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# Community leadership and the construction of political legitimacy

## Unpacking Bourdieu's political capital in post-apartheid Johannesburg

Claire Benit-Gbaffou & Obvious Katsaura

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### Introduction

The imperatives of community participation in urban governance have required a better understanding of community politics, from a practical and normative perspective, and increasingly from a theoretical perspective. Authors have highlighted the heterogeneity of communities, and related issues of representativeness and political domination processes in participatory governance settings (see Williams 2004). Many acknowledge the messiness of community engagement, challenging the very possibility of deliberative democracy (Barnes 2008) and call researchers to apply their minds to the 'black box' of community micro-politics (Pieterse 2005; Simone 2002; Tostensen et al. 2001). This theme is addressed by a growing body of literature, often using extensive ethnographic research to present and unpack community politics (Auyero 2000, 2007; Baiocchi 2005; Banégas et al. 2012; Barnes et al. 2004; Cornwall 2008; Singerman 1995; Cornwall and Shankland 2013). Such literature is often focusing on cities of the global South, where the conjunction of less resourced states, huge needs and inequalities in terms of infrastructures and access to basic services, and sometimes the more recent character of democratization and political fragility of state institutions, craft a specific space for civil society mobilization and for the hopes vested in it to drive social change.

One entry-point into these complex micro-political dynamics is the study of community leadership, as the question of leadership involves both the politics of representation and issues of local agency – the ability of community actors to drive or influence local social and urban change. Understanding community leaders' discourses and practices in local public arenas (overt and covert), what drives their competition and alliances, cooperation and opposition to local projects, can indeed provide a key to understand complex local politics. What is it that community leaders do, and why? What difference do they make in their communities, are they able to influence their own environments, through their interactions with other actors of urban governance? Like Kjaer (2013), we are less interested in developing typologies of leaders - charismatic, traditional, bureaucratic (as has been done based on Weber 1978); transactional or transformational (Burns 1978); organizational or visionary (Aminzade et al. 2001); charismatic, ideological, or pragmatic (Mumford 2006); facilitator, caretaker, visionary or local boss (adapted from John and Cole 1999) - than in developing tools to understand what shapes and frames community leaders' actions and choices, and what their 'room for maneuver' is in the complex and constrained political terrain they both evolve in and contribute to shape.

Following Burns (1978: 425, quoted in Hartley and Benington, 2011), we understand leadership as the "reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values; various economic, political and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals, independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers". Whilst *political* leadership has often been defined through the legitimacy conferred to the leader by electoral vote (Helms 2012, Morrel and Hartley 2006), we wish to extend this definition, as "a focus on the electoral basis of political leadership misses some important alternative manifestation of political leadership", such as leaders of social movements, who "emerge without having been elected [...] and yet would qualify as

genuine political leaders” (Helms 2012: 5). We will define a political leader as building his legitimacy on various forms of collective popular consent, considering that – unlike corporate leaders - political leaders claim (and regularly have to justify the fact) that they *represent* their followers, as they have been given a (formal or informal, explicit or sometimes tacit) mandate by them.

*Community* leaders are specific political leaders, contrasting with national leaders, but also with other local leaders such as city mayors. First, they work at the neighborhood or community scale, in what Bierschenk et al. (2000) have termed, in African rural contexts, “local political arenas”, characterized by intense competition for power, informal negotiations and flexible alliances, and a certain autonomy *vis-a-vis* national politics. Although we agree with Purcell (2006) that local politics have nothing *inherently* more democratic, and certainly not more progressive, than other scales of political engagement, and that the local scale has often wrongly been attributed all types of positive virtues, we disagree with the statement that local scales of engagement do not have specific features, properties or potentials<sup>1</sup>. What is common for instance between two normative analyses of local politics (the literature celebrating the merits of decentralization, and the literature warning on the dangers of clientelism) shapes at least two specific features of local leadership (Bénit-Gbaffou 2011). Firstly, the personalization of representatives, where local leaders can develop personal relationships with their constituency and emphasize their accessibility, their commitment to people and place. Secondly, the flexibility of policy, solutions or responses to local issues, as leaders are grounded in a relatively small space that they get to know in depth, spatially, socially and politically. In this respect, however, the local leader is never alone at the neighborhood level, and has to engage in competitions and alliances with other local leaders, for access to resources and political recognition (Katsaura, 2012).

Working at the local level, a second specificity of community leaders is their position of intermediaries (brokers, interface, mediators) between their communities (their followers or constituencies, not necessarily a homogeneous group) and various institutions (the state in its different levels, in particular but not exclusively the municipality; political parties; private national or international agencies). To access and remain in this position, they need to be recognized as legitimate, both by their constituencies and by the institutions from which they hope to derive resources for distribution, or gain power to shape local projects, which in turn helps in building and maintaining their legitimacy in the community. Whilst legitimation by their constituencies (‘the bottom’) and legitimation by resource-holder institutions (‘the top’) might reinforce one another, these are two distinct processes that also create tensions, dilemmas, or even contradictions. Various students of local leadership have highlighted these tensions, debating the extent to which they create a ‘dilemma’ or open a ‘room for maneuver’ for local leaders (see Bierschenck et al. 2000 for a history of this debate on African traditional chiefs for instance): but few have attempted to understand these tensions more systematically. We argue further, that these tensions are even more tangible for *community* leaders as ‘informal’ leaders<sup>2</sup>. Community leaders indeed are generally not formally elected; nor do they have a defined, clear, formal mandate; their term or their time as community leaders can be ended but not in predictable and defined ways – through loss of reputation, voluntary withdrawal, as much as through more formal processes of community elections. This informality creates, we argue, a high level of uncertainty on their legitimacy, that is regularly contested by a variety of actors, and that they constantly need to defend and justify in multiple public arenas. The importance of leadership competition involving legitimation and delegitimation of community leaders is even more the case in ‘precarious societies’ (Burawoy and von Holdt 2012a), such as South African urban societies: where mass inequality and unemployment

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<sup>1</sup> It is generally admitted that higher scales of government are more able to achieve redistribution and to manage regional infrastructures (such as transport systems), whereas lower, more local scales are more fitted to organize residents’ participation and foster a sense of local identity (Savitch and Vogel 2009). Whether these levels of government will or not adopt and achieve these objectives is another issue.

