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## Differentiated Security Production in Yaounde

Stéphanie Fer | Marie Morelle | Olivier Iyébi Mandjek

Translator: Laurent Chauvet

### Abstract

This article analyses forms of security production in two poor neighbourhoods of Yaoundé. The capital city of Cameroon relies on many national, regional, county or local institutions for security. Despite this concentration, the fear of being mugged or attacked is strong among residents. The difficult economic context is not indifferent to such a situation. Yet, we must not idealise public security policies in the decades preceding this crisis. Already at the beginning of the colonial era, the police force and gendarmerie carried out surveillance and control missions at the service of the State, to the detriment of people and property protection. Some of the neighbourhoods and residents of Yaoundé appear to be abandoned by the institutions within the framework of a neo-patrimonial State. Where this raises the issue of distribution of security offer in one of the largest cities of Cameroon, we posit that populations generate their own responses in the face of real or perceived insecurity. This article looks at unequal access to security, the feeling of injustice among the populations deprived of protection, and their capacity to exercise their own justice.

*Key Words: justice, security, popular initiatives, Yaoundé, Cameroon*

This article analyses forms of security production in two poor neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup> of Yaoundé (Map 1). We look at security in terms of practices and even policies which are more or less institutionalised and are meant to ensure the protection of individuals and properties. By conducting surveys in poor neighbourhoods, we must be able to show the gap between the theoretical public security offer and the reality on the ground. Such a gap opens various reflections on spatial inequalities to access security, and on the feeling of injustice experienced by populations without protection. When this feeling is linked to a spatial location, we speak of spatial injustice.

In the field of security studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, research in the social sciences have been focusing mainly on countries belonging to the old urban tradition, i.e. marked a priori by a strong, durable and increasing crime rate. In this regard, Kenya and particularly South Africa and Nigeria are over-represented in analyses on insecurity, security and the police force (Perouse de Montclos: 1997; Dirsuweit: 2002; Fourchard, Albert: 2003; Anderson, Killingray: 1992). Researchers have also been analysing the exportation and appropriation of mainly anglophone security models founded on the notion of resident participation (Benit Gbaffou: 2006). We felt it became necessary to envisage the question of security in another country such as Cameroon, where the majority of the population is francophone<sup>2</sup> and where various co-operation, multilateral and bilateral agreements have been signed with France in particular. More specifically, we will discuss the situation in Yaounde, the Cameroon capital, where political concerns underlie public security issues.

Cameroon comes across as a strongly centralised State. In this regard, Yaounde, as the political capital as well as a regional and county centre, is the seat of various national, regional, county or local institutions responsible for security. Yet, despite this concentration, insecurity is high: hold ups

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<sup>1</sup> By poor suburb we mean densely populated, under-equipped and damaged suburbs, for lack of accurate statistics on income levels and professional status.

<sup>2</sup> After being initially colonised by the Germans, at the end of WWI Cameroon came under a League of Nations mandate and subsequently became a United Nations Trust Territory, shared between Great-Britain and France.

as well as theft in the streets or in taxis are increasing; the fear of being attacked is strong (Chouala: 2001; Durang: 2003). The difficult economic context with all its social repercussions is not indifferent to such a situation. In 1988, the Cameroonian State concluded a first agreement with the IMF. It was the beginning of its adjustment process<sup>3</sup>. The State was compelled to drastically reduce its spending in various sectors (Courade, Sindjoun: 1996; Courade: 2000). Certain neighbourhoods and various residents of Yaounde seemed abandoned by institutions, including those in charge of public security, within the framework of a neo-patrimonial State (Médard: 1991: 1995). Where this raises the issue of security offer distribution in one of the largest cities of Cameroon, we posit that populations generate their own responses in the face of real or perceived insecurity, which we intend to analyse.

Our research examines access to security and the right for all residents to feel protected. Security, in this instance, represents an entry point from where we can begin to understand urban society, its interactions, its ruptures as well as its fair or unfair functioning modes. Our research examines the production of inequalities in the territorialisation of public security, and tries to understand through which mechanisms and discourses populations define their right to security, and take it upon themselves to define what is just and unjust in the production of security.

Our analysis relies on research initiated on the one hand on the practices and representations of policemen and gendarmes<sup>4</sup>, and on the other hand on a programme carried out specifically on popular security practices<sup>5</sup> in Yaounde, in 2009. Faced with a shortage of reliable information and statistics, we privileged interviews with police personnel in 2007<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, in 2009, we privileged a direct ethnographic approach to neighbourhoods for our study. First we conducted an observation phase during which we made contact with the residents, then an interview phase which led us to meet the heads of neighbourhoods and apartment buildings, the members of vigilance committees as well as a few residents. In the end, two neighbourhoods were selected for our purpose: La Briqueterie and Nkomkana.

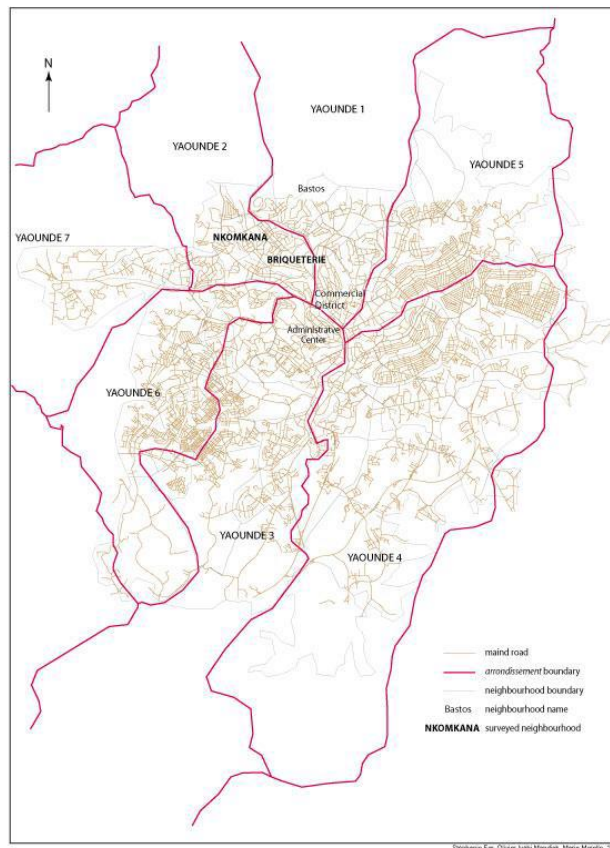
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<sup>3</sup> Strategic Actions Programmes saw the day: 1988-1989, 1991-1992 and 1994-1995, then Cameroon was admitted to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme in October 2000.

