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**Security in nocturnal Niamey –
Preliminary reflections and conceptual outlook**

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Abstract

The analyses presented in this paper are first reflections on the security landscape of nocturnal Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger, drawn from a period of three months of preparatory fieldwork. This paper starts with an overview of recent changes in the security dispositif of Niamey, that is, institutional changes and new groups entering the scene. After that, I will combine an institutionalist with a spatial perspective in order to describe three different modes of preventing disorder (and producing order) (a) in their relation to the supposed state monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force and (b) for the spaces they are characteristic for. I therefore define three different “spaces of security”: spaces of imposition, spaces of delegation, and spaces of abstention. This spatio-institutionalist perspective allows to overview the security landscape (in this case, of nocturnal Niamey); however, it is an objectifying approach that regards security as a good to be delivered (by different actors, groups, institutions, etc.) and thus bears enormous disadvantages when applied to actual situations where security is obviously at stake. Trying to overcome these difficulties, I close with some preliminary theoretical reflections on the notion of security. I argue that the predominant perspectives on security – objectifying and psychological/individualistic approaches – cannot do justice to the situational character of the security landscape, that is to say, to the situations in which creatively acting individuals are involved in the simultaneous production of security *and* insecurity. A notion that may help anthropologists take into account this situatedness and ambivalence of security is the notion of the *event*.

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Security in nocturnal Niamey.

Preliminary reflections and conceptual outlook¹

Mirco Göpfert²

During and after my fieldwork in Niamey and especially while elaborating the present paper, I found myself confronted with one major conceptual difficulty, namely the question “What is security?” Is it a public good, a monopolized function, an individual feeling? One of the reasons for this difficulty might be, as Hollway and Jefferson noted (although in 1997, probably still valid nowadays), “that all the relevant concepts in the debate—fear, crime, risk, anxiety—are undertheorized. Sometimes deployed in a social fashion, though more often in a narrow, individualistic way, they are descriptive categories and largely simple take-ups from everyday commonsensical usage” (1997: 256). I deem it necessary to be conscious of this difficulty in order to not employ the term arbitrarily, and in that way disguise what is actually going on between creatively acting individuals. In this paper, I will focus on the actors who are involved in the security dispositif of nocturnal Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger. Firstly, what do I mean by “security dispositif”? By “security dispositif” I mean, in a semi- or pseudo-Foucauldian sense, an ensemble of discourses, institutions and actors involved

1 This paper is a revised version of a presentation held in April 2009 during a visit at the *Centre de Recherches Sociologiques sur le Droit et les Institutions Pénales* (CESDIP) in Guyancourt, France. The paper was also presented, in a modified version, for the panel “Spaces of (In)Security” during the European Conference on African Studies, Leipzig, in June 2009. The fieldwork it is based on was made possible by the financial support of the Volkswagen Foundation and the Sulzmann Foundation as well as by the support offered at the *Laboratoire d’Études et de Recherches Sociologiques sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local* (LASDEL), Niamey. For productive comments on earlier versions of this text, many thanks go to Jan Beek, Thomas Bierschenk, Jan Budniok, Fabien Jobard, Thomas Kirsch, Carola Lentz and Julie Poppe. I am particularly grateful to Mahaman Tidjani Alou for his encouraging support and intellectual stimulation during my fieldwork in Niamey.

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in the production of a certain order in—an at least partially—public space.³ And secondly, why at night? Because at night security issues, like the maintenance of order, crime and crime prevention, are particularly present.

The analyses presented in this paper are first reflections drawn from period of three months of preparatory fieldwork in Niamey. During my stay in Niamey from October 2009 to January 2010, I was mainly concerned with paving the way for further fieldwork on the police in Niger, in other words, I was trying to obtain a research permission. While I was caught in this administrative struggle, my interest lay in non-state actors involved in the production of order in public space. I interviewed watchmen (two of whom were ex-policemen), heads and office personnel of security companies, and three neighbourhood chiefs (*chefs de quartier*) who played an important role in the organisation of private night patrols in their respective quarters. Yet, the major part of my fieldwork consisted of chats with watchmen, taxi drivers, friends, and walks through different neighbourhoods of Niamey.

This paper starts with an overview of the socio-historical context in which some institutional changes occurred and new groups entered the security scene of Niamey. After that, I will combine an institutionalist with a spatial perspective in order to describe three different modes of preventing disorder (and producing order) in their relation to the supposed state monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force: spaces of imposition, spaces of delegation, and spaces of abstention. This spatio-institutionalist perspective allows to overview the security landscape (in this case, of nocturnal Niamey); however, just as any objectifying approach that regards security as a good to be delivered, and an individualistic approach, regarding security as a subjective feeling, this perspective bears some disadvantages. Trying to overcome these difficulties, I close with some preliminary theoretical reflections on the notion of security. I argue that the before mentioned perspectives (objectifying, institutionalist, individualistic) cannot do justice to the situational character of the security landscape, that is to say, to the situations in which acting individuals are involved in the simultaneous production of security *and* insecurity.