<sup>2</sup> This reflection on *political* informality is chiefly inspired by the work of Chatterjee (2004) on political society, of Roy (2009) on state’s informal politics, of Auyero (2007) on ‘gray politics’. It is being developed in the research group *INVERSES*, Informality, Power and the Other Side of Urban Spaces.

prevail, community leadership confers a social status and possibly the stepping stone towards a paid position or job. More significantly even, in societies marked by social uncertainties, including a multiplicity of social norms that might apply to regulate social conflict (including violence as a usual mode of response to conflict), community leaders' role in shaping and inventing political solutions is possibly enhanced.

In our attempt to unravel the structures, constraints and opportunities under which community leaders operate, we have been inspired, as many before us in different ways<sup>3</sup>, by Bourdieu's work on political capital, political representation and his analyses of the specificities of the 'political field' (Bourdieu, 1991). However, we also feel that his theoretical frames are built on reflections developed at a supra-local scale, in contexts of highly institutionalized or institutionalizing politics (national party apparatuses), and where the politics of informality are not at the center of his observations. We believe our perspectives on the micro-politics of the local in urban societies dominated by informality, and in globalizing and neoliberalizing governance contexts<sup>4</sup> which see the proliferation of governance institutions (private and public, formal and informal, local, national and international) might bring new insights into the understanding of the complex construction of political legitimacies. In particular, we argue that community leaders – being both grounded locally, in close proximity to their constituencies; and in search of institutional recognition (by a party, or a fraction of the state) that might give them less uncertain legitimacy as well as possible access to material resources, need to build their political legitimacies not *either* from the bottom *or* from the top, but from both simultaneously. Following Bourdieu's notion of *double dealings* (the need for what he calls 'professional politicians' to fight in the political field as well as in the social field; for their own political positions and as representatives of their mandators), we then elaborate on instances where the relationships between the two legitimation processes (what we call here legitimation from the 'bottom' and from the 'top') reinforce one another or contradict one another.

Our paper is divided into three sections. First, it was necessary to contextualize further our study in the various scholarly fields that have touched on issues of leadership and local politics. A second part is a presentation of, and elaboration upon, the concepts within Bourdieu's work that we found useful to our theorization of community leadership. A third section is illustrating the relevance of this theoretical framework to unpack a complex South African story of local politics. The conclusion debates the relevance of this framework beyond the South African case.

## **1. Community leadership, a gap in existing literature?**

Community leadership, or informal and local political leadership, intersects many different disciplines (political science, political anthropology, urban sociology) and fields of studies (urban politics, leadership studies, social movement studies, community participation studies, etc.). But bridges between them are scarce, and consolidated work on urban local, community or informal leadership is limited.

Urban political leadership studies (a part of urban politics and governance studies) have been dominated by the study of 'formal' leadership: leaders in elected positions at the city level, generally

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<sup>3</sup> In the prolific literature on leadership and community participation, more or less direct (and rigorous!) reference to the work of Bourdieu abound. Countless is the use of his (or, problematically, Putnam's) 'social capital' (Purdue 2001); some authors even invent a 'leadership capital' (Nepstad and Bob 2006). More interesting in our view, as less tautological, is work on 'political capital', its circulation and its convertibility (Casey 2005; Kjaer 2013). We share with all these authors both our inspiration from the thought of Bourdieu, and the need to confront it to a reflection (and hope) on the possibilities of individual agency.

<sup>4</sup> By globalizing and neoliberalizing governance, we mean the restructuring of local government under new management principles, leading in particular to the multiplication of para-public agencies and corporations, adding a layer of fragmentation to the decentralized and multilayered nature of the state; the rise of public private partnerships as key governing agents to manage prime parts of the city (especially central business districts and inner city neighborhoods); the contracting out, by the state, of civil society organizations to deliver a number of services.

in the position of mayors, to the point that most authors explicitly or implicitly define political leaders as having been given a mandate through elections (Stone 1995, John and Cole 1999, Genieys et al. 2004, Leach and Wilson 2002, Sawicki 2003, Borraz and John 2004, Greasley and Stoker 2009, Kjaer 2013). Even though publications debating the nature of mayoral leadership abound, most recognize with Stone (1995: 96) that “there is no well-developed theory of political leadership, perhaps not even a universally accepted definition. Consequently the treatment of leadership in the urban literature is largely *ad hoc*, and much of the discussion is embedded in various biographies. This field rests on a wide tradition of American city politics monographs, the basis for a powerful theorization of municipal governance (with some aspects on leadership) stemming mostly from the United States - although being debated by a rising literature on and from European cities (see special issue coordinated by Borraz and John, 2004; see also Sawicki 2003). Urban political leadership literature focuses mainly on the respective roles of structure and agency, in different urban regimes (Stone 1993) or modes of governance (Le Gales 1995; Jouve and Lefevre 1999). Theoretical debates for instance question how institutional reform might change the nature of urban political leadership and leaders’ ability to effect change (Borraz and John 2004; Greasley and Stoker 2009; Stren 2013); the relevance of the notion of leadership itself (Sawicki 2003) in a less and less individualized mode of governance, where formal leaders work under increasingly constrained and complex environments, and tend either to develop leadership teams and networks (Genieys et al. 2004), or to focus on communication and branding without much leverage to shape their cities (Pasotti 2009). This literature attempts to define the nature of leadership in a globalized world, proposing typologies of mayors’ roles and functions (John and Cole 1999; Leach and Wilson 2002), and possibly neglecting or avoiding the difficult question of “the difference that mayors make” in cities (Stone 1995, Greasley and Stoker 2009).

