JOCKEYS ON MECHANICAL DONKEYS – MODES OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION IN AN AFRICAN METROPOLIS*

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Abstract: ***On the example of transportation services this paper discusses the dynamics of present-day globalization processes in Khartoum, Sudan. Building on the dialectical relation between concepts of adaptation and creativity, the article aims to show how individuals display resilience, flexibility and determination to survive by ways of harnessing modernity for their own purposes. Rickshaws as newcomers to the transportation market in Sudan undergo a continuous process of appropriation and adaptation into the Sudanese context. The current article is an attempt to capture some of the notions that control the negotiated (dis)order for such traveling and globalized technologies.***

Key words: ***globalization, transportation, creativity, adaptation***

Methodological preface

The article is based on my six-month stay in Khartoum, Sudan. Like anyone who has traveled in the teeming African cities, I have been stunned by the multilayered tapestry of the transportation means. The ways in which globalization is presented and transformed in this officially sieged country are particularly palpable in the transportation sector. Although not a focus of my stay, the everyday experience of traveling in the ebullient city has drawn my attention to this seemingly ordinary and tedious activity – getting from point A to point B. Accustomed to the ordered and neat transportation system of European towns,

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the experience of traveling in Khartoum became distinctive and exquisite. The creative ways in which the transportation conundrums are daily solved by the stakeholders of the commuting schemes urged for capture. In other words, the touchstone of this article is the portrayal of the new social velocity (Mbembe and Nutall 2004), the creative responses to changing conditions of order and disorder of the transportation industry. The ethnographic focus of this article is on Khartoum.

During the six months, I traversed from the available variety of transportation options in Khartoum. Initially, warned by well-meaning colleagues and acquaintances, I employed the "avoid public-transportation strategy." The results were easily foreseeable – overspent budget line on local transportation due to the taxi fares and deficit of sleep due to vain efforts to avoid the morning heat. Shortly after, I decided to try out the emic ways and found out the available transport options mainly consisted of buses, minibuses and rickshaws. Due to the daily need of short-distance commuting I opted for the usage of rickshaws (for details, please see "*A glance at the transportation system in Khartoum"*). By this means, I had the opportunity to be a participant observer of the creative conduct in which the space is inhabited, continuity experienced and modernity negotiated.

In order to shed light on these negotiations, I relied on qualitative methods; namely on ethnographic field notes, interviews and participant observation (Denzin 2005, 2008). While trying to understand these meanings, the basic anthropological axiom became more and more clear – the meanings that were uncovered and will be discussed are particular and selected and clearly can never be all-encompassing (Emerson 1995). Additionally, the curious questions of a young white woman, probably working for the UN or one of the international NGOs, needed to be answered in *her way*. Initially, thus, I was assured that all rickshaws are legal just like any other means of transportation, that the scary noises are the songs of their reliable vehicles that can cross anywhere – even outside Khartoum, and that the business runs smoothly and easy. A few words about 50 Cent or Akon, as well as "being from Nedved's country" shifted me towards their trust zone, which was deepened with the passing time and increasing insight into the rickshaw business. My presence was consequential and undeniably the following pages provide a snapshot of the social reality that was read over the shoulders of everyone participating (Geertz 1979, Bourdieu 2003).

Theoretical Orientation

The article discusses a specific example of appreciation of the form and structure in which the globalization processes are manifested in Africa. A voluminous body of literature presents the ways and conduct of Africans participating in the globalized world. Typically, a vital aspect of the analysis is centered on the uneven impact that globalization has on African communities. In this vein, Brecher and Costello (1994) discuss the issues of cultural and societal homogenization that is brought about with globalization. Their work holds eminent focus on possible actions and strategies to address the time-space compression. By this, they set the stage for Hertz (2001) and Klein (2000), who focus on the transnational movement of opposition to globalization.