<sup>4</sup> This research was conducted in two phases: first in July and August 2007, when interviews were conducted with the Cameroonian police and gendarmerie in Yaoundé (29 interviews including 5 with representatives from the French Co-operation in Cameroon, 5 with gendarmes and 8 with police officers); and secondly in July 2008, at the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer d'Aix en Provence to add to the archives consulted in Yaounde (National Archives) to understand better the emergence of security institutions during the colonial period (francophone Cameroon).

<sup>5</sup> This programme was financed by the French Service de Coopération et d'Action culturelle in Cameroon.

<sup>6</sup> It was not always possible to record these interviews. The gendarmes and police officers who refused to be recorded were in fact the most forthcoming, as opposed to those who accepted the use of a microphone and who spoke little of themselves, their careers, their doubts and the daily realities of their work.



Map 1 – Location of Surveyed Neighbourhoods

In the first section, we outline public security offer in Yaounde. In the second, we examine two poor neighbourhoods with a view to understanding how residents manage to meet their security needs, individually as well as collectively.

## 1. Security Forces: Intermittent Appropriation of the City

### Monopolisation by Security Forces

We must not idealise public security policies in the decades preceding the socio-economic crisis of the 1980s, for law and order and public security in Cameroon have been the subject of strong ideologisation since the colonial era. They are first of all political constructions at the service of a power. Already at the beginning of the colonial era, the police complained of a striking lack of numbers and means in Yaounde<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> A few letters today archived testify to the difficulties experienced by the forces present to fulfil their security missions: ANY, 1 AC/1100 and ANY, APA 11 223/M The Minister of Colonies to the Prefect in the Territories of Cameroon. Letter dated 14 May 1938: RE the annual report of the Police Commissioner for the year 1937 Paris, 14 May 1938 (rue Oudinot, Paris 7e).

The post-colonial situation brought no change. The police and gendarmerie's geographical coverage of Yaounde always turns out to be deficient and geared towards maintaining a system based on clientelism, which is the priority objective. Somehow, security forces are monopolised by State institutions and men in power. And yet the men and women in uniform partake of this centralised system where advancements and appointments depend on place, network and social membership. In this regards, we are dealing with political as well as professional principles. Indeed, relations are not just one way, such as from the Presidency towards security institutions; these institutions actually take part in the power system by following specific rules for the purpose of their own career. All the more since it seems that gendarmeries and police stations are far from being the most solicited forces. Many special groupings have seen the light of day since Independence. Next to the territorial and mobile gendarmerie and police forces inherited from the French model, we find the Groupement Spécial d'Opérations (GSO) which benefits from the technical and financial support of France. Although the GSO is close to the Presidency, it does not dethrone the Presidential Guard<sup>8</sup>. These two bodies incarnate an elite which is entirely at the service of the government. During the riots of 2008, it was the Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (BIR)<sup>9</sup> which took over the Presidential Guard and besieged Yaoundé to end the demonstrations.

Finally, to what extent does the government control the entire urban space and its residents? It certainly shows its intention in this regard, by implementing multi-scale divisions (arrondissements, communes<sup>10</sup>, neighbourhoods, districts and blocks), each one being a decentralisation of the central power. With the actual implementation of security companies, we realise that the will to improve security is a deception, because only very few areas are truly safe. The urban space is, at least partly, a political space which is fashioned by the good will of the government on the one hand, and the men and women in uniform on the other. In the end, only sporadic operations for the maintenance of law and order remain at the service of the residents. The crisis contributed to reinforce unequal security territorialisation and made the inefficiency of implemented protection structures visible.

### **Minority Security Territories in the City**

Despite what at first looks like a maximum security offer compared to the other cities, public institutions are proving incapable of implementing a security policy to protect people from crime.