Social movement studies have, for different reasons, neglected the question of leadership in civil society organizations and movements (Barker et al. 2001; Aminzade et al. 2001; Morris and Staggenborg 2004). Most indeed agree with Barker et al. (2001: 1), that “there is something of a black-box in social movement studies, in that leadership has been under-theorized”. This neglect can be explained by “the desire to avoid ‘great man’ theories of history” in the post-modern intellectual landscape in which social movement studies emerge, and their ambition to “give proper theoretical weight to both circumstances in which movements develop, and the part played by membership” (Barker et al. 2001: 1). It is also the result of political choices: emphasizing an analysis of the structural collective grievances of the movement rather than give ground to critics reading social movements as the results of the action of a few, isolated agitators; and more deeply, keeping an ideological suspicion towards leadership as a form of traditional oppression (through what Freeman (1970) has critiqued as a romanticized libertarian-inspired celebration of spontaneity and ‘structurelessness’). Texts specifically engaging on issues of leadership in social movements often debate typologies of leaders: for instance, Morris and Staggenborg (2004) argue that a social movement leader needs to be a visionary, defining goals and framing an identity; a mobiliser, of communities and of resources; a broker/articulator/translator with other parts of society. This is similar to the typologies that have been developed for mayors’ main functions: giving strategic direction and a vision for the city; building internal unity (municipal machine and the party); representing the city to the outside world; ensuring implementation and delivery (Leach and Wilson 2002). Interestingly the importance of ‘delivery’ for leaders is seldom mentioned as one of their key functions in social movements literature, or even in literature studying community leadership, leadership succession and competition (Purdue 2005). It is only when turning into another object of study: patronage or clientelism, that this concern about the ability of the leader (the ‘patron’) to ‘deliver’ becomes central.

Indeed, a disconnected and yet highly related concept to the one of social movement or community leadership is the concept of political patronage or clientelism, which is expanding to the urban arena after having been primarily studied at the national scale - in political studies - or at the micro local scale - in political anthropology, around the figure of the ‘big man’, reconfigured in urban studies around one of the ‘local patron’ (Médard 1992). With limited reference to the concepts used in leadership studies, this literature usefully unravels the complex relationship developing between

patron and clients; the exchanges that tie them together, unequal but not entirely oppressive or manipulative (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2006; Auyero 2000; Gay 1999; Bénit-Gbaffou 2011).

From the perspective of the study of community leadership, this could be seen as a mere sub-case of leadership, corresponding to 'transactional leadership', where leaders offer their followers the reproduction of the status quo, through negotiation with a number of social groups in exchange for their political support (as opposed to 'transformational leadership': Burns 1978, where leaders drive change through their ability to create unity amongst their followers, around their vision). But studies unpacking the importance of clientelism in urban politics have more to offer to our understanding of community leadership. Firstly, because they highlight the complex exchange relationship between leaders and followers that needs to be established and maintained over time, through in particular the ability to solve issues, resolve conflict, redistribute material or symbolic resources. It shifts the analysis towards the capacity of the leaders-patrons to deliver, and interrogates where and how they access the resources to be distributed, or what are the bases for their influence. The position of the patron as often himself a 'broker', caught between his clients-followers on the one hand, and the party or government able to handle resources on the other (Médard 1992; Bierschenk et al. 2000), is key to understand the leader's capacity to access and redistribute resources. This position is largely sidelined by social movement studies, which see social movements as fundamentally autonomous from, or at least confrontational to, the state (see in the South African context Ballard et al. 2006). This literature therefore is often unwilling or unable to unpack the brokerage role that is (we argue) at the core of informal leadership's role and its challenges. Finally, studies of urban clientelism expose the informal nature of the links between leaders and followers (Auyero 2000): few of the literature on leadership and governance theorizes 'informal' political leadership (e.g. political leaders without the sanction of formal elections, in social movements, in interest or in community groups), nor focuses on leaders operating at infra metropolitan scales (e.g. community or neighborhood level).

If 'the community' features in urban governance studies, it is often denied the status of having 'leaders'. Community participation studies generally unpack social groups rather than portray key community leadership figures; or, when focusing on municipal practices of engagement with communities, they oppose municipal 'leaders' to amorphous or disorganized 'communities' (Lowndes and Sullivan 2004; Haus and Sweeting 2006; Haus and Klausen 2011). It is only recently that the term 'community leadership' has appeared<sup>5</sup>, mostly in British literature (Taylor 2000; Purdue 2001, 2005; Munro 2008), linked to the "New Deal for Communities" policy adopted by the British Labor Government in 1997. Therefore, the notion of community *leadership* is often understood from the perspective of municipalities engaging in formal partnership with local 'communities', in urban regeneration projects, where community leaders' legitimacy is questioned at least in two ways. By municipal officials and politicians first, who feel they are themselves more legitimate in shaping policy than unelected community 'representatives' or civil society 'experts' (Häikiö 2007). By communities secondly, as community representatives are generally coopted by local government to support market-driven regeneration dynamics, that they have limited ability to oppose or even influence. It is Munro (2008) who has focused the most explicitly on this intermediary position, defining community leaders by the two main ways they derive their legitimacy: from the community and from the state. He highlights the tensions these two sources of legitimation create, quoting Taylor (2003) describing these tensions (Munro 2008: 42-43):

"They (community leaders) are caught in a no-man's land where they are expected to represent the views of their constituencies to [the state] on the one hand, but at the same time to embody the [state] back in the community on the other, even when its decisions fly in the face of community wishes. Where money is at stake, representatives also run the risk of being suspected of feathering their own nests by their community, while being accused of being unrepresentative by their new partnership colleagues is an occupational hazard, especially if they challenge the drive to consensus."

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<sup>5</sup> With a meaning that differs from the traditional community power debates that have shaped urban politics studies in the 1950s – where *community* is understood at the metropolitan, not neighborhood, scale.