Security put into context: the late 1980s and the early 1990s

From the late 1980s onward Niger experienced significant political changes, starting with the crumbling of the military-controlled one-party system, the downfall of President Seyni Kountché. Under the pressure of Structural Adjustment Programmes,

3 I call it “semi- or pseudo Foucauldien sense” because I adopt Foucault’s notion of *dispositif* and connect it to the production of order in public space; I do not adopt his term *security dispositif* that he tightly links to the concept of modern governmentality, an approach of little explanatory value with regard to the purpose of this paper. See for Foucault’s notion of “*dispositif*” Foucault 2001: 299; for his notion of “*security dispositive*” Foucault 2004: 7-8.

Kountché's successor, Ali Saïbou, paved the way for democratisation and cut down on social services, student bursaries, and expenses on equipment for public services in order to balance the national budget (Gazibo 2005: 75; Gervais 1995: 33).⁴ The groups who had been particularly suffering from these cut-downs—civil servants, teachers, students and workers unions—organised and dominated the National Conference held in 1991. They managed to mobilize and keep up opposition to negotiations with the IMF until 1994, so Niger was more or less cut off from external financial flows (Gazibo 2005: 79; Gervais 1995: 37-9). In addition, Niger suffered from high inflation and from the fall in demand for uranium, the country's main export raw material, particularly after Chernobyl and after the end of the Cold War (Gazibo 2005: 82; Gervais 1995: 40). Gazibo even talks of a vicious circle: "The absence of external aid (in a context of internal financial bankruptcy) prevented the government from satisfying social demands, which developed into social unrest. When troubles were prevalent, donors became even less willing to help, invest, or grant loans" (2005: 82). In a word: Niger suffered badly from an economic crisis, and it is a common place that economic crisis translates into social problems—the rise of criminality in a rapidly urbanising society being but one of them (see for example Motcho 2004).

This was the context in which a number of changes in the security dispositif took place. First and foremost, the disintegration of Kountché's military regime, hand in hand with internal financial bankruptcy, made Ali Saïbou, who was obliged to balance the national budget, to cut down on police and military expenses: Kountché's famous secret police (*La Coordination*) was suppressed, police patrols and road blocks were largely trimmed back (Idrissa 2008: 177). These are, in a sense, institutional changes inflicted on the police during Saïbou's campaign of demilitarisation. In addition to that, after long years of military regime, the absence of pluralist expression and the citizens' diffuse fear vis-à-vis an "extremely policed state"⁵, the police was largely discredited and kept low profile, especially following the National Conference in 1991 (Lund 2001: 859-860). Be it due to institutional changes, budgetary cut-backs, or the voluntary maintenance of low-profile—the period of democratic transition translated into the retreat of the police state. One of the consequences was a rise in petty crime, especially in the rapidly growing urban centres.⁶

The retreat of the police state and the rise of crime led to the emergence of several new actors, groups and institutions active in the security dispositif. The first new-

4 However, neither were the wages of public employees cut down, nor was the number of employments reduced, on the contrary: the number of people employed in the civil service, most of which were young graduates, increased by almost 40 per cent from 1982 to 1989 (Gervais 1995: 37).

5 As Kimba Idrissa put it: "un État extrêmement policier" (2008: 199).

6 With regard to Niamey, on which I will concentrate in the following, see Jambes 1996 and Motcho 2004; for the rise in crime in Africa's urban centres on a more general note, see Fourchard 2003 and Pérouse de Montclos 2004.

comer was a private security enterprise that was founded in 1988—and many more would follow; today more than forty security enterprises exist, with the grand majority merely active in Niamey. The first one, GED-Services (*Gardiennage, Entretien, Désinsectisation*) was founded by an ex-police officer, employing mostly ex-police and ex-military personnel. Currently, GED-Service employs 1600 watchmen in Niamey only.⁷ The staff of security companies, in Niamey about 6000 watchmen in total, essentially consists of “Ex-”, as some of my interview partner called them—ex-policemen, ex-soldiers—, and of young men who, out of sheer need for employment, chose to apply for a job as watchman. They are all uniformed, equipped with truncheons, pepper spray, boots, knives, and walkie-talkies—in order of frequency—depending on the client’s demands (and willingness to pay). Security companies are primarily contracted by NGOs or private enterprises, and very few times by private households who usually employ non-contracted watchmen.

The second group of actors entering the scene are the *yan banga*, the term being a Hausa adoption of the English word “vanguards” (Ya’u 2000: 170). They have first been formed in the 1950s in Northern Nigeria as organised political party thugs to terrorise the opponent party and its supporters. In the 1990s, they were reinvented in Niger; one might call this an import from Nigeria, but this misses the point. The rise in petty crime after the National Conference of 1991 ushered taxi owners, lorry owners and other businessmen in Maradi and Zinder, towns in Nigerien Hausaland in proximity to the Nigerian border, to take their security into their own hands: They invited some Nigerian *yan banga* leaders to help them form their proper police force.⁸ Neither the *préfet* nor the police commissioner gave them a written authorisation; however, the police commissioner furnished them with torch lights and handcuffs, while merchants provided them with uniforms. These *yan banga* were mainly young unemployed males, paid with contributions by merchants of the market places and inhabitants of the housing areas they patrolled; alleged thieves would be beaten up, vilified, and sometimes killed, while the police seemed to close its eyes (Lund 2001: 859-2; Tidjani-Alou 2001: 121).