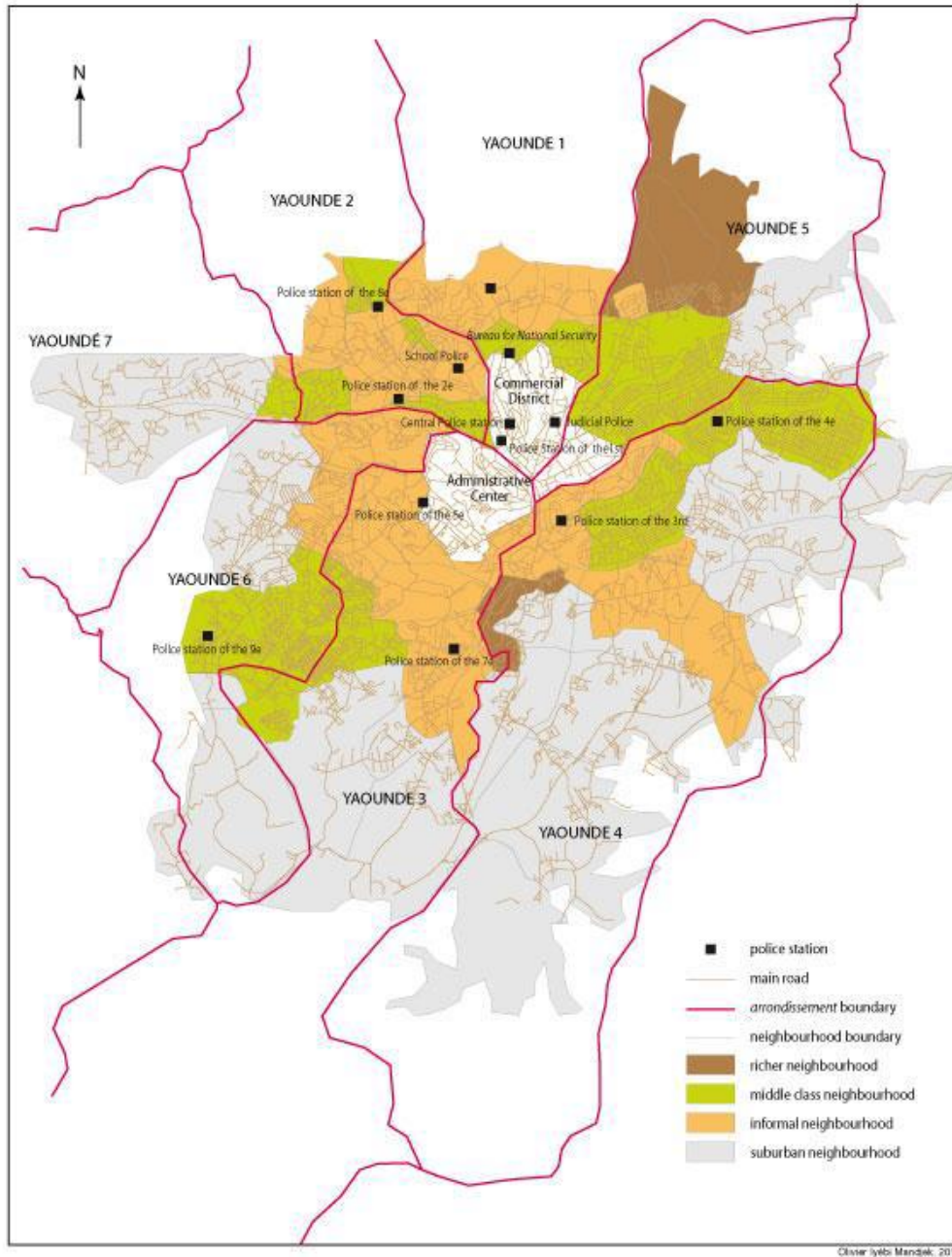
Up until 1999, the city of Yaoundé only had one central police station and one Gendarmerie Company. The central police station had sub-stations in the arrondissements, while the gendarmerie maintained squads in certain neighbourhoods.

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<sup>8</sup> After the putsch of 6 April, the Republican Guard was dissolved by President Biya. He then created a joint task force made up of gendarmerie, Army, Air Force and Navy personnel called the Presidential Guard, which was legitimised by Decree n° 85/ 738 of 21 May 1985. This Guard falls under the jurisdiction of the Head of State and has two missions, i.e. parading and fighting (Belomo Essono: 2007: 430).

<sup>9</sup> The BIR is an elite unit recently created to fight against armed road gangs in the north and east of the country. The BIR intervenes where the police and gendarmerie cannot.

<sup>10</sup> Yaounde makes up an urban community, led by a government representative who is appointed by the Central Authority. This community is divided into 7 urban communes of arrondissement, each run by local councilors who are elected into post.



Map 2 – Police Stations before the Reform

Police presence was higher in the more affluent neighbourhoods and large shopping districts, leaving many other neighbourhoods unseen to. This situation was aggravated by the exponential growth of the city. Due to the fact that it had been spreading over the years, a reform at the beginning of the 2000s led to the creation of four central police stations in charge of co-ordinating arrondissement police stations (16 public security police stations), and to the set up of several police

stations (unknown number<sup>11</sup>). These came directly from the police capacity building support programme, a Franco-Cameroonian co-operation programme implemented in 2007. The territorial competency of each public security police station remains extremely wide, making the “proximity” between police and population somewhat unrealistic. The redeployment of the gendarmerie into three companies, each one responsible for several squads (6) brings us to the same conclusion.

Moreover, policemen and gendarmes complain about the shortage of numbers, or the massive recruitment of untrained men and women, as well as the shortage of vehicles and fuel and, more generally, the shortage of equipment or the inappropriate usage of existing equipment. These complaints form an archetype of police discourse. Pointing an accusing finger at the absence of means is a means to justify any shortage. However, since there is no mapping of the security system or that of the systematic deployment of the police into the urban space, we can conclude that the control of the city is deficient, and that urban security is established discontinuously in time and space. Without any fuel or accurate map, how can one claim to improve security in the city? Short of a permanent and efficient police presence, in a context of budgetary strictness, the security system is presented according to certain short-lived or more durable principles.

In the discourse of police officers and gendarmes, embassies, the jogging routes of expatriates and tourist sites such as Mont Fébé and the Palais des Congrès represent “sensitive areas”. The security of diplomats and, more generally, that of expatriates are a concern for the authorities. To this end, the Cameroonian authorities created the Compagnie de sécurisation des diplomates (CSD) or Diplomats Security Unit, in 2007, in the residential neighbourhood of Bastos.



Photograph 1 – Bastos, Yaounde: Security on View

Auteur: S. Fer (2009)

As such, we can really speak of security staging. Bastos is the showcase of security institutions and, beyond that, Cameroon and her government.