Munro (2008: 108) therefore proposes a theoretical framework analyzing community leaders as situated agents, between structural constraints (rules and norms framed by both the state and the community) and individual agency (consisting partly in iterative interpretation of contexts and the results of their own actions therein). However, his analysis focuses mainly on the deployment of individual agency in this framework, as his main objective is to understand “the difference that community leaders make”. Our paper, based on similar observations of the conflicted intermediary position of community leaders in a South African context, theorizes further the way structural opportunities and constraints frame community leaders’ actions, using a Bourdieusian approach in a more informal urban and political setting.

## 2. Elaborating from Bourdieu’s thought on political capital

We attempt here to put some of Bourdieu’s concepts into work empirically by exploring the messy terrain of micro-politics that we have been exposed to in our research. We seek to deploy Bourdieusian thinking tools, not as all-encompassing frames of thought, but as ‘open concepts’ that we attune to our observations and experiences, as recommended by Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This follows a vein opened by Michael Burawoy and Karl von Holdt (2012) in their attempts to think South African societies with and against Bourdieu: like them, we have the conviction that South African cases pose specific questions to Bourdieu’s thinking tools. How can these thinking tools speak to a context fraught with issues of informality, of agency and social change? What is their relevance in post-colonial contexts where the multiplication of institutions (through the neoliberal restructuring of the state, through the intervention of global institutions, through the rise of private agents as active and legitimate in urban governance) is posing questions of political legitimization in new ways?

### 2.1. Political capital and legitimacy in Bourdieu’s work

We understand *political legitimacy* as resulting from using political capital that can be accumulated, invested, maintained, converted, grown, spent or lost. As other forms of capital, political capital can be *incorporated* (or embedded) in the leaders’ habitus, in what we understand as political ‘skills’, leadership, charisma, ability to speak in public, to negotiate and debate, etc. (Bourdieu 1986). It can be *objectified*: measured for instance by the number of votes, or followers counted in a meeting or in a march. It can be *institutionalised*, as through a title or an official function within an institution (party, government but also NGO or even community based organization). Like other forms of capital, political capital may be *converted* into economic, social and cultural capitals (Stokke and Selboe, 2009, Casey, 2005, Bourdieu, 1986). Political capital is also a particularly fluid and unstable type of capital (Bourdieu, 1991): it is based on credibility and symbolic recognition of the leader that can easily be destroyed through rumors, suspicion, and scandals.

Bourdieu presents in his work three, somehow contradictory or at least not entirely congruent, ways of approaching the construction of political legitimacy. The first states that leaders have two ways of deriving their political weight: either from mandators (that we call here their constituencies or their followers), or from apparatuses (that we call institutions, to highlight their increasingly various natures and various degrees of formalization):

“In the political arena, the professionals have political weight in proportion of their power to mobilize, i.e. in proportion to the credit and belief which they receive, either directly from their mandators, or from the apparatuses which invest in them to the extent that they invest in the apparatuses.” (Bourdieu, 1984b: 36-37).

A second conceptual opposition proposed by Bourdieu is the differentiation between *personal political capital* – built through individual respectability, notability (based on other types of capitals) and converted into political capital in an ‘inaugural moment’ (speaking up in public when there is a crisis, a political void); and *the capital of delegation* – a position or a title delegated by an institution (a party, a community organisation, local government) or the electorate to an individual (Bourdieu 1984a and b). It is not entirely congruent to the first statement, as personal political capital is not directly dependent on a mandate given by constituencies; it is also built through the accumulation of other forms of capital.

A third area where Bourdieu elaborates on political legitimacy is when he elaborates on professional politicians' *double dealings*:

"One of the mechanisms that allow usurpation and double dealing to work (if I may put it like this) in all innocence, with the most perfect sincerity, consists in the fact that, in many cases, the interests of the delegate and the interests of the mandators, of those he represents coincide to a large extent, so that the delegate can believe and get others to believe that he has no interest outside of those of his mandators. [...] The people who serve the interests of their mandators well are those who serve their own interests well by serving others; it is to their advantage and it is important that it should be so for the system to work." (Bourdieu, 1991: 214-15)

While the political interests of the professionals coincide with those of their mandators'; sometimes (and increasingly so) they do not. Often the political battles played in the political field are very obscure to the mandators, that gives rise to an

"...*esoteric culture*, comprised of problems that are completely alien or inaccessible to ordinary people, of concepts and discourses that are without referents in the experience of ordinary citizens and, especially, of distinctions, nuances, subtleties and niceties that pass unnoticed by the uninitiated and which have no *raison d'être* other than the relations of conflict or competition between the different organizations or between the 'tendencies' and 'trends' of one and the same organization". (Bourdieu, 1991: 184)

Thus, Bourdieu posits that in many cases leaders have interests that are not defined by those who have mandated them, but engage in personal battles for positions within the political field.

In all these engagements with political capital, Bourdieu does not elaborate much on the relationships between the political legitimacy obtained from mandators and the political legitimacy obtained from apparatuses. Similarly he does not really work on the possible links between personal political capital and the capital of delegation. Finally, he almost seems to exclude from what he calls the political field the relationship between leader and his mandators.

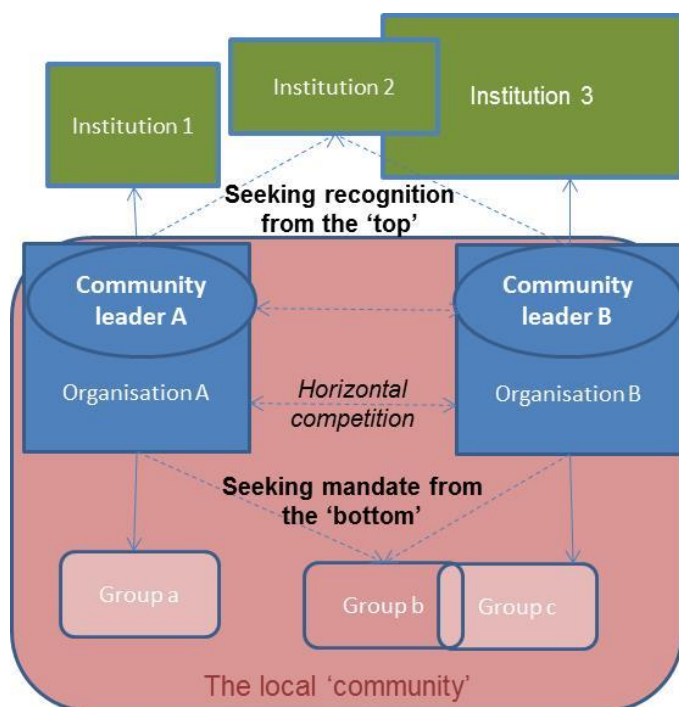
## **2.2. Bourdieu's concepts applied to community leaders in Southern cities**