The third newcomer on the security scene of Niamey is a movement publicly known as *fada*. *Fada* is a Hausa word originally designating “a chief’s council chamber”;⁹ today, the term is applied to any gathering of young men on the street, usually preparing tea, sometimes rice with beans, mostly listening to music, and chatting until late at night.¹⁰ Under Kountché’s military regime, characterized by strict military police

7 In the whole of the country GED-Service has about 2000 employees.

8 In Zinder it was the *Président de l’Association des Commerçants* who invited them (Lund 2001: 860).

9 According to the Bargery Hausa-English Dictionary (<http://maguzawa.dyndns.ws>).

10 Youngstedt (2004) is writing about a very similar phenomenon among Hausa called *hira* (conversation). However, I did not witness that, as he states, “[a]ll ethnic groups in Niamey enjoy their own

patrols in nocturnal Niamey, it was, according to my interlocutors, virtually impossible to sit and chat on the street at night in front of one's house or compound. The place where the youth were to gather was provided by the regime itself: Since the late 1970s Kountché created a tightly woven net of youth centres in the whole of the country, the so-called *Samariya*.¹¹ In the aftermath of the described evolutions in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the *de facto* curfew after 11 p.m. was lifted and the youth centres were no longer maintained. Moreover, since the economic crisis leading to the step-by-step cutting down on employment in the civil service and difficulties in the private sector, combined with the rapid increase in the urban population, there was and still is a huge number of unemployed youth who, as a friend of mine put it, "don't have to get up in the morning". To cut it short: Today, the streets of nocturnal Niamey are virtually dominated by circles of young men, chatting and preparing tea, in the whole of Niamey until about midnight, and in the ancient, popular neighbourhoods all night long.¹² But what do these *fada* have to do with security? I will come back to this question further below, but for now only in very simple terms: Where there are *fada*, there is no police. And in the ancient, popular neighbourhoods in the centre of Niamey, the density of the *fada* is at its highest and police is virtually absent day in and day out. This leads to my assumption that these *fada* play an important role in the maintenance of some kind of order in their neighbourhood.

Spaces of imposition, delegation, and abstention

Let me now portray these actors involved in the production of order—state police, security enterprises, vigilantes, and non-organised circles of young men—in more detail. In order to do so, I will adopt a spatio-institutionalist perspective (one might also call it a state perspective). I take this approach as a heuristic tool that helps me organise my first empirical findings and sketch the security landscape of nocturnal Niamey. What do I mean by "spatio-institutional" perspective? I look at the different actors involved in the security dispositif in Niamey as if it were state police that is principally in charge of producing order and preventing disorder. In so doing, I distinguish three different spaces, each defined by a particular relation to state police: spaces of imposition, spaces of delegation, and spaces of abstention.

conversation groups" (2004: 117); from my own experience in Niamey, I maintain that ethnic ties are but one (rather marginal) factor determining sociability among young men.

11 The *Samariya* were part and parcel of Kountché's programme *société de développement* (society for development), with as main objective the mobilisation of the Nigerien population in non-political associations closely connected to the single party. For further details on the *société de développement* and the *Samariya* see Idrissa 2008: 169 ff., Maignan 2000: 43 ff. and Mignon 1989.

12 Assane Soumana, a Nigerien journalist, even talks of a "Fadamania" in Niamey (Sahel Dimance 6.6.2003, pp. 8-9).

Spaces of imposition are characterised by a numerous and rigorous presence of police, at night usually in the form of night patrols. The patrolling of Niamey is divided amongst three different forces into three separate sectors; one sector is patrolled by the *Police Nationale*, another by the *Gendarmerie Nationale*, and the third by the *FNIS* (*Forces Nationales d'Intervention et de Sécurité*). However, for my informants, this did not make much of a difference; for them these different night patrols are just "police". Police patrols are conducted primarily in relatively young quarters nearby the city centre which are characterised by a high density of NGO headquarters and well-to-do housing, as well as on broad avenues and highly frequented roads.¹³ They usually start at about eleven o'clock at night. Earlier in the evening, the streets in these quarters are well crowded: People are shopping, shopkeepers still busy, young folks gathering in front of TV sets to watch soaps and video clips, listening to music, chatting, preparing tea, and night watchmen still sitting outside the walls of their object to guard. Around 11 p.m. most people clear the streets and return to their homes, while the watchmen move to the inner courtyard of their client's domicile.

The patrolling police units usually consist of about ten men mounted on a vehicle with which they patrol larger avenues. Mostly they wear black battle dresses and are armed with machine pistols. Every now and then they park their vehicle, a Sovamag, stop passing vehicles or split up in two groups in order to patrol narrow streets of residential areas on foot. Every person found in the streets will be asked to produce his papers (identity card, birth certificate). Those unable to produce them will be taken to the police station for identification. In practice this means the person picked up will have to spend the night at the police station, unless he or she demonstrates some dexterity negotiating with the police.