<sup>11</sup> We are not in possession of sufficiently accurate data to map the redeployment of police units in Yaoundé.



Photograph 2 – Bastos, Yaounde: In Praise of the Fence

Auteur: S. Fer (2009)

The residents of this neighbourhoods do not actually want to call on the police and delegate their security to private agencies (Belomo Essono: 2007). As such, security guards from the same company (e.g. 4GS, DAK) can be seen operating in numbers in the same street, thereby creating a visible security perimeter.

But what happens to residents who cannot afford to recruit security guards? We saw that the redeployment of police stations and gendarmerie squads was not sufficient. It seems that the set up of *Équipes Spéciales d'Intervention Rapides* (ESIR) or special rapid intervention squads is not very convincing: on what basis are the police able to intervene with certainty and diligence in an area, even when their vehicles are in working order and available? We already highlighted this difficulty: "Yet here we are close to the road, so why the police do not drive in here where access is possible? (...) Here, the police only stop cars and they tend not to drive inside the neighbourhoods. Whether on the road or inside neighbourhoods, they are not really doing their job. Talking about hold ups, when you call the police, they ask you "Are they armed?", you reply "yes" and they hang up." (A resident of Nkomkana: 2009)

And so when insecurity becomes too high, the authorities call on special forces such as the GSI<sup>12</sup> nicknamed "the anti-gangs" by the population at the beginning of the 2000s. These security operations are often specific and end up becoming so-called "punch" operations in the same way as raids or operational commands (FIDH: 1998; Amnesty International: 2009). These can result in blunders, as was the case in 2000 in Douala, where nine young men from the popular neighbourhoods of Bépanda disappeared altogether (Malaquais: 2002; Owona Nguini, J. B. Oyono: 2000). Other sporadic operations were carried out over the entire national territory, e.g. in Vautour, Harmattan etc. The procedure was always the same: neighbourhoods closure, resident arrests, ID controls at the police station, negotiations to come out of prison. These operations are named raids in Cameroon and we, researchers, have witnessed many, typically on the eve of international summits or during periods of increases in the number of thefts and attacks. As a result, State officers

<sup>12</sup> The Groupe Spécial d'intervention (or Special Intervention Group) is made up of police officers specialized in the fight against organised crime. See also the Groupe Polyvalent d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GPIGN).



in charge of security in turn become a potential or known source of insecurity, and are recurrently accused of clientelism and corruption by the residents.

In the end, the scope of activities of the police and the gendarmerie concerns the security of political property as well as more "ordinary" security, i.e. the protection of properties and persons from crime. Historically, this has led to unequal access to security in the neighbourhoods of the capital, and has been reinforced since the 1980s by police "raids" which are a source of insecurity, and by the emergence of security companies in aid of the more well-off populations.

During the 2000s, sponsors provoked the politico-administrative and financial reorganisation of security institutions. France recently contributed to the renewal of the in-house training programme of the police force (1999 and 2007), focusing on the police force's image of public service and community policing in particular. In this regard, while Cameroon is still affected by the current trend which consists in making of security an imperative of development policies (UN-Habitat: 2007), she tends to distinguish herself from privatisation and participation principles (Coleman, Sim: 2000; Ruteere, Pommerolle: 2003; Bénit: 2004), advocating a public security service "for" rather than "with" the populations. Yet, these co-operation agreements have led, at best, to a reconfiguration of the government's action, mainly stimulating new ways of operating and reinforcing the security of the President of the Republic. We are far from the declared community policing units (which were, as an example, implemented in Brazil with many criticisms, Deluchey: 2003): at best, one or two police officers take turns at manning makeshift police stations, i.e. containers placed in tarred neighbourhoods. Security is negotiated to the detriment of the poorest but in the favour of the clientelist State. As such, the residents must constantly try to organise themselves in order to protect themselves. In this light, security indeed proves to be a form of spatial injustice (Harvey: 1992) insofar as the spatial and social "distribution" of security is inequitable.

## **2- Creating One's Own Security: New Geographic Discontinuities**

In the face of poverty, deficiencies and the asymmetry of security institutions and personnel, residents have been taking their own security initiatives. While these can rely on relative forms of clientelism with the police force (inhabitants can sometimes come to an arrangement in their favour), they prove to be relatively efficient where certain authorities structure the neighbourhood. Conversely, in the neighbourhoods that do not benefit from the same legitimacy from the local authorities, initiatives have been short-lived. Many temporal and spatial discontinuities exist as far as security is concerned. Moreover, we posit that residents' actions are a barometer for what they deem fair or unfair, such as access to security.

### **A Traditional Organisation at the Service of Security: The Archetypal Figure of La Briqueterie Neighbourhood**

Opting for the neighbourhood called La Briqueterie or La Brique for our interviews was not an innocuous choice. For many residents and external observers, it incarnates the archetype of the ethnic neighbourhood (Agier: 1999; Bopda: 2003). It is necessary at this stage to qualify this representation.

Administratively speaking, La Brique is in fact called Ekoudou. It represents a cluster created from the destruction of the Haoussa neighbourhood in the 1930s (the current site of the central market). It is divided into eight districts: Ekoudou 1 to 6, Briqueterie Centre and Briqueterie Ouest. Each district is divided into blocks. La Brique is a particular district in that its inhabitants are Muslim and organised according to a model which is spread widely in the north of Cameroon: a strong hierarchical organisation of powers and a cluster head (the *lawan*, called *lamido* in La Briqueterie)

assisted by a tribunal which, in principle, includes a dignitary who is responsible for the security of the cluster (sarkin garkoua), and who has posts in the various districts and blocks of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, cluster heads are well aware of the boundaries of their territories.