The African continent in large is arguably considered as a marginal space of modernity; in fact it is often portrayed as the continent catching up with modernity. The often taken-for-granted marginalization of Africa from globalization (Fergusson 1999) enables research on the resilience structures and forms present in the local needs, circumstances and imaginations. Since gaining independence, the countries of the African continent have continued to be the space of extraordinary outside interventions addressing poverty, environmental crises, social exclusions and violence (Engel and Olsen 2005) resulting in more powerful and rigid interventions than any other area worldwide (Rottenburg 2009). Instead of analyzing these interventions, I turned my attention to the less visible everyday processes accommodating these larger interplays, the manifold spaces in which people resist and maneuver on the back stages of high level negotiations. In order to capture the empirical reality in valid theoretical terms, the article builds on the dialectical relation between adaptation and creativity. Hence, adaptation is not seen only as a passive process indicating lack of power or agency, nor is creativity the bearer of agency and sovereignty. As an alternative, the article starts from the empirical observation that adaptation and creativity are in a dialectical relation; adaptation is realized as long as it is adaptive to the local context, and creativity can be realized to the extent it is adaptive to the existing milieu (Bhabha 1994).

The article further builds on the observation that the societies in Africa are globally entangled (Mbembe 2002) while the scope of the entanglements has been changed. No longer can they be considered as naturally given, bounded entities. In this vein, it is not plausible to consider the local as something given and the trans-local as something to be achieved or avoided (Lefebvre 1991).

Both the local and trans-local are socially constructed and reconstructed in the given context. Therefore, the approach used in this article denounces the clear-cut distinction between authentic and foreign forms as well as the omission of the distinction between forms that were institutionalized long ago and the newly emerging forms. Instead, the following pages are intended to go beyond such an approach by focus on agency and the ways in which it maneuvers its creative and strategic ways in the globalizing conditions. The aim of the following pages is to examine the interplay between the older and the newly emerging forms of adaptation and creativity in the context of global entanglements and local appropriations.

Organizational dynamics in the transportation industry

A glance at the transportation system in Khartoum

Despite the centrality of mobility on the continent, only limited scope of research is available on the African road system. Historical accounts describe the pre-colonial routes (Wilks 1992); others link automobility and power (Gewald 2002) often emphasizing the relation between colonial oppression and automotive systems (Wrangham 2004) or the "religious logistics" (Gewald 2002). Another stream of literature questions the benefits of roads with regard to market integration and development (Wilson 2004) or raises questions about the impact of roads on land-use patterns or indigenous institutions (Kamal and Nasir 1998). Until recently, anthropological research on the road system outside Europe and the United States has mainly focused on issues related to decorations and slogans on vehicles trying to investigate cultural trends towards car cultures (van der Geest 2009). In the various bodies of literature only few have pointed towards alternatives to dominant external pressure and passive local adaptations. For instance, Porath (2002) analyses the transformations the roads bring as a field of contestation and accommodation. Featherstone (2004) goes further, examining nation-specific car cultures and culturally diverse motorscapes. Despite the fact that such an approach overcame the outsider/insider dichotomy, it provides limited space for examining the creative ways of the culturally informed practice. For these purposes, Miller's (2001) edited volume provides instrumental insights into the fact that the use of vehicles and roads is culturally shaped.

In the early 1990s, the government in Khartoum initiated severe economic reforms. The civil war in the south and the international embargo had

a disastrous impact on the Sudanese economy which in combination featured an enormous decrease in the oil supply to all relevant sectors (de Waal 2005). The old, insufficient and unorganized system of public transportation was also hit by the oil scarcity, resulting in an even more disordered transport market. The two main features one observes in relation to the transportation system in Khartoum is that it implies very little of a system – there are no bus stops, but there are buses without numbers moving; there are no schedules informing about the arrival times, but there are bunches of people waiting; there are no ticket machines and no information kiosks, but everyone seems to get to their destination. In short, the issues of mobility in the five-million metropolis give firstly the impression of being disorganized and miscellaneous at the same time. In order to get to a specific destination, one has to typically use at least two types of vehicles which are different in capacity, availability and construction. The binding fabric of the vehicles is their load – people. Boarding a crammed bus or hopping on a rickshaw, one is accompanied by an array of human behavior reflecting the African reality to the extent that the bus has sometimes been characterized as a microcosm of African life (de Bruijn 2001).