One Thursday morning I found my Spanish housemate Maria tearstained in our living room.¹⁴ Still on the verge of tears, she told me what had happened the night before, when she had met a police patrol at four in the morning. As she was returning from a party in the centre of Niamey, her party friends, had already gotten off the taxi since we lived in a rather peripheral, mixed-housing neighbourhood. Midway on the sole paved road from the centre to our quarter, her taxi was stopped by the police. A police officer stepped to the car and asked Maria to produce her passport, which she could not; she had left it at the house. She tried to persuade the police officer to follow her to the house, which was only about five hundred metres from where they were standing, where she was more than willing to show him her passport. Apart from that, she tried to make him understand that her husband was waiting and worrying at the house. From what she told me, it seemed like the police officer could not care less. He made her step out of the taxi and take a seat in the Sovamag in the midst of ten heavily

13 If not explicitly specified, I use the term *police* to denominate police, gendarmes and FNIS agents alike.

14 All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

armed policemen. Maria was frightened to death. She was sitting there for about twenty minutes—“but it felt like an hour!”—until they let her step out. She wordlessly entered the taxi and they drove away. Instantly the taxi driver asked her to give him 4,000 Francs CFA. That, it seemed, was the price he had to pay for the police to release her.

Perhaps it was because of Maria’s sensitivity that she was virtually traumatised by that incident. But police night patrols can also evoke intense reactions among Niaméens, perhaps because a lot do not dispose of papers (or do not carry them with them), or perhaps because the price one has to pay to step out of the Sovamag is too high. Mossi Hamadou, a Nigerien journalist, having accompanied one night patrol of the *Gendarmerie*, notes that, in one street bordered with drinking spots, “the mere sight of our vehicle caused a panic among the revellers, and those reproaching themselves with something took flight”.¹⁵ In a word, police night patrols cause vigorous reaction among those being patrolled. It is impossible to ignore them, it is mostly not advisable to look for them, and it is very costly to appease them. That is why I use the term “imposition”.

Spaces of delegation are characterised by the delegation, or the transfer of policing functions to organised groups and organisations other than state police. This delegation can be either implicit or explicit (or somewhere in-between). This “in-between” is particularly evident in the case of private security enterprises. In the case of the *yan banga*, it seems to be either explicit or implicit, not in between. More than forty security companies—mostly *sociétés de gardiennage*—supply the growing number of private enterprises and NGOs with security personnel. The main task of the security personnel is to guard a particular object. In the daytime the guards are often additionally assigned petty jobs for petty cash directly by their clients: They wash cars, water plants, sweep the pavement or the courtyard. After office hours they are essentially sitting on benches in front of the object they are supposed to guard, preparing tea, eating, listening to music, chatting. After 11 p.m., most of them move to the inner courtyard of their client’s house where they spend the night dozing nearby the front door. Their job consists of “being present and looking out”, as the most senior watchmen among my interview partners put it. The major difference between the police and security personnel is the passivity of the latter. Watchmen do not look for villains; they just make sure that there are none in their scope. Patrolling police, on the other hand, are actively trying to detect supposed villains in the open street, even if it is more of a symbolic control over public space than the effective hunt for gangsters.

15 Translation M.G.; orig.: “La simple vue de notre véhicule a crée la panique au sein de cette communauté de fêtards. Ceux qui se reprochent quelque chose prirent la fuite” (Sahel Dimanche, 18.3.2005, p. 10)

What do I mean by delegation in this context? As I mentioned, it is not an explicit delegation of particular tasks. Yet, apart from the licences issued by the Ministry of Commerce (*Ministère de commerce*) and the Ministry of Labour (*Ministère de fonction publique et de travail*) necessary to run a company, a security company needs to have the official approval of the Ministry of the Interior, a licence to exercise security functions, to wear uniforms and to bear arms, though no firearms, in public. And importantly, the police profits from the presence of security personnel because in those quarters characterised by high density of watchmen, it is not all that necessary for the police to conduct patrols in order to respond to the inhabitants' demand. Firstly, burglars seem to be discouraged from trying to enter a building of which they know it is being guarded by a watchman. Only three of the (about twenty) watchmen I talked to have ever seen a burglar—while the burglar was running from them. Secondly, if there is one, he is likely to be caught by watchmen. One of the watchmen I interviewed narrated the story of his only confrontation with a burglar during his twenty year long career: As soon as he saw him jumping over the wall of the object he was guarding, he blew a whistle in order to call all the watchmen in the vicinity. It was about 3 a.m. The burglar, once he heard the whistle, jumped back over the wall to take flight. From the whistle the landlord had woken up, and four watchmen from the surroundings came running, so in total six men were chasing the burglar. They reached him and the landlord beat him almost to death with a wooden slat. They tied him up and in the morning they brought him to the police. This story was surely boosted by the watchman's pride of having caught a thief. Nonetheless, one gets a hint on the reasons for the burglars' fear from watchmen. And the fact that this was the only one of my interview partners that actually confronted a burglar hints at the rareness of burglaries in NGO and high standard housing areas.