These become gaps when studying community leadership in particular, because political leaders have generally limited recognition from institutions (or the institutions giving them a function or titles are themselves battling for recognition); and because many community leaders are not formally or regularly elected. For community leaders, this link between the legitimation from local groups as constituencies (that we call here legitimacy 'from the bottom'), and the legitimation by institutions that yield a degree of power, be it political, symbolic or economic (legitimacy 'from the top') becomes crucial.

This metaphor (top/ bottom) seems operational to understand local leaders' activities and battles, and the multi-layered, sometimes contradictory constraints under which they work. It encapsulates the community leaders' position as brokers between civil society (at the bottom) and the state or other institutions (at the top), in a vertical relationship, further 'verticalized' and complexified by the multi-scale nature of the state (local, provincial, national) and of global governance institutions today.

**Figure 1 – Vertical political battles for legitimation – the metaphor of 'top'/ 'bottom'**





Community leaders seek legitimation from the bottom (their constituencies), to get an informal mandate from them - or 'consent' (as a condition of political legitimacy: Beetham 1991). This consent can vary from getting tacit agreement (absence of contestation) to active mobilization, in public meetings or in forms of collective actions such as petitions or marches. Community leaders also seek legitimation from the top, that we call here recognition from state, party or other institutions. One of the stakes for community leaders is indeed to be 'seen by the state' (to paraphrase Corbridge et al. 2005), in the myriad of competing community leaders in town: to be named, selected, possibly appointed or invited, as the one trustworthy, representative of their community. Top and bottom here should not be confused with formal and informal relationships (respectively) between the community leader and institutions on the one hand, communities on the other. Leaders use both formal and informal relationships to build their legitimacy from the bottom as from the top. There are also different forms of legitimation or recognition by the top as well as by the bottom (see infra), with different degrees of formalization.

This metaphor also helps us differentiate types of political battles for legitimation – vertical and horizontal (**Figure 1**). Local leaders will seek a mandate from the bottom, and seek recognition from the top, in forms of 'vertical' engagements; but they will also compete with other leaders (in a 'horizontal' competition), to be the ones to gain legitimation from both the community and the institutions they need to engage with.

### 2.3. Modes of legitimation / delegitimation

We reflect here (**Figure 2**) on the argument used by leaders to consolidate their (informal) mandate from local constituencies, and to maintain their legitimacy in the eyes of institutions yielding different types of power<sup>6</sup>. Actually, as noted by Connelly (2011), these modes of legitimation generally only become explicit when under attack, in public political arenas such as public meetings, newspapers or any form of media, or more indirectly through local rumors: they are displayed either as a way of delegitimizing a competing leader, or as a way of defending oneself against such attacks.

**Figure 2 – Types of argument used by community leaders to gain different forms of political legitimacy, or to contest the legitimacy of others**

<sup>6</sup> This list is tentative, not exhaustive. We thought through the various legitimation and delegitimation discourses displayed in our South African case studies, and provide some theoretical framing to make sense of their diversity. A discussion on its relevance beyond our case studies is developed in this paper's conclusion.

<p><b>Building legitimacy from the 'bottom'</b> (How to be 'lent' a formal / informal mandate of community representation)</p> <p><u>Demonstrating efficiency:</u> Ability to solve issues (individual/ collective)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forms of knowledge (educational/ institutional)</li> <li>- Incorporated political capital (1): local respectability (social capital)</li> <li>- Incorporated political capital (2): political skills (rhetoric of public meetings; knowing the 'rules of the game'; strategic thinking; core team of followers; etc.)</li> <li>- Local visibility in public space (actions, public communication on actions, being present and vocal in meetings)</li> <li>- Availability/ approachability</li> <li>- Ability to mobilise followers (put pressure)</li> </ul> <p><u>Showcasing similarity: 'One of us'</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demographic profile (locally relevant social divisions)</li> <li>- Local embeddedness</li> <li>- Incorporated political capital (1): local respectability (social capital)</li> <li>- Forms of knowledge (situated knowledge)</li> <li>- Availability/ approachability</li> <li>- Ability to mobilise followers (collective profile)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Building legitimacy from the 'top'</b> (How to be formally/ informally recognised as 'representative' by institutions)</p> <p><b>Reinforcing legitimacies (both 'top' and 'bottom')</b></p> <p><u>Objectifying &amp; institutionalizing political capital</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Title/ executive position in multiple organisations or institutions</li> <li>- Elected mandate</li> <li>- Formal/ formalising organisation</li> <li>- Receiving financial support/ funding</li> <li>- Multi-scale political networks</li> </ul>	<p><u>Demonstrating efficiency: providing access to the community</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Situated knowledge (inform about the area/ community dynamics)</li> <li>- Ability to mobilise community (vote bank/ organise support for events / transmission link)</li> </ul> <p><u>Demonstrating loyalty to the institution</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visibility: consistent presence in / being invited to institutional forums</li> <li>- Desire and ability to cooperate (constructive/not too radical approach)</li> <li>- Track record: Loyalty to the institution/ reliability (political, financial)</li> </ul>
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Building legitimacy from the bottom involves questions of representativeness, in its two meanings (Pitkin 1967; Houtzager and Gurza 2010). Representativeness is first about *reflecting* the identity and experiences of followers, the leader being 'one of us', "the people's friend", a "fraternal" leader (Bailey, 2001: 53, 65). Representativeness is also about being *the most qualified or efficient* mandated to defend the interests of the followers, the leader being a 'problem-solver', or even further, 'advancing our political agenda' - something akin to what Bailey (2001: 53) describes as being "godlike" or "far above" the followers. Strangely, the ability to deliver (or problem-solving) dimension of legitimacy seems less contested in public arenas than the identity or profile of the leader: possibly because of the elusive character of change and agency (Stone 1995), the multidimensional character of delivery (individual service, conflict mediation, access to resources, influence on collective goods, etc.); or the broad understanding that the ability of community leaders to effect change is limited, constrained, and can only be measured in the long run. More common are delegitimation processes involving the groundedness of community leaders: how long they have been staying (and active) in the community, how autochthonous they are, focusing on their social, racial, religious, gender or ethnic profile: whatever the locally relevant line of social division is to (de)legitimize a leader. Legitimation processes, in response to direct or indirect delegitimation attacks, might emphasize the leader's ability to deliver or actual delivery of goods to the community; or renegotiate the boundaries of local identity, for instance through demonstrating the ability to mobilize local followers in support.