Buses, the largest in size and very rare to find, are literally the dinosaurs of transportation in Khartoum. Being leftovers of the older system, even colonial times, buses suffer from neglect and decline in numbers. Their large sizes barely qualify them to run through crowded stations, narrow streets and old bridges. Like all official public-transportation vehicles, each bus is operated by a driver and an assistant (*kumsari*[1]). The driver is responsible for navigation and the mechanical state of the vehicle. The assistant is responsible for collecting fares from passengers as well as keeping the vehicle as clean as possible. Being privately owned vehicles, the buses still need to be registered with the authorities as public transportation vehicles. Due to decreasing numbers and low efficiency, the buses have been for the most part replaced by minibuses. Explicatory for the preference of minibuses is the timing – the bus trip usually takes double time compared to the smaller and faster minibuses.

Minibuses have been the ones to conquer the streets of Khartoum for the last two decades. Equipped with 25-30 seats, they have managed to serve different destinations in all Khartoum. Their size has been an advantage needed to cross old, narrow bridges between Khartoum, Khartoum-Bahri and

1 Despite the common usage of the word it was not possible for me to trace the exact meaning or origin of the word.

Omdurman. Their speed has also been more convenient for people working in different areas in Khartoum. Like the buses, the minibuses are privately owned and each minibus is operated by a driver and a *kumsari*.

The third competing means of bus transportation are the world-wide known smaller minibuses: *peseros* in Mexico, *otobis* in Egypt, *kombis* in South Africa, *danfos* in Nigeria, or *matatus* in Kenya[2]. In Sudan, these vehicles are called according to their trademarks: the Haice or the Grace with no particular umbrella denomination. The Haice offers more seats, thus allowing the small *kumsari* to be squeezed in between the driver's seat and the door. In the Grace, the space left for the *kumsari* is just between two adjoining seats so he needs to be very flexible and fast getting out at each stop and shouting the final destination for the potential passengers. As there are no official routes for the vehicles, the route itself is negotiated by the driver and the vehicle's passengers.

Negotiated order

On an extremely hot day, I decided not to wait for the minibus and to take the Grace that was approaching. The young *kumsari* waved from the window in an attempt to shout the final stop of the Grace "*Jackson Square.*" Using the same hand sign as the *kumsari*, I waved, the car stopped and the *kumsari* got off to let me in. Aware that these vehicles have no standard route, I had to ask him whether the Grace would take me to my destination. Passing the question automatically to the driver, the *kumsari* inquired. The driver passed the question to the passengers: "Anyone objects to going through that direction?" The driver answered: "OK, we will go there! Get in before a policeman arrives." Shortly after getting back on the road, the driver turned to the passengers announcing that the vehicle was to be stopped by a police patrol. In a confident tone, the driver asked: "Obviously, I have no papers. Would you mind pretending that we are on "a company vehicle" if the officer asks?"

A few words were exchanged between the police officer and the driver; the officer seemed to be inspecting the car, looking suspiciously at the passengers while giving the driver his license back. Soon after, the Grace got back to the main road and the driver put the music back on as if nothing had happened.

The road system of the Grace is defined not only by the normative framework guarding correct conduct; in reality the road system is much more shaped

2 For further information please see Godard and Teurnier 1992; Godard 2002.

by the social orders of the road users. In this vein, the crew of the vehicle, in the fullest meaning of the word, decides whether a newcomer is accepted onboard or not. Despite the fact that the bus driver and the *kumsari* will (hopefully) profit from the passengers – and clearly the more passengers they transport the higher the chance of profit, the final decision on the route is collective while the already boarded passengers hold the right of veto. Similarly, a joint responsibility is present while on the road –for the police we were a work team on "a corporate vehicle," thus allowing the driver to pursue his business without a legal permit to serve as a public transportation vehicle.