The operating range of security enterprises, focused on NGO headquarters and private enterprises, is basically limited to quarters in and close to the city centre, in its composition characterised by the latter and by high-standard housing. These are essentially the same areas that are patrolled by the police at night. In very simple terms, these spaces of delegation turn into spaces of imposition after 11 p.m.

The *yan banga* are either implicitly or explicitly entrusted with police functions. The term "implicit delegation" can, for example, be employed in the case of Zinder described by Christian Lund. He reports that in the early 1990s businessmen, in cooperation with the Sultan, organised groups of young men that would patrol the business and housing areas of Zinder. They did not have a written authorisation of any state official—unlike security companies—, and yet they were tacitly accepted as security forces by the police commissioner and the *préfet*, they were even furnished with torches and handcuffs (2001: 859–62). In Niamey the term "implicit delegation of police functions" is helpful to describe the situation in the peripheral quarters of Niamey, characterised by their rural nature and low standard housing, where the *yan banga* are particularly active (Motcho 2004: 201). In these quarters the police conduct night patrols, if

at all, merely on arterial roads. Some police functions are executed anyhow, sometimes under the control of the chief responsible for a particular quarter (*chef de quartier*), sometimes even without the chief being involved.¹⁶ For example in Kirkissoye, a peripheral quarter on the right bank of the Niger River, three influential members of the community organised some youth to patrol the streets of their quarter at night. According to my interlocutors, the chief was not part of this organisational committee, neither was the police informed. Yet, they did not encounter resistance; quite the contrary, the residents, among them even high-ranking police officials, were willing to contribute either money or tea, sugar, rice and beans, kola nuts—in short, what the *yan banga* need to make it through the night.

Apart from this implicit delegation the *yan banga* have also, in certain quarters and at certain times, been explicitly commissioned to execute police functions. This was especially the case in the peri-central quarters of Niamey characterised by mid- and high-standard housing. So the *chef de quartier* of the quarter La Poudrière told me about his *yan banga*. When he became chief in 1992—in the context of rising criminality and declining police activity—he tried to take security into his own hands, but not without the police being aware. He informed the *préfet* of the urban municipality of Niamey (*Communauté urbaine de Niamey*), his direct superior, and he called upon his citizens to make their sons present themselves to him with their birth certificate. He vetted them and selected about 100 of whom, in the next step, the police checked the criminal records. In the end, he had 75 young men whom he split into five groups, each patrolling one sector of his quarter. The police, well aware and supportive of his plans assigned two policemen to accompany and head each of the *yan banga* groups on their nightly patrols. However, after a while, the police deemed it not necessary anymore to support the *yan banga* to such an extent and they withdrew from active involvement.¹⁷ In short, here the delegation of police functions became explicit through the administrative (*identification judiciaire*) and the active (patrols) participation of the police.

In another case the delegation of police functions was explicit in the truest sense of the word. Early in 2008 a landmine detonated on a principal street in a peri-central quarter of Niamey (Yantala). Following this incident, as I was told by the chiefs I interviewed, the governor of the urban municipality of Niamey assembled all the *chefs de quartier* of his municipality. He called upon them to recreate the *yan banga* in order to support the police in their mission to maintain public order. He asked them to assemble the youth and bring him their birth certificates, so that he could initiate the check of their criminal records. The chiefs responded that if they were to organise a “police de

16 For the role of traditional chiefs in the municipality of Niamey see Motcho 2005.

17 After a while most *yan banga* turned out to be just as dangerous as those they were supposed to catch. Hence resistance among the citizens rose and fewer and fewer were willing to contribute so that in most quarters the *yan banga* were no longer existent in recent years.

quartier", they would need the governor's financial support since the citizens would not want to pay for something the state is supposed to deliver for free, certainly not for a group of youth that in the past proved to be almost as dangerous as the burglars they were meant to deter. Moreover, without financial support the youth would not take the risk of patrolling the streets of Niamey. The governor never responded to the chiefs' demands, so the *yan banga* have not been recreated under the governor's supervision. In other words, the explicit delegation failed.

The third category of spaces in the security landscape in Niamey are *spaces of abstention*. These are areas where police is not present at all, essentially the ancient quarters in central Niamey, close to Niamey's three major markets and distinguished by the highest population density in Niamey, buildings are essentially mud compounds and only the main streets are tarred.¹⁸ During daytime the streets of these quarters are busy, due to the inhabitants predominantly pursuing commercial activities. After sunset the image of the streets is dominated by the *fada*, circles of young people sitting in the streets.