The Haoussa and Bornouan dominate and are assisted by the Bamouns (themselves creating an appendix within the cluster which is sometimes integrated, sometimes rejected) (Franqueville: 1984). La Briquerie is the result of Muslim migration in Yaoundé (and includes people from Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali among others). As such, the social network of the neighbourhood is based on a common religious identity, i.e. Islam, as well as an "ethnic" identity, that of the Haoussa (who are in the majority). The Haoussa have ensured the continuation of their way of life: local industries (butchery, dressmaking) and trading in general (fabric, household electrical appliances, meat and grills). Because of its specificities, La Briquerie attracts many residents from all over Yaoundé. Paradoxically, due in fact to its social and cultural particularities and identities, La Briquerie remains separate in the representations of the capital's population and even feeds their imagination: the place where all the dangers can be found (stolen goods, thefts, attacks, prostitution, all kinds of traffics, Bopda: 2003).

The residents of La Briquerie, who are stigmatised and feared, play on this image to maintain, reify and invent a social and political functioning peculiar to the neighbourhood. Also, by collectively putting forward ethnic membership, the residents ensure that the authority is maintained and keep any competing authority at a distance. In this case, the ethnic category has been mobilised in relation to the security issue.

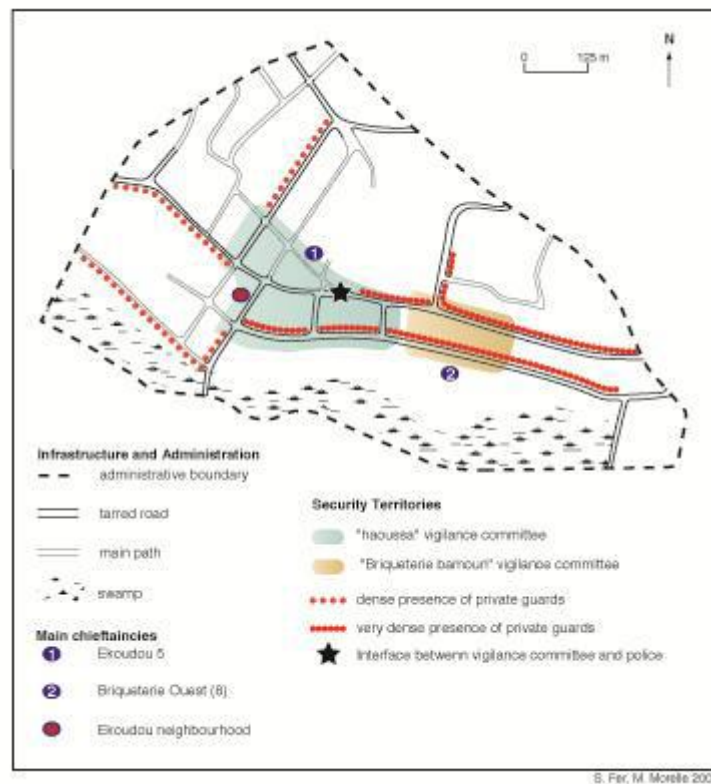
The actual development of the neighbourhood makes it possible to maintain spatial and social proximity, thereby guaranteeing control as well as solidarity. Apart from three tarred roads, La Briquerie is characterised by the absence of communication routes and a high population density.



Photograph 3 – La Briquerie, Yaounde: Dwelling Density at the Service of Social Control  
Auteur: S. Fer (2009)

Initially, land concessions were delimited by fences which disappeared with population increase. The "concessions"<sup>13</sup> were right next to one another, sometimes forcing residents to cross other residents' properties. Living in dwellings opening onto courtyards generally leads to greater conflictual as well as amicable social interaction (Durang: 2001). As such, each resident is part of a yard, an area, a family and, in the end, a community: that of his/her native village (or the village of his/her parents' and grandparents') which was built over the years in La Briquerie itself. Whether or not residents accept it, each and every one of them is known, which is the first step towards preserving relative security within the neighbourhood. Attacks can only come from outside (even if they can be ordered from inside). Each family must control its children, although some youth draw attention to themselves by committing criminal activities such as smoking dagga in groups. As such, La Briquerie is not a completely secure territory.

In 2009, two vigilance committees operated in La Briquerie: the Haoussa Committee and the Bamoun Committee, both depending on various founding district chiefs.



Map 3 – Popular Security Initiatives in La Briquerie (2009)

While officially the Haoussa Committee was initiated by neighbourhood chief, unofficially it results from the initiative of one of the district chiefs (Ekoudou 5). This chief, who had been chief for many years already (although with a status inferior to that of the cluster head) and was assisted by the heads of his blocks, was in fact the legitimate person to mobilise the youth living in the Briquerie,

<sup>13</sup> Expression of colonial origin used locally to refer to plots of land in popular areas.

in agreement with the neighbourhood chief. This means that, generally, the neighbourhood chief appoints one of the district chiefs to see to the production of security in the most central sector of La Briqueterie, which is also the most commercial with the presence of many shops, in Ekoudou 5 in particular. The distribution of the Committee members from one street to another depends on their density in the street. The Committee works in collaboration with security guards and all share the money paid by the shopkeepers, which in the end, beyond the chief's will<sup>14</sup>, guaranties the permanence of security actions. As to the Bamoun Committee, its area of action covers roughly the so-called district of Briqueterie 8, which is placed under the jurisdiction of the Bamoun Chief. On this side of La Brique, the Bamoun community is well represented, even if its presence is not as obvious as that of the Haoussa. It seems that the organisation of this Committee does not depend so much on the community as on the economic dynamics of the area: the Total petrol station, the large goods stations and the spare parts shops make enough money to pay the members of the Committee. As such, the security actions of La Briqueterie can appear disparate on a large scale and dependent on shopkeepers, while still being part of the hierarchical relations which structure the life of the neighbourhood. This tends to maintain a certain unity and the role of mediators of the main chiefs or even the imams.