Building legitimacy from the top might take similar channels, but with different objectives and frames. Local leaders are necessary entry points into the neighborhoods in which different institutions wish to intervene (the party, the state, but also NGOs, foundations, global institutions). This entry-point is all the more necessary to institutions as globalizing good governance principles strongly recommend, if not impose, degrees of community participation in their regulatory or funding frameworks. Community leaders however can only serve as entry points into communities if they have situated knowledge of the neighborhood, so as to be able to report on local situations, tensions, dynamics, as key informants for the institution. Another asset that community leaders can possess is their ability to mobilize residents: a sign of legitimacy from the bottom, instrumentalized by institutions for their own purposes, as community participation is required for institution-led participatory initiatives, or in elections or political rally. A second type of element for legitimation is

the degree to which the community leader appears as a reliable ‘partner’ to the institution: loyal, constructive and willing to cooperate – this loyalty being built through regular interactions, formal and informal, in private encounters or collective forums.

Some modes of legitimation work in both arenas (top and bottom), the one reinforcing the other. They pertain to the formalization of political capital: its objectification and institutionalization (Bourdieu, 1991). Objectification can take many forms: displaying numbers of followers (members in organization, participants in a march, votes cast in a community election); showcasing newspaper articles celebrating the leaders’ actions, posters of events or marches organized by the leader, photographs of the leader with prominent political figures materializing her network, etc. Institutionalization is about getting titles that have an institutional value: being elected chair of an organization, or executive committee member, being appointed as formal partner to an institution, winning a price in a competitive bid, etc. Displaying objectified and institutionalized political capital will both contribute to increase leaders’ legitimacy at the bottom (showcasing their ability to solve issues) and at the top (see for instance the importance of formalization and procedural democracy within civil society organizations for formal partnership with various institutions).

There are different types of leaders and leadership, crafting unique balances between building legitimacy from the bottom and from the top. Some leaders remain closer to the ground and spend the bulk of their time and energies strengthening their links to their constituencies, while others spend more time gaining influence in, and legitimation by, diverse institutions. There are also different types of leadership depending on leaders’ commitment to, or focus on, change in their neighborhood, as opposed to spending their energies into fighting for political positions in various organizations and institutions. These differences might be explained by personal traits, abilities and preferences; or by contexts of political opportunity; or by stage in organizational development or developmental projects. But, whilst it is possible to fight (and win) political battles without needing to be committed to change in the neighborhood, we argue that it is difficult to effect local change - beyond discrete disruptions of existing social order- without some political position or networks within institutions.

We would like now to illustrate and further refine the relevance of this theoretical framework to understand the politics of legitimacy seeking and maintenance in the context of an inner city neighborhood in Johannesburg.

### **3. Applying and testing our theoretical framework – a Johannesburg case study**

Tomorrow<sup>7</sup>, an inner city neighborhood in Johannesburg, South Africa, has a population estimated at about 40 000, a significant portion of which are international migrants mainly from the African continent. A former white area under the apartheid regime, host to waves of migrants from Eastern Europe, Tomorrow has morphed, like many other central neighborhoods in Johannesburg, into being predominantly Black in the post-apartheid era. Whilst marked by low-income levels, Tomorrow is a thriving area, where people survive through a myriad of formal or informal economic activities. Politically, Tomorrow abounds with forms of local activism – in fluid and ephemeral civil society organizations, but whose leaders have sometimes been involved in the community since the anti-apartheid struggle (**Figure 3**).

**Figure 3 – Main civil society organizations in Tomorrow**

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<sup>7</sup> Names of places, people and organization have been anonymized (see Figure 4).

Acronym	Name of organization	Type of organization <sup>1</sup>	Constituency/ objective	Approx. date of creation
TCDT	Tomorrow Community Development Trust	NGO	Develop a developmental vision for Tomorrow	2008
AMF	African Migrant Forum	NPO	Respond to, and work to prevent, xenophobia and discrimination	2008
TRPA	Tomorrow Rate Payers' Association	CBO	Represent home (building) owners in Tomorrow	2012
TCPF	Tomorrow Community Policing Forum	CSO - Statutory civilian body established by each police station	Contribute to crime prevention and public safety in Tomorrow	1995
TSF	Tomorrow Stakeholders Forum	Forum of CBOs and NGOs	A forum of civil society organizations, established to contribute to infrastructural development	2004
TCF	Tomorrow Community Forum	CBO	Created to solve housing and crime issues and chase away foreigners, as others CBOs and councilors are seen as too soft and inefficient	2010

\* NGO – Non-Governmental Organization; NPO – Non Profit Organization; CBO – Community Based Organization; CSO – Civil Society Organisation.

Also involved in the local politics of Tomorrow, and of interest to this analysis, are political party organization branches such the African National Congress (ANC) and the ANC Youth League branches<sup>8</sup>. The neighborhood falls under four different electoral wards, two of which have been won by the ANC and two by the Democratic Alliance (DA)<sup>9</sup> in the 2011 local elections – but, due to this institutional fragmentation, none of the councilors can claim to ‘represent’ Tomorrow on their own. Alliances and competition do not only occur between councilors and community leaders (as analyzed in Cherry et al. 2000), but also, and perhaps mainly, between community leaders themselves.

It is these community political dynamics that we want to unpack using our theoretical framework. We first expose one central story illustrating the multiplicity of modes of legitimation and delegitimation and their interplay in community politics. We then examine scenarios where legitimacies from the top and bottom reinforce one another; where the legitimacy from the top supersedes legitimacy from the bottom; and where the legitimacy from the top is challenged from the bottom.

#### Figure 4 - A note on methodology, writing and ethics

We base our reflection on long-term, in-depth, ethnographic observations of micro-politics in several neighborhoods in Johannesburg, South Africa. Our observations rely in particular on participation in multiple public meetings (ward public meetings, ANC branch meetings, CBO meetings, CPF meetings, etc.), public neighborhood events (campaigns and marches, cultural events, etc.); interviews and informal discussions with local leaders; and, for both authors, a degree of involvement in local CBOs/ NGOs.

In-depth analysis of micro-politics and local leadership requires presenting a flurry of details on our case studies – sometimes divulging personal details, as at the local level the personal and the political are intrinsically intertwined, and the focus on leadership tends to make this personalization of political dynamics even more acute (Stone 1995). It is indeed the details, often at the Goffmanian level of micro interactions, that make the analysis possible.

One way we adopted to protect individuals (not entirely efficient nor satisfactory) has been to anonymize the neighborhood, the local institutions and the local leaders mentioned. For the purpose of this paper, our main terrain of observation will be named Tomorrow; its various local civil society organizations renamed accordingly (see Figure 4); and its main local leaders will be given pseudonyms.

As much as possible, and as this type of ethnographic research entails the development of close, personal relationships with the local leaders we interact with and learn from, we have also shared and debated our ideas and analyses with them – in generally constructive and sometimes heated discussions, around earlier drafts of this text. Analyses presented here however remain our own.

<sup>8</sup> The ANC is still a mass party, organized in local branches at the ward level (so is its affiliate the ANCYL). In this paper – a theme that we do not have space here to fully develop- party branches are hybrid between civil society organizations and apparatuses (or institutions): extremely grounded locally, they are also subject to party discipline and hierarchy, and the legitimacy they confer to leaders can be both from the bottom (the ground) and the top (the party in power).

<sup>9</sup> South African politics are still dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), the liberation movement that put an end to the apartheid regime. The Democratic Alliance (DA) is its main opponent at the national level, but in Tomorrow the main threat to the ANC dominance is its own internal tensions, including with its youth league (the ANCYL).

### 3.1. Legitimation and delegitimation battles in Tomorrow: juggling the top and the bottom

Martin is one of the main political players in Tomorrow. A resident of Tomorrow for 30 years, an anti-apartheid activist, an educated white male with long-standing links to local government and the ANC, he is involved in many local civil society organizations. Whilst his main position is the director of TBCDT, an NGO working for urban development in Tomorrow, he also is the secretary of TRPA, the treasurer of TCPF, and advisor to AMF and TSF. One day in July 2012, Martin received a threatening text message from an unknown cell phone number:

“It has come to our attention that you want to rule this area disturbing our businesses, we will not allow that, so we are going to make sure that u move out of this area, watch and see! We know where your wife works we know the car she’s driving \*\* registration known, your son is driving \*\* [...] we know where he is studying, we know your office and people who are working for you. We are giving you a month to leave this area starting from today, this is the area for black Africans, u are left alone, people like you are staying at Sandton<sup>10</sup>, leave before you see the wrath of black people, we are warning you, mother fucker! [sic].”<sup>11</sup>

Following the threat, Martin appealed for support, in and outside Tomorrow. He published the SMS and a call to the community, as well as the messages of support he had received from individuals, organizations and institutions, in the local newspaper he is editing. He posted a petition on-line, written with Tomorrow Rate Payers Association (TRPA) and calling for the restoration of ‘Law and Order’ in Tomorrow: demanding *inter alia* the stricter enforcement of by-laws to deal with informal trading and liquor vending stores. He organized a march in Tomorrow, supported by both TRPA and AMF. This alliance around the march was surprising: TRPA consists mostly of South African local property owners, aiming at the regeneration of the area, and often blaming foreign migrants for the informalization of Tomorrow’s activities that affect their life style. AMF is made mostly of African foreign migrants, united in their fight against xenophobia and discrimination<sup>12</sup>, and reacted to the racist nature of the attack against Martin. It is to Martin’s credit, personal and institutional, that he could organize such an uneasy alliance around the event.

The march was framed around the theme ‘Unite for a safe tomorrow’. It was *de facto* led by the leader of TRPA, who made the marchers stop in front of selected decayed buildings, informal taverns, churches or businesses, and led the crowd to shout “*Phansi* [down] with illegal people, *Phansi* [down]!” – worrying the AMF leader, who made a point in adding each time “*Phansi* with xenophobia, *Phansi*!”

This march drew an important crowd, estimated between 100 – 150 people. It was, in a way, a test of the ability of Martin to mobilize, of his local support or legitimacy – and it was a success. There were attempts from some members of the ANC Youth League to disrupt it – a too small group however to affect the march, ridiculed by its inability to mobilize. And the heavy police presence further reduced its ability to disrupt. The leaders of the three organizations (TCDT, TRPA and AMF) handed the memorandum to representatives of the municipality (one from the City Manager, one from the Member of the Mayoral Committee for Safety and Security, and one from the Mayor), and ended the march with speeches calling for Tomorrow’s unity.