To highlight the *fada*'s importance in the security landscape of Niamey, let me reveal one episode I experienced myself. I had an appointment with the chief of the quarter Lacouroussou, one of Niamey's popular and ancient quarters. At 8:30 p.m., I was going to meet a friend of mine, who would introduce me to the chief. As I arrived a little early, by 8:10, I decided to take a little walk in the neighbourhood. The sun was already set, and lamps, lanterns and TV sets were lighting some parts of the street, mostly in front of huts sheltering small grocery stores or snack bars. As I passed the second *fada*, somebody greeted me, not too friendly, but not too harsh either; I responded without slackening my pace. After I had turned around the first corner, I was addressed by a young man sitting in the next *fada*. He greeted me friendly and asked where I was heading. I explained that I had an appointment with the chief and, since I didn't stop here either, he let me continue my walk. From the next four or five *fada* which I passed there was always at least one voice greeting me; from the last *fada* a young man got up from his bench, he welcomed me in his neighbourhood and asked me where I was from and where I was heading. I told him about my appointment with the chief and he instantly took me by the arm and lead me toward the chief's compound, very friendly though, demonstrating his interest in me by incessantly asking questions about my provenance, my job, etcetera. When we arrived at the chief's place, he placed me on a bench, entered briefly into the compound. After a few seconds he came out again and told me to wait for my friend. He wished me all the best for my endeavours and left for where we had come from.

18 For further details on the character of the ancient quarters of Niamey see Jambes 1996: 323-6 and Motcho 2004: 200-1.

This episode was about fifteen minutes long. Later in the evening, during my interview with the *chef de quartier*, I understood better what had happened during my walk. Asked how often the police were patrolling his quarter, he responded that the police only enter his quarter either if there is a violent brawl, mostly among the youth of his very quarter, that cannot be resolved by the habitants themselves, or if the police wants to hand over the summons for somebody. In the first case, the police responds to a demand articulated by the chief himself, which occurred only once in the last four years, the chief assured me. In the second case, they come to the chief whom they entrust with the task to make sure that the person concerned receives his summons. As regards police patrols, there are none. Answering my question, why this was the case, the chief responded:

I am *chef de quartier* since thirteen years and there has not been a single case of burglary, only petty theft inside one family. You know why? There are always people in the street, the whole night long. And everybody knows everybody. If you come and you are not from here, everybody will know it. And if you have no business here, you need to explain what you want. If you are a thief, the youth will beat you well. They can even beat you to death! They are very proud and they can be so fierce! If you are a thief, you will run into the arms of the police rather than be caught by our youth (14 December 2009).

Probably he boosted the facts a little. Be that as it may, his explanation helped me understand what had happened during my walk. I was recognised the very moment I entered the neighbourhood from the tarred street. Not only was I recognised, they made me notice that I was recognised (unlike in other quarters where nobody seemed to care about me having a walk). And after having penetrated the neighbourhood some hundred meters, having passed by several *fada* from all of which I was addressed in one way or the other, one friendly young man got up and personally received me, somehow embraced me and made sure I was not getting lost. From what many interlocutors told me I got the impression that if I had not obviously been a European stranger, the *fada*'s reactions might have been less subtle and perhaps slightly harsher.

Perhaps in this context too one could refer to the "Fadamaina" as the delegation of police functions. Yet, I choose to rather call it "abstention" for two reasons. Firstly, there are no organised groups exercising police functions that are known and definable (as in the case of security enterprises and the *yan banga*). The second reason is that the *fada* do not even claim exercising police functions. All the youth I talked to stated that all they want to do with their *fada*, is prepare tea, rice with beans, listen to music, meet girls, perhaps smoke some cigarettes, and have a chat. Only, they did not want to be disturbed, and obviously an intruder in their quarter already constituted some kind of disturbance for some. Thus, I find the term "delegation" risks to be too much of an abstraction from the reality of the *fada*. It is true, however, that the line between *delegation* and *abstention* cannot be clearly drawn, as is the case with any analytical categorisation—they are ideal types never completely corresponding to empirical reality. Conse-

quently, delegation and abstention should be thought of as the endpoints of a continuum describing the active involvement of state police.

Both terms, “delegation” and “abstention”, suggest that we deal with some kind of state or police failure to produce order in public space. This is by far not the point I want to make. Consider the case of the *fada*: It becomes evident that the absence of police patrols does not entail the absence of order. Quite the contrary, it seems as if the order in these popular quarters is stable to such an extent that the inhabitants do not even feel the need for police presence. Here the interpretation of the absence of police in terms of “state failure” is misleading. Rather it should be understood as a response to specific conditions, namely a particular constellation of the types of breaches to be corrected, the types of requests of the population, the presence of alternative security agents, and so forth. Also with regard to the delegation of police functions, one might be tempted to argue that the police was no longer capable of ensuring the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force and therefore others are (implicitly or explicitly) called upon to fill the gaps in the security landscape. Yet, this “police failure” thesis, also put forward in local discourse, is an unsatisfactory explanation since it is disregarding of the complex rationalities framing the vigilante phenomenon (see in this regard Meagher 2007 and Pratten 2008a/2008b). Moreover, this thesis does not bear in mind the tight (often informal) interconnectedness between state police and security companies. I thus argue differently. Following Reemtsma, I understand the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force not as a state or a condition (*Zustand*) that either is or is not there; I rather regard it as a regulative idea, as a tendency (2003: 9-11; 2008: 98, 168).¹⁹ Thus the emergence of non-police actors in the security dispositif should be interpreted neither as the collapse of the monopoly, nor as the retreat or failure of the state; such an interpretation would mean to fall victim to a purely essentialist perspective on “the state”. I advocate we rather think of the delegation of police functions as a reformulation of the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force, that is to say, as a reconfiguration of the groups being furnished with a licence for the exercise of violence.²⁰

The “police (or state) failure” thesis can also be argued against on a more empirical level, as does for example Bierschenk for the Beninese judiciary. He demon-

19 Already Max Weber pointed out the process character of the state monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force. Only the scientifically constructed ideal type of the state *successfully* claims this monopoly (2002: 822). Considering empirical reality never fully matches the ideal type (2002: 4), the process of claiming this monopoly is never completed.