Photograph 4 – La Briqueterie, Yaounde: Islam, One of the Foundations of the Community Dynamics of the Neighbourhood.

Auteur: S. Fer (2009)

In this context, the relationship with security forces and more generally institutions is not without ambiguity. Indeed, the chiefs did not hesitate to resort to the Sub-Prefect of their arrondissement to have their committees legalised. Consequently, while we cannot conclude that security initiatives, whether public or private, are strictly juxtaposed, we can perhaps conclude that the chieftaincies have been substituted or even somehow incorporated into the central administration. However, according to certain chiefs living in La Briqueterie, taking one's own security in hand is a means to keep a certain distance with the police. When a theft is committed and the identity of the thief is known, he is chased after by the members of the committees and is asked to return the stolen

<sup>14</sup> A shopkeeper can give between 500 and 1 000 FCFA per week to the committee.

goods: "the members of our committee go and fetch the thief in his home. He returns what he stole" (District Chief: 2009). This is not so much about punitive as restorative justice which, according to some interviews, would also make it possible to exercise and turn a blind eye to various activities involving the receiving or possession of stolen goods. "The police station of the 2nd arrondissement requested premises (...) but nobody accepted. No one wanted to rent or sell a piece of land for them to settle there because we are a bit careful about the police. Because the shopkeepers import goods from Nigeria. And therefore the residents felt that this could harm their business. And then, if they wanted to settle there by force, I think that the premises would soon be burned down in the night" (deputy of a district chief, March 2009).

Nonetheless, sometimes this does not prevent the police or gendarmerie from submitting a case to court, when the people concerned are from outside the neighbourhood and have no connection to the main families of La Briqueterie. In this case and according to some members of the Haoussa Committee, the place called "Carrefour tissue", not far from the pharmacy of the Verset, is used to interface with the police. This is where the police or gendarmerie come to fetch criminals who were arrested in the night.

Moreover, the chiefs speak about the imperative of maintaining peace in case of riots, which brings us back to the ideological dimension of security. But, generally, the residents complain about the excessive corruption of the police and gendarmerie on the one hand<sup>15</sup>, and the excess of laxity on the other hand: "the problem is that when they arrest a thief, he gets out the next day. When a parent or a friend of that thief pays, then the police let him go, when normally he needs to be punished. The problem is that you don't have the same way of measuring criminality. The police superintendent thinks that when a man steals a radio, that man is a petty thief, and the prisons are full of them, and therefore the police let him go. The police categorise crime differently from us. For the police, these are petty crimes, but for us it's not" (District Chief: 2009). Where the police think they are applying justice, paradoxically that is when the residents feel that they are the victims of an injustice.

On the whole, spatial and social proximity is what guarantees security in La Brique. Despite the diversity of the populations, we can conclude that there is a community-based security, with chiefs ensuring that any prejudice is remedied. How long will recognition of this authority last? In some areas, residents note the arrival of new lodgers and are concerned about the fact that La Brique is opened to strangers and falls outside of the current mediation patterns. The fact that this community-based security system has not been transposed at the city level, makes of La Brique an enclave more than ever, one that ensures the protection of its residents.

### **Nkomkana: A Weak Territorial Organisation behind the Fragmentation of Security Systems**

Unlike La Briqueterie, as far as identity foundation and maintenance are concerned, the densely populated peri-central neighbourhood of Nkomkana consists of a mixture of different cultures, with the Bamileke as the dominant ethnic group, although "bamileke" does not actually refer to a specific ethnic group, but to a group of chieftaincies with distinct yet related languages and common cultural traits.

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<sup>15</sup> It appears that paying to come out of jail is more expensive in a gendarmerie squad than in a police station. In this light, the gendarmerie is not any less corruptible than the police force, simply more inaccessible. Apparently gendarmes ask for 30 000 FCFA when police officers demand between 2 000 and 6 000 FCFA.

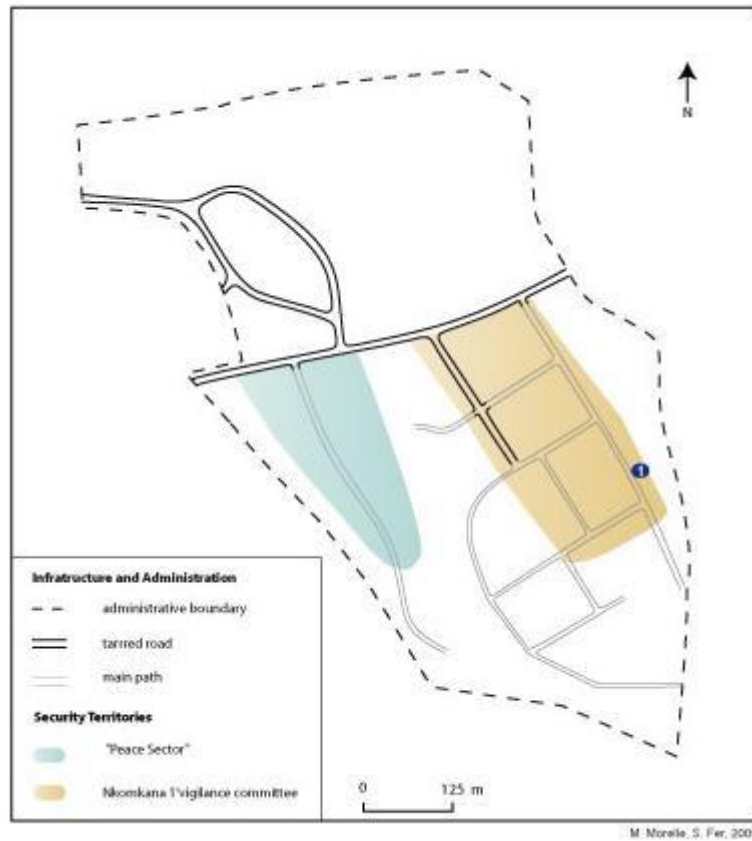


Photograph 5 – Nkomkana, abandoned by the Authorities

Auteur: S. Fer (2009)

The population of Nkomkana increased when the neighbouring neighbourhood of Madagascar underwent developments (Franqueville: 1984) and its residents were chased away. These decided to settle in Nkomkana and, together with migrants from western Cameroon, became the core of the population. These migrants came to live in the capital city for personal reasons and did not seek to join one community or another, although it always seems necessary to do so when living in Yaounde for the first time. Indeed, the density and diversity of the residents' origins do not guarantee social or solidarity networks.

Nkomkana does not have a regulation and control system like that of La Briqueterie. Also, in the face of recurrent insecurity (theft and house breaking), attempts have been made at improving the security of the neighbourhood, with the creation of several vigilance committees succeeding one another.



Map 4 – Popular Security Initiatives in Nkomkana (2009)

Interviewed residents spoke of the vigilance committees created already in the 1990s. These were organised in reaction to an increase in the number of thefts and attacks, and relied on the mobilisation of young men from the neighbourhood who were often out of work, and who came from all walks of life, whether graduates, unemployed or school dropouts. These committees relied on a subscription system: each resident who did not physically take part had to pay a certain sum of money (e.g. 100 francs per day per household for one of the committees, or irregular payments for other committees). The money collected was then used to remunerate vigilance committee members. In principle, every night, ropes were stretched across certain roads, de facto creating a roadblock where all pedestrians and cars were controlled. Whistles were used to sound the alarm when necessary. A committee can initially gather up to around fifty members. But this number can dwindle down to nothing, with the committee disappearing altogether in the space of several weeks. As such, Nkomkana's social profile is very different to that of La Briqueterie. Indeed, the potential emergence of collective security practices is slowed down by the absence of recognised authority and strong social principles. Vice versa, local response to insecurity does not manage to bring out a territorial unity or the collective appropriation of Nkomkana. As a result, the non-presence of the police is strongly felt, which keeps the image of the committee alive. This situation brings us to consider even more the multiplicity of figures and authorities intervening in the security of Yaounde. Who is behind a committee? What kind of relations does a committee have with the police and the gendarmerie? And, finally, what do residents end up choosing?

The authorities (and more particularly the Sub-Prefect) of Yaounde have encouraged the creation of vigilance committees to assist or relay the police, which is no secret in Yaounde or Cameroon for

that matter. A report on the activities of the central police station of Yaounde dated from 1957, mentions the existence of vigilance patrols. The patrols of La Briqueterie and Nlongkak were pointed out particularly for having committed attacks. "These vigilance patrols do not always respect the instructions given to them and sometimes take advantage of the situation to satisfy their desire for personal revenge.<sup>16</sup>" The fact that instructions were given by the police means that these patrols were not necessarily the fruit of resident initiatives only. At the level of the country, during decolonisation, the central authorities in turn encouraged the residents of many villages to set up their own security endeavours to protect themselves from independence fighters (called maquisards).

Today, the Sub-Prefecture must give residents the means to buy the equipment. Committees make use of whistles, flashlights, ropes, clubs and machetes, which requires an initial investment, covered in part or in whole by the Sub-Prefecture<sup>17</sup>. As such, the populations want to see the existence of their vigilance committees legalised. The head of the neighbourhoods is then asked by one committee or another to take part in the negotiations with the authorities. While recognition of a committee should ensure its partnership with the police officers and/or gendarmes in charge of the area concerned, it should also guarantee committee members from any legal action against them.

However, the police strongly incriminate the existence of such committees and do not trust their initiative, pointing out the many blunders and lack of professionalism. In the end, the Sub-Prefecture remains reserved about a process which, paradoxically, it often ends up initiating as well as provoking. It wishes for a security at a lower cost but cannot fully pursue it, and even less cover potential criminal actions.

In this context, a vigilance committee was developed in Nkomkana 1 in 2009, on the initiative of the neighbourhoods head and a man named W, in charge of organising security, and for whom security is a personal investment. W is 28 years old and was born in Nkomkana. On the initiative of an association called Assistance Cynophile et Service, he hired himself out to various security companies in Yaounde. In agreement with the district chief where he lived, he put together a vigilance committee for Nkomkana 1 and, over time, became a reference in the district. The way this committee had been developing shows how an individual initiative can become a collective project. Permission to create a committee was requested from the authorities and more particularly the Sub-Prefecture of Yaoundé 2, the police station of Mokolo 2e and the gendarmerie squad of Tsinga Madagascar. With the approval of the Sub-Prefect, W received permission to compile a register of Nkomkana 1 residents, with a view to working out how much the committee could rely on if it was to function properly. Each household listed was to pay 3 000 FCFA per month, i.e. 100 FCFA per day. Then the committee began operating, erecting barriers at night to delimit its field of action, and controlling strangers coming in and out of the neighbourhood. The committee had around twenty members who were to be either posted at the entrances of the neighbourhoods, or organised in patrols doing rounds. W explained that, should this pilot project turn out to be efficient and sustainable, it would be extended to include greater Nkomkana.

However, Nkomkana residents felt that the action of the vigilance committee was more about sporadic reaction to security degradation than long term security investment in the neighbourhood. The committee relied on the existence of neighbourhood networks and their capacity to stir people into action, which was not inherent to each neighbourhood, particularly Nkomkana, from the viewpoint of La Briqueterie. Finally, while some residents did not want to pay, others simply could

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<sup>16</sup> ANY, 1 AC 1890

<sup>17</sup> A legalised vigilance committee must not be equipped with firearms.



not afford regular fees towards a vigilance committee, leading the young committee members to lose heart and grow weary of carrying out security missions voluntarily.

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xn4doy\\_la-justice-populaire-a-yaounde\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xn4doy_la-justice-populaire-a-yaounde_news)

Sometimes, the absence of vigilance committee gives way to people who take the law into their own hands. This was the case of two young brothers who, in 2009, decided to ensure security in Nkomkana. Each resident was supposed to have their cell phone number handy to reach them in case of mugging. The two brothers, who were also born in Nkomkana and were without occupation, were both under 30. They intervened on a portion of the neighbourhood which they called the "peace sector". Well-known in the neighbourhood for their strength and muscles, they headed a group of around fifteen resourceful youngsters who met every day. All shared the modest sums obtained from ensuring security in the area. They deemed it their duty to protect the area in which their families and friends lived. As such, security was informal and depended on the relationships developed with residents. In this light, one could consider the area as a micro-territory of security. In our interviews with the brothers, we noticed how they defined the right to protection and decided to re-establish a form of justice to the point of calling themselves "lawmen".

[http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xn4di0\\_deux-justiciers-a-nkomkana\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xn4di0_deux-justiciers-a-nkomkana_news)

By keeping on claiming to be lawmen, the young brothers opened themselves to mistakes, legal actions and sanctions from potential thieves. This was testified by the fact that one of them requested protection from (and integration into) the police. This questions their status and intentions, which were not easily discernable in a few weeks' worth of interviews, but which some people mentioned during the interviews, questioning their status of lawmen and their concept of justice for personal ends.

Resulting from this all is a spatial distribution of neighbourhoods into many areas, which depends on the flow of security initiatives. Enclosing an area using ropes at best guarantees the protection of a few roads only, and as such Nkomkana is not fully covered by the actions of a vigilance committee. One could also question how two committees manage to coexist. All in all, one year after the first interviews, the vigilance committee established by W no longer exists and the two brothers left the neighbourhood. In the end, while it seems that a committee might need specific context and personal investment to come into existence, this certainly weakens the social network hypothesis. In addition, a committee relying on leadership makes it all the more fragile. This is a far cry from the emergence of in-/formal participative principles, materialised through road closure on the one hand and the creation of neighbourhood associations on the other (as shown in Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya, Bénit-Gbaffou, Fabiyi, Owuor: 2007). A committee in Cameroon can even partake of the fragmentation of a neighbourhood into zones of influence.

The absence or even privatisation of security seriously calls for a real public security policy. As seen previously, we cannot oppose police and popular responses too hastily and in a clear-cut manner. Security overlapping takes place at several levels and between different actors. However, it seems that residents are not actually included in the private initiatives of the few local personalities who, on the contrary, are in the security business to their own private ends. In this light, such initiatives are on a par with those of the police force which is inclined to make money from its interventions. In Nkomkana for example, what emerges is a deep feeling of injustice coupled with high expectations as far as city level public security service is concerned. On the other hand, the State appears to be

almost ousted from the functioning of La Briqueterie where residents have taken public security management into their own hands.

## Conclusion

Through our study on security, we are discovering a complete geography of urban powers, involving a multiplicity of actors such as security forces, private companies, neighbourhood and district chiefs, vigilance committees, lawmen and residents, all intervening on different time and spatial scales, opposing one another, meeting and negotiating, and raising the issue of a spatially fair access to security.

Our study reveals the individual logic found in well-off residential areas which make use of walls and cameras, and call on registered security companies or informal security guards, as in Bastos. It also reveals the more collective logic of popular neighbourhoods. In the end, security is not just a State affair; it also involves any actor intervening in the urban space. At this stage, we need to avoid reducing security initiatives to organising vigilance committees. While such committees are the most visible form of security in poor neighbourhoods, this does not mean that they are to be found there every time. As such, security raises the issue of power struggle and standards underlying the city, and leading to the appearance or consolidation of inequalities within it. Security is not accessible to all in the same way but the State remains a key element to negotiate the access to security. Its production interacts with social inequalities understood in their spatial dimension: public security policies and the security practices of the police, communities and individuals, express, compose and reinforce strong urban segmentations and social distancing. Such differentiated security management depends on social dynamics peculiar to each neighbourhood, areas and blocks. Yet it also has an influence on the actual social space of the neighbourhood, and on the strengths or weaknesses of its identity and territorial unity. As such, from one neighbourhood to another, or even from one street to another, popular security initiatives are being distinguished. The more a neighbourhood carries a strongly claimed identity, the more the community – which is attached to it – manages to establish and maintain regulatory and monitoring authorities, and therefore security processes, which is what La Briqueterie illustrates. Conversely, some neighbourhoods fail to sustain and maintain social dynamics, leading to micro-territories of security, as in Nkomkana, which do not last.

Could the existence of a community principle, like that found in La Briqueterie, echo international requirements for a responsible, committed and community-based police force? The will to establish and develop police stations and squads without taking into account local political and regulatory systems, especially in a clientelist State (Bayart, 1985), represents a shortcoming in the construction of a committed police force. Nevertheless, this raises the issue of fair access to security for all throughout the urban space. There are no such social dynamics in Nkomkana. In Bastos, they lead to the privatisation of security as per resident affordability. As to La Briqueterie itself, it seems that the neighbourhood and districts chiefs with major shopkeepers want to ensure the security of their own properties first. Security is a factor of fragmentation (which depends on a diversity of criteria such as income, origin and gender) and spatial injustice: a reaction to a lack of security in one neighbourhood of the city reinforces relegation in another. What appears just and legitimate to the residents of La Briqueterie will, in the end, reinforce the marginalisation of Nkomkana.

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