The event went smoothly; as if it happens all the time or as if every passenger knows the traffic laws about public transportation and the gaps that allow the driver to pretend to be on a private drive. The passengers did not act – talk. The individuals who boarded the vehicle transformed into a community on board that without speaking adapted to the joint goal – reaching the final destination with as few obstacles as possible. For this, the role of a company crew was taken up without preparation and was dropped when the first passenger embarked in the vehicle. The paucity of formal rules is adapted to serve the purposes needed – the role playing would have continued even in case the police officer had not been satisfied with the driver's performance. In this case, the passengers would all have joined in to convince the police officer to release the vehicle. In daily conduct, public transportation can be seen not as a rigid, regulated system but artisanal creative improvised conduct in the making.

Creation and transgression of boundaries

Temporal and spatial spread of the rickshaw

Two decades ago the term rickshaw did not recall any familiarity to the average Sudanese. With the worsening transportation crises, the demand for transportation solutions was on rise. The increased local needs for transportation were to be solved by a global product that was transferred into Sudan. Transfers of technology succeed if the transfer is followed by translation in which new institutionalized practices and webs of beliefs are built (Middell 2000). In 1992, the Indian company "Bajaj" started to export rickshaws through its local client in Sudan, the "United Company for Distribution." Auto rickshaws, small motorized three -wheeled vehicles have been serving in many, predominantly Asian countries. In the city of Omdurman the numbers of rickshaws started to increase from 22 vehicles, rapidly multiplying. (Albayan newspapers, interview on 05/03/2011).

According to Osman, a former jockey, these 22 rickshaws "were not actual rickshaws like these now...they were more like tuk tuks, where people in the back were seated facing each other on 2 opposite benches. Everything was different; we commuted on set routes – say from Banat to al Murada, or so. It was never meant to spread like this and go to places...even before, it was not for people at all. It was for cargo, people I think it was in Egypt, taking the gas on it; later we came with our standard routes and then with the worsening situation only these small ones came in."

The first time the rickshaw entered Sudan it was meant to serve as a cargo vehicle for gas distributors. Some retail gas producers purchased the rickshaws to deliver cylinders to households following the example of Egypt. Soon after, the rickshaw was introduced to function as a passenger transportation taxi (Sudan General Directorate of Traffic). Osman further explained that, initially, small scale cooperatives were formed and helped to run the business. From the available information it seems that the members did not form partnerships on kinship or community lines; a more plausible interpretation is that the unifying glue was based on former professional associations – mainly former public servants forced into retirement after the change of regime in 1989. This group was able to benefit from the acquired social capital and creatively respond to the transforming country and its new challenges. The question is not how it is possible that the old structures were able to benefit in the changed circumstance but more how it is possible that they were not able to dominate the new business.

When the rickshaws started to serve in the streets of Khartoum they were extremely limited to narrow streets, linking two or more neighborhoods which were not connected by public buses. The short trips usually took about 5–10 minutes.

Tamer, a jockey, revealed the history thus: "It all started in Omdurman as it is the center; almost everything is located there and back then there was no transportation... I mean there were buses and also the small buses, but it was basically impossible to get anywhere...people walked for two hours to get to work every morning...and two hours back...so it did not take long and people started to look for opportunities how to handle it."

According to similar stories the jockeys related the beginning of the rickshaw business to the need for commuting to work. Hence, for Adil the opportunity was: "clear back then, you could see it...there are people who need to get to

work, to school, to relatives, so what did you do? You bought a rickshaw and started a good business." The philosophy and process of starting the business was also repeated by younger jockeys: "In the old times, it was very easy...buy a rickshaw and earn money...it started like that!"

The year 1994 was the first year rickshaws were brought for registration. The Registration Department refused to issue registry documents for the rickshaws, but the Transportation Technical Committee agreed shortly to their registration to cover the gap during the transportation crisis back then. In 1996 rickshaws were officially approved as vehicles for public transportation in Khartoum state. (Sudan General Directorate of Traffic). Initially, thus, the market for the services was present and, by means of spotting the gap, a global – outside product was employed in the Sudanese context. Due to the high needs for commuting, this external solution was adopted to become a part of daily life.

The owners of the rickshaws at these times, adding to the cooperatives, were mostly families letting one of their sons operate the machines. The unemployment rate in Sudan was increasing annually, so any opportunity to earn money was cherished. Typically, the young men would spend their days without a job, outside the house wandering around, playing cards and smoking, awaiting their daily food. Most of them are high-school or university graduates. According to the informants the waiting time between graduation and finding a job may take up to 10 years. The dearth of official statistical data on this matter does not allow for confirmation; nonetheless most Khartoumians seem to believe in this statement and take it for granted that young educated men stay home while job hunting. Sufian (jockey) explained saying: "I am a college graduate, studied commerce and I have owned a rickshaw for the last 8 years. I do not know why there is all of this fuss over rickshaws since Sudan is used to accommodating a big number of new transportation vehicles (like the Haice, the Rosa and the Grace) and all these are known for example in Egypt as "service" and have never been controversial. I think it's a successful investment. I earn 60 pounds a day (20 USD) and this amount I cannot earn with my own degrees."

One of the possible ways out of this situation is that families purchased the rickshaws from their savings. The savings operate on a pattern present in most low-income households worldwide– a box rotates within the family circle, mainly handled by women, filled with a set amount of money by all participants. It is used for a large purchase by one of the participating families. In this case, the family needed to collect up to 15,000 Sudanese pounds

(ca. 5,000 USD). For a while the rickshaw purchase seemed like a solution for many young men to earn a living, support a family, and escape unemployment. According to informants, at that time a self-employed jockey would earn up to 60 Sudanese pounds a day (ca. 20 USD). This amount of money would cover the basic needs of a household.

The fares were standardized by each route; rickshaws entered into a new mode of transportation, like mini taxis, offering on order trips (Mushwar) to nearby quarters. These trips did not cover a large distance and were short as well. The fares were rather small: 1-3 Sudanese pounds (0.5-1 USD). For that kind of trip jockeys avoided asphalt-paved roads to keep away from policemen and tax agents. Although being considered a motorcycle vehicle by the traffic authorities, rickshaws are fined as a transportation vehicle, as Karam, a jockey, explains: "The rickshaw is a very safe vehicle if there is no traffic and the roads are clear. When we started working there were fewer paved roads and policemen did not bother us."

To facilitate their business jockeys gathered in small, unofficial stations near major crossroads and roundabouts. These stations were self-regulated and the use was based on first come, first served. Entering Khartoum streets by street and neighborhood after neighborhood, the rickshaw became the most visible vehicle during traffic jams. As Adil, a commuter describes: "Introducing rickshaws to the streets in Khartoum helped to solve the transportation crises to a large extent, but now they have become a headache for traffic. The authorities are trying to suffocate them by forbidding them from entering main roads and telling them to take side roads."

The small size of the rickshaw and its ability to maneuver in small alleys admitted rickshaws to spaces that were not accessible to other transport vehicles. The authorities declared this excessive accessibility to be a security threat for the society and started restricting the traffic zones for rickshaws. The most important restriction is the one-neighborhood policy or the bridge-crossing ban. The bridges form a physical barrier to the spread of rickshaws – to commute between the three cities that form metropolitan Khartoum it is necessary to cross a bridge. However, as argued by van der Geest (2009), vehicle inscriptions often function not only to attract attention, but the ornaments and words reveal attitudes and aspirations. For instance, one of the slogans commonly found on a rickshaw reads: "I wish to cross the bridge."

Despite the efforts to keep the rickshaw business in order, rickshaws gradually reconfigurate their operational space. The number of rickshaws increased

steadily. Between 1989 and 2009 the number of rickshaws entering the country was 48,437, but only 23,323 were reported to be registered (results of the traffic survey 2010). On Jan. 14, 2002 a decision from the Minister of Commerce numbered (15/2002) was released to stop the import of rickshaws to Sudan. By that time over 10,000 rickshaws were registered to work in the state of Khartoum solely. (Traffic survey 2010).

In 2003 the same Ministry issued a number of exceptional decisions allowing the import of 2,023 rickshaws for specific institutes and bodies. The following year, on May 20, 2004, a new resolution from the Minister of Commerce was issued to end the import of any rickshaws to Sudan.

Despite of the resolution by the Minister of Commerce No. 12 dated July 28, 2008, to halt the import of rickshaws into Sudan exemptions from that resolution were regularly given to some companies and organizations. For instance:

An exemption dated Aug. 10, 2008, for the number of 1,429 rickshaws.

An exemption dated Dec. 25, 2008, for the number of 2,000 rickshaws.

An exemption dated Jan. 21, 2009, for the number of 990 rickshaws.

An exemption dated Jan. 8, 2009, for the number of 1,100 rickshaws.

The contradiction behind the import ban and the ongoing exemptions indicates the forces of inclusion and exclusion that govern the process of space-making for the rickshaw. The groups that first occupied the rickshaw business have been overcome with newcomers. The small cooperatives gave up the way to an expanding industry, in which importers are only permitted to enter the rickshaw through the Minister's door and jockeys are hired on shifts by fleet rickshaw owners.

The rickshaw business is operating in a highly restricted regime, a regime that is governed by import bans, import exemptions, restricted zones and fines. In spite of all these restrictions, rickshaws are finding their way to the streets every day.

Almost from the inception of the rickshaws, their operation was embedded in a series of multilayered discourses hinting towards the negative consequences of their utilization. Unsurprisingly, the issues that are raised by the authorities and to some extent the public when criticizing the rickshaws are related to poor safety measures and the criminality associated with their functioning. Both significations are pertinent in the countries with a rickshaw presence (compare Choudhury 2010). The Sudanese model translated these significations into its own web of beliefs.

Although coming third after minibuses and the Haice in the rates of accidents, Rickshaws are blamed for a higher rate of accidents and mortality (Musa Hussein 2007). As an institutional response, since last year permission to import rickshaws was limited to vehicles that have doors on the back and a seatbelt for the driver. Such equipment was not a genuine part of the original rickshaws imported to Sudan. In order to address the newly emerged requirements importers started to use locally manufactured doors and seat belts to show them during the registration process. Karam explains: "The doors and the seatbelt would be put it in for the registration only. No one wants them or uses them anyway. As soon as the rickshaw is registered the doors and the belt are taken out and the rickshaw is sold."

Hand in hand with low safety, the rickshaws are portrayed as spaces of criminal behavior. Their size and ability to maneuver and enter buildings, their quantity and the young age of the jockeys form a web of myths. Hence, as elsewhere, in newspapers and everyday talks rickshaws are believed to be used for smuggling and distributing drugs and alcohol and facilitating abductions and moral-related crimes. As already shown, the government is putting in efforts to order the industry, resulting in the prohibition of night operation, restriction of operation – one-neighborhood policy and the obligation of the jockeys to register with the social security police (responsible for moral crimes).

Waheed, a senior jockey: "I reject the accusations by some people against rickshaw drivers. Especially those related to manners and criminality. I registered, I have my badge from the public-order police. I am a good man; the rickshaw driver's society is just like any other society; there is the good and the bad."

How do the rickshaw drivers overcome this *bad*, in what ways do they maneuver in the negatively perceived sensation around their mechanical donkeys[3]? As repeatedly revealed by the jockeys: "Being a rickshaw driver is much more than being a service provider or being a driver of a bus or taxi. It is a type of hero." For the rickshaw drivers, this hero-like feeling is built on: (1) the ability to drive a rickshaw in Khartoum and survive (2) the ability to adapt and run a business and (3) the opportunity to attract (girls') attention.

The ability to drive a rickshaw in the roads of Khartoum requires a certain skill and mindset. The combination of the damaged roads and the anarchic driving styles turns roads into a death trap for rickshaws. When looking closely

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at cars in Khartoum it is difficult to spot a car without a bend on its body; accident is a matter of time more than of skills or care. Rickshaws and motorcycles are the smallest victims of this vicious environment. The view of an upside-down rickshaw is a part of the scenery – after a few months of their usage getting out of the rickshaw, turning it back on its wheels and getting back into it becomes an integral part of traveling.

Despite the hero aura, none of the interviewed jockeys plans to work as a jockey for a long time – being well aware of the risks, they all dream about earning enough money to buy another rickshaw and rent it to other jockeys. This time-bound step on the professional ladder serves only an interim purpose – as can be illustrated by another slogan: "He is sleeping and I am wandering." For the time being, the jockeys adapted to their roles as petty workers, but this role is a temporary solution– at the same time they are mastering the craft in order to, as Karam put it: "Now I am learning, and I know that one day it will be me renting the rickshaws and I will know exactly how to deal with things... because I have done this I will know exactly everything."

The attention that rickshaws draw can be exemplified in the loud music that comes out of their appropriated recorders. Large speakers that are attached to the jockey's side play explosive music all the time. Attached to a modern CD player or a USB stick the music seems unstoppable. Fresh pop and rap songs followed by the newest Sudanese music comes out of rickshaws[4] in a disturbing sequence deserving their name as Khartoum's parties on wheels. The topic of the loud music divides the rickshaw passengers presumably on generational lines – just like taxis in South Africa, rickshaws cater to young and poignant trends in the youth culture (Hansen 2006). In the highly restricted context of Sudan, such carnivalesque space opens windows of uncommon interaction. Unlike most of the young men in Khartoum, jockeys enjoy less-restricted access to the opposite sex. The rickshaws are obliged to drive within neighborhoods and thus commonly their customers are women; jockeys can benefit from direct interaction in a small space with women and girls. The negative connotations of being a jockey form a dichotomy for the girls – on the one hand, the girls are constantly informed that the jockeys are part of the underworld, thus to be avoided, but curiosity often trumps the customs. In return, the rickshaws'

4 As the jockeys are due to the workload unable to download new music on their slow connections, they tend to rely on the 'music cabinets'– near to rickshaw stops temporary 'offices' selling the latest songs on USB sticks are common. Due to the short time I was not able to closely examine them; nonetheless the economy of the rickshaw business deserves a thorough analysis.

jockeys tend to exploit their appalling reputation; they revel in their reputed, what can be considered as obscene, behavior because they know that their actions will be tolerated (Mutongi 2006). As a result the jockeys become a part of the very limited circle of Sudanese men who have the ability to listen to and participate in women's conversations.

Concluding remarks

While visible on the cultural and economic level, the mundane aspects of globalization and the ways it is transformative to local societies remains a matter of further investigation. The article has placed emphasis on the procedural character of the globalization, on the accent on the dynamical relation between people – place – culture (van Dijk 2007). Beyond the obvious utilitarian function, the transportation system provides a window on the socioeconomic and political facets of early 21st century Sudan.

The aim of the paper was to illustrate the developments in the transportation industry in Khartoum through the prism of adaptation and creativity. As such, the normative framework is interpreted as a space that enables creative actions. Instead of adapting to the order, a large space for improvisation is open to creative and artisanal efforts. On the example of the imported globalized artifacts – the rickshaws – the processes of the resilience, determination and flexibility of the rickshaw drivers is discussed.

The paper sets a path for further, long-term investigation into the lives of the jockeys which would enable a closer analysis of their networks and adaptation strategies.

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