#### Figure 5 - Public march ‘Unite for a Safe Tomorrow’, August 2012

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<sup>10</sup> Sandton is the epitome of the middle to upper class area in Johannesburg.

<sup>11</sup> This anonymous message was widely publicized by Martin – online and in the community newspaper he is editing. See below.

<sup>12</sup> See Figure 6 below.





**Some of the slogans:**

We are not intimidated  
 No Threats to Our Activists  
 Against all Forms of Discrimination

Too Many Bars!  
 No Noisy Businesses and Churches!  
 Fix Our Street Lights  
 We want our area safe

**Why was Martin under attack?**

There is definitely a clash of interests between Martin and people running ‘illegal’ businesses in Tomorrow, especially as Martin has been at the forefront of fighting informal taverns and brothels in the neighborhood, sometimes with success, sometimes not. Oral threats had been made by tavern owners on some of these occasions, which Martin has widely reported to other local activists. The SMS points to this directly. But more broadly, as one community leader suggested: “This is an area where poor people live, and Martin’s problem is that he seems to be working to pull poor people out of Tomorrow and replace them with middle-class. That’s why he gets these kinds of threats.” The text of the petition, and some features of the march itself, confusing informality with crime without much consideration for local residents’ livelihoods, certainly pointed to this class divide. This confusion between informality and crime, blatant in TRPA’s usual discourse and in the initial petition text, was later amended by Martin himself in the more nuanced text of the memorandum submitted to local authorities.

Connected to the issue of class, Martin was attacked on his race. Claiming that ‘this is an area for Black people’ was a means of showing that ‘you are not one of us’ and questioning Martin’s political and social standing in Tomorrow. When we asked Martin about the significance of his racial identity on his political position, he responded: “I don’t think my racial identity really matters. When I stood to deal with community matters, Black people supported me. People use race against me only when it suits them”. Martin also narrates how his skin color has been used to sideline him within the ANC, when it came to nominating a candidate for local elections. What remains evident, even from Martin’s utterance above, is that the race card is a powerful instrument in South African political battles, to legitimize or delegitimize contenders – and Martin to some extent has incorporated it as part of the post-apartheid political game. Indeed, and as noted by the AMF, this issue of racial discrimination has hardly been raised in the protest: it does not feature in the petition nor in the memorandum. On the contrary, the way the march was pointing fingers at (mostly) foreign-owned informal activities or residences, could have led to violent xenophobic incidents.

Physical violence (or threats of its use) is part of the arsenal for political competition and struggles to de-legitimize an opponent, in the democratizing South Africa still marked by its history of violence. In this case, there were three occurrences of threats of violence. Contained in the SMS sent to Martin are threats of physical violence against him and members of his family. There were subsequent threats of clashes between the marchers for law and order and ANCYL members – manifesting their opposition to Martin himself rather than to the march. As highlighted by von Holdt et al. (2011), recourse to violence to settle conflict is all the more likely that there is an educational gap between

opponents, with the less educated or articulate threatening the use of violence to shift the battle field in an area they have at least a chance to win (Martin in this case being more educated, articulate and informed on legal and institutional matters than both informal businesspeople and ANCYL members). In was in response to these threats of violence, expressed by the ANCYL in a public meeting, that the AMF used its high level connections in the Police to grant a heavy police presence to secure the march. The police presence might have helped reducing the third threat – the xenophobic violence emerging from the march itself and the ambiguities, if not contradictions, of its message.

The march itself gave more information on the probable authors of the SMS – reflecting on not only the display of allegiances and support, but also on who was absent from the march. While the two DA councilors signed the petition, or participated in the march, one ANC councilor sent his apology, the other (and main) ANC councilor for Tomorrow was absent. Moreover, Tomorrow Community Policing Forum, whose mandate is on safety, security, law and order in the community, did not support the march. It was even at a CPF<sup>13</sup> public meeting that members of the ANCYL mentioned that they would disrupt the march, and that Martin should leave the area, in terms very similar to the SMS. Given the ongoing conflict between Martin and some members of the CPF (see Figure 8), the SMS might very well have been sent by those members in order to frighten and get rid of Martin as a leader in the area.

This story is important, in its complexity, as it provides an illustration on the multiplicity of elements constituting political legitimacy at the local level, that manifest themselves mostly when challenged. Horizontal competition is rife between different local organizations and their leaders fighting for the control of resources: economic control over informal businesses, but also political control over the Community Policing Forum, an organization that often allows access to a variety of economic resources, including possible racketeering on informal activities (Meth 2011). Martin is violently accused of not being representative of the community, primarily because of his own identity (white, middle-class), and therefore not defending their interests (access to livelihood and housing, even if informal), even compromising them. The framing of this attack to Martin's legitimacy is grounded in the South African post-apartheid context: a specific racial understanding of social divides ('whites are no longer the masters'); and the threat of violence (and its real possibility) as a response to Martin's legal fight against 'illegal' (sometimes crime-related) local businesses. Martin deploys several modes of legitimation to fight back. From the bottom, he demonstrates his ability to mobilize, locally grounded organizations and leaders of various constituencies, and masses, numbers in the street. From the top, he showcases his broad political and institutional connections – gathering high profile signatures on the petition (beyond Tomorrow), organizing officials and politicians to receive the memorandum, getting the police's visible presence and support. Through this deployment of various legitimacies, Martin is able not only to respond to the author(s) of the SMS and depersonalize the issue; but also to try and drive collective unity around him, as a necessary bridge between competing community organizations representing different (if overlapping) constituencies and defending conflicting interests. This unity however may be built on fundamental ambiguities on the core of the matter – Martin has not clearly stated his own political vision of the place of informal activities in Tomorrow (see Figure 7 below).

### **3.2. Vertical challenges: When legitimacy from the bottom meets legitimacy from the top**

What we found missing from Bourdieu's framework is an elaboration on how legitimacy gained from the top and legitimacy gