West and Central Africa. The hypothesis that more communication and information through new technologies has led to the formation of new 'movement' networks in the regions where we work. This hypothesis is of course linked to empowerment as posed in the previous section. Resistance however is interpreted as an intentional political act. It refers to political agency. Humour can also be an expression of this political agency, as are the formation of closed groups where politics is discussed, or the actions that can be labeled under citizen journalism (Chad, paper Remadji Honaithy), but also blogging is a technique of connectivity and resistance (Fiona Dragstra, Emmanuel Dabo), or the new formation in religious realms (Kathryn Pype; see also pictures of Inge Ligtvoet in the art exhibition), or the new formation of artistic organisations (festivals, Mirjam de Bruijn, exhibition Salma Khalil and Catherina Wilson), or the remembering of former political acts (Biafra, Inge Ligtvoet). Furthermore hashtags play an important role in connectivity and political agency as the case of Cameroon shows (Bitang).

History of communication

One of the important insights that every historian will bring to the fore is that nothing is as new as it seems to be. The communication revolution that is often given as a label to depict the introduction of the mobile phone is certainly not the only communication revolution. The comparison of what is happening in the present, and what happened in the past and their similarities, and also points of learning are clear from the study in history as was presented by Shamil Jeppie in his keynote, and as the dissertation of Souleymane Adoum made clear, but also as was shown in the art exhibition, where paintings refer to the conflict histories or big men of a country's regime (Sapin). The making of history is certainly part

of the 'effect' of artists' work, as the work of Didier Kassai about CAR and its conflicts do. Both the contribution academics, artists and journalists make to the 'creation' of history and contribute to the forms of memory a population can develop, and the strong presence of the past in daily endeavors, are constant elements of analysis.

Violence; duress

Although the conference has not devoted a panel to the concept duress, it was clearly present in all panels and discussions, as being part of the environment and history of the regions in which our researches developed. Duress has become integrated into the research. The discussions on memory, evasion, silence, connectivity are discussed as forms of 'expression of duress'.

Duress was also present in the mindsets of the researchers and participants of the conference: the interpretation of the Chadian environment and history (although we did not feel it so much in our residences and with the excellent food that was served). And as a consequence of the discussions about the colours of the maps in relation to insecurity. Here is a danger; is the interpretation of the researcher also the interpretation of the people in the regions where the researcher works? During the conference the artists and journalists we met however, confirmed the presence of duress, in their artwork, in their contribution to the panel discussions.

Duress enables and restricts agency. Duress is not only a inhibitory force, but it is also a force for reflection, for coping, and for creativity. It does limit agency in some instances but may as well open up avenues. It may inform various forms of evasion, remembering, silence, connecting.

Remembering (and forgetting)

There exist techniques to remember. Photographs are one of these (Cameroon, Vera Bakker). People make their own memory in photos and photobooks. How they do this and how they present these to visitors and the next generation is important to understand. Photos make one remember but the collection of photos is already a memory (constructed). Remembering (and forgetting) is always a political act as well on the level of the individual as on the level of a community, or the level of the nation. It creates memory. But whose memory is told and whose is not and on what level is a continuing query. Silencing history is an important act on the level of the nation (Tamekamta). Remembering is thought to be important for reconciliation as is sharing these memories, but is forgetting not more important (Shamil Jeppie)? Remembering and forgetting are generational acts, and vary with time and with age. Hence the understanding of what duress means or is as being read from memory and forgetting is a very subjective (double subjectivity) act and although one can try to decipher, in itself this subjectivity is duress. In Cameroon memory feeds into the political actions as they develop in present South-West Cameroon (Nkwi & Goodwin).

Silence & Duress

What can silence talk about? Is silence a form of data? How to record? Silence is certainly an expression of duress when it is related to not talking about memories that are too painful. In research then we should probably not try to make people remember but observe daily life and read in the non-said through

the said (as Inge Butter showed with the video). On the other hand people know what is silenced and this can be known by the interviewer by listening to the non-said (as was the case in Ivory Coast Kathryn Heitz). In connectivity there is also this type of silence, things that do not appear in FB. Or probably the new connectivity relate to another 'noise' revealing what is silenced in the off-line. It can also be a forced silence because the techniques of connectivity do not work. A phone that has no network, ruptures. Such silence becomes a moment of annoyance that explain agency in their own way.(Christian Kitenge). It is to the researchers to read all these silences to understand duress and the societal formation that it gives birth to. In the research programme and sub projects silence has not been discussed that explicitly. But it has been an important element of our techniques to get to understand duress, as we have been participating in silences. Reading silence in connectivity is a skill to be developed for this type of research.

Nomadic mind(s)

The nomadic mind has two interpretations that are closely connected. The nomad's mind is associated with mobility, flexibility and adaptability. As a nomad moves, in the two cases of the paper presentations during this panel (Elie Doksalá & Boukary Sangaré) nomadic pastoralists in the Sahel, to herd his cattle he or she has to be flexible in social contacts, in his or her mind. Today's situation for many pastoralists in the Sahel is not in favor for the former ways of mobility and flexibility. Nomads find themselves restricted in movement, victims of violence, moving to urban areas out of poverty. They cope with these situations often again in flexible and mobile ways, keeping to the nomadic mind.

To understand and get to know the field a researcher has to adopt the attitude of the nomadic mind. Being flexible, adaptable and moving both physically and emotionally has been the way the CTD team did research. To understand the internalization of violence and conflict in the mind one has to become interactive with these minds. This also means that the 'production of data' becomes a collective (at least between two people) exchange and the ownership of the production becomes blurred. The informant becomes a co-creator. This can also deepen the collaboration: (the 'researcher' is the authority, still) the researchers allows the co-creator with his or her own ways of knowledge production into the research. The CTD team came across artists, journalists and activists and a close collaboration in a nomadic mind-set led to the creation of beautiful research settings, like the painting performance as presented by Wilson. Is the academic writing genre, in strictly guided articles and PhD theses, the way to capture the writing in the style of the nomadic mind? The nomadic mind pushes researchers into the domain of journalism, or into alternative publications like blogging, novels and the creation of on-line publications. These forms of publishing are not less academic, but keep room for alternative expressions and liberty to show data in different ways. This is where the birth of the journal *Bridging Humanities* (the e-platform for alternative knowledge production supported by Leiden Brill) fits in.

During the conference there was another example of the nomadic mind in academia: Adamou Amadou en slam (excerpt):

Au secours ! L'université vers les artistes et les artistes 'slamequement' et humoristiquement dans l'académie. Que chacun n'évolue plus jamais de son côté. Nomadisons nos esprits et concoctons nos idées en symbiose ;

Mais voyons enfin. Ces thèses sont aussi devenues nos duress qu'on finira par internaliser ;

Car finale ne signifie pas finir.

Plutôt nous sommes là pour préparer et murir les connectivités du passé, présent pour le futur dans l'espace et les places à travers des acteurs mobiles de ces temps et milieux.

Conférence finale ne voudrait jamais finir !

<http://www.connecting-in-times-of-duress.nl/adamou-amadou-un-chercheur-apprenti-slameur/>

To conclude: the label end-conference for this conference-festival 'living with duress' is in fact wrong. As this short reflection on the conference content shows there are so many paths to further develop. We do not want to disengage from our research fields. This conference-festival has different reasons to plea for a continuation. This report has emphasized the panels and more academic parts of the event in Ndjaména. The event was also an artistic gathering and sharing with the Ndjaména population. For this we refer to the live blog on our site where Roland and Lucia have worked together to give a balanced view on what has become really our pride as a concluding event for CTD!

Arnold, slam artist from CAR, refugee in Kinshasa made a text for the conference and festival that somehow reflects a sentiment that we all shared in Ndjaména:

Arnold: slam text:

Esatis Le Bon – Arnold Ngbagalet, “Kangbi na contrainte”
(Divorcing Duress - excerpt)

Voilà fini mon plus belle amour ! tout est bien fini !

Mon coeur est trop lourd ! Je n'essaierai plus d'aimer désormais celle que j'aimais.

Mais, si je me permet de m'agenouiller, ne prenez pas comme un signe de faiblesse ni de soumission à la contrainte.

Même s'ils ont un sous- mission rempli d'illusion sous leur casque bleu, ma mission est celle de résister non violemment même quand ils violent nos amants et volent nos diamants.

Mes genoux à terre font taire ma terreur qui est une erreur donnant des ailes pernicieuses à la contrainte.

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