20 This perspective is, firstly, inspired by Jan Philipp Reemtsma regarding police not as *the* instrument of the state monopoly but rather as an organisation that the state provides with a license for the exercise of violence (2003: 11); secondly, this perspective is similar to (and inspired by) Béatrice Hibou who refuses to think of the privatising the state in terms of retreat or failure of the state, rather as a “modification des modes de gouvernement [qui] se fait dans un sens qui laisse de plus en plus de place à la délégation” (1999b: 7). See particularly Hibou 1999a.

strates that the voluntary self-restriction of a state agency's (in Bierschenk's case: the judiciary's) field of activity should be understood not as a mere failure but rather as a disburdening strategy that is essential for the functioning of a state agency structurally underequipped (2004: 202).²¹

Conceptual outlook

Until now I have adopted a spatio-institutionalist, top-down perspective to give an overview of the security landscape of Niamey and the principal actors involved in it. It is beyond doubt that this perspective is reductionist and simplistic, particularly if we want to understand what is happening in actual situations where security is at stake. Let me now adopt a slightly different perspective from the one I just presented. Yet, I will stick to the spatial metaphor of the security landscape. I find it helpful to understand *landscape* in the sense Thomas Hall, inspired by Tim Ingold, did. Hall argues that landscape is more than the place where action occurs; rather we should take into account the reciprocal engagement of the urban landscape and the individuals acting in it (2008: 64, 72, 74).²² This perspective does justice to the creative potential of individual actors navigating through the security landscape of Niamey. Another episode:

It was about 7:30 p.m., when I and Ibrahim, a seventeen year old boy, left the compound of the LASDEL (*Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local*), the research establishment where I had an office and his father was employed as night watchman. For me it was too late to find a taxi heading toward my rather remote neighbourhood; Ibrahim wanted to visit friends whose place was not far from mine, so he was confronted with the same problem (though he didn't think of it as a problem). So we set off, at least once a week, for a one hour walk. We were to cross a peri-central quarter, called Plateau, with many NGO headquarters, private enterprises, administrative buildings, and high standard housing. Habitually, when I walked alone, I took the tarred road leading almost straight to my quarter, at least in my opinion. But according to Ibrahim, I was going a long way round. He preferred to zigzag the narrow streets right through the residential area. In the beginning I did not object. After some time, however, I tried to persuade him that my route, even if possibly slightly longer, were a lot less exhausting since we would not have to walk through sand but on solid ground. He overruled my objections putting forward one great advantage of his route: We would only have to cross two large avenues, which

21 In any case, the self-restriction of a state agency's field of activity is not a feature characteristic only for African states or police. Dominique Monjardet, drawing on fieldwork among French police, defined as one of the main features of police work the ongoing process of selection in which police officers need to single out a number of tasks from a pool of potential tasks that is largely exceeding their actual capacities (1996: 39).

22 Contrary to my argument, Hall explicitly includes the physical landscape in his.

meant that we limited the risk of confronting police patrols. A friend of his had already been caught once and since he didn't carry papers with him, he had to spend the night at the police station—an experience he was not very keen on reliving. Usually, when Ibrahim sees headlights approaching, he hides behind a corner, a parked car, a container, or some other object offering cover. On our route through residential areas, watchmen were sitting in front of at least every second building, mostly in groups of three to five, while preparing tea, watching television and chatting. Ibrahim greeted almost all of those watchmen *fada*. Some responded and wished us a good walk, some invited us to sit and have a glass of tea with them. Probably that is why this 30 minutes path turned into a one hour walk. Half of the time Ibrahim was concerned with socialising. When I asked him how he knew all those guys sitting in the streets, he responded that he had been walking this route for more than two years, ever since he had been visiting his friends in the quarter where I lived.

To come back to the security landscape, Ibrahim is more than merely traversing a given terrain; Rather, he is responding to constellations which he cannot manipulate—like the police patrols on the main streets—and is creating a terrain of familiarity (*Vertrautheit*), namely by always taking the same route and by socialising with the youth and the watchmen bordering his path. Thereby, if we follow Niklas Luhmann's terminology, Ibrahim lays the groundwork for confidence (*Zuversicht*) and trust (*Vertrauen*), two basic modes of self-assurance, which are pre-conditions for dealing with dangers and risks (Luhmann 2001). By composing a landscape of familiarity, he reduces the danger of being caught by the police or being attacked by villains in an unfamiliar and anonymous environment, and as such translates danger into a calculable and acceptable risk. In other words, he is not merely at the mercy of some uncontrollable dangers, but he transfers them into the realm of the familiar, thus developing strategies for dealing with them.

It is important, in my view, to underline that Ibrahim is *doing* something, he is creatively acting, building up a landscape of familiarity; he does not simply *undergo* the security landscape. How can we link this *doing-something* to our understanding of security? In this regard I find Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of the *event* very promising (although this is not the place to discuss their ontology of the event).²³ To Deleuze and Guattari the event is an incorporeal transformation (1994: 21), a singular rupture that becomes significant only through its embeddedness in a series of events (Bensa & Fassin 2002: 16, 35; see also Gluckman 2006: 17f.), and importantly, an event is of an enun-

23 "For ages people have used them [concepts] to determine what something is (its essence). We, though, are interested in the circumstances in which things happen: in what situations, where and when does a particular thing happen, how does it happen, and so on? A concept, as we see it, should express an event rather than an essence" (Deleuze 1995: 25).

ciative and thus essentially ambiguous character.²⁴ Let me flesh it out with a concrete, though fictitious event: Ibrahim is caught by a police patrol. At first glance, this is an extremely corporeal situation, as policemen jump out of their Sovamag and Ibrahim is packed into it. But this situation can be understood as an incorporeal transformation that only in the second step affects bodies. What is at stake, is the police turning Ibrahim into somebody to be captured.²⁵ Although this situation is part of daily police work and of Ibrahim's usual reasoning while crossing a large avenue at night, it is a concrete situation and therefore inevitably singular in character—which is a rather trivial statement. And yet, it becomes only meaningful for those concerned insofar as it is embedded in a whole series of other events: For the police it is a routine activity, for Ibrahim—fortunately—a rather scarce occurrence, but an occurrence similar to others he had already heard of. In other words, the event becomes significant only in its historicity. And to regard this event in its enunciative character means to take into account the two sides of the coin: On the one hand, the police practices are meant to produce security, that is, re-establish a (symbolic) order, remove a suspect, produce statistics. On the other hand, Ibrahim—just as his friends and his family afterwards—would read this event differently: For him it were a kind of worst case scenario and the instantaneous production of insecurity. So is it an event of security or insecurity? It is essentially both.

Summary and research prospects

I have started this paper with a confession of my struggle grasping the notion of security. What I presented in the course of my argument was basically the course my reflections on security took, during and after my preliminary field research in Niamey. In the first part, I sketched the historical context that gave rise to some changes in the security landscape of Niamey, namely the crumbling of Kountché's military regime, the financial bankruptcy and the growth of Niamey's population. The consequences for the

24 For the discussion of the *énonciation* from a linguistic point of view (where this notion was borrowed from) see Dubois 1969. For an inspiring adoption of this concept and a discussion of its value in political and social sciences see Bayart 1985.

25 Smith delivers an insightful discussion of the incorporeal transformation as used by Deleuze and Guattari: "Deleuze and Guattari show that, in expressing an incorporeal event and attributing it to bodies, one is neither representing nor referring, but 'intervening' in bodies in a particular way. For instance, in a juridical act of sentencing, what takes place before the sentencing (the crime) and what takes place afterward (the punishment) are actions and passions affecting bodies (the body of the property, the victim, the accused, the prison, and so on); but the transformation of the accused person into a convict is a pure instantaneous act or incorporeal attribute that is the 'expressed' of the judge's sentence. In a hijacking, the brandishing of a revolver or the execution of hostages are actions between bodies; but the transformation of passengers into hostages, and of the plane-body into a prison-body, is an incorporeal transformation" (Smith 2004: 372-373).

security landscape were the retreat of the police state—the police kept low profile—and the rise in crime in Niamey. This context gave also way for new groups entering the security scene: Private security enterprises, the *yan banga* which one could describe as vigilante groups, and the *fada* movement consisting of young people hanging around in the streets at night. I described these different groups and the respective modes of producing order through an institutionalist or top-down perspective, attributing them, for the sake of an overview of Niamey's security landscape, to different spaces. Consequently pursuing the institutionalist approach, I called them spaces of imposition, delegation and abstention.

In the last part I suggested an approach to security that does justice to the essentially situational and ambiguous character of security that remains unconsidered in objectifying, institutionalist and individualistic approaches. I argue that I understand security landscape not as the mere frame of individuals' action (although presented as such in the previous paragraphs for the sake of a necessarily simplistic overview), rather as the result of reciprocal engagement with creatively acting individuals. An approach that might help overcome the difficulties intrinsic to objectifying and top-down perspectives is to think of security in terms of *event*, that is to say, to take into account its essential situational and ambiguous character. From this point of view it is no longer useful to talk of "spaces of security"; we should rather talk of "events of security".

That being said, continuing my fieldwork in Niger, I need to look much deeper into concrete events where security is at stake. This entails, firstly, asking questions about emic concepts of (in)security. What are the concepts used by the persons concerned to describe the breach of an order, the order itself, the restoring of order, etcetera? And secondly, for the purpose of taking into account the individuals' creativity—in the double sense of the word: individuals being both *producers* of and *originally responding* to these events—, there is a need for extended participant observation among the groups and actors presented in this paper—police units, security personnel, *yan banga*, and *fada*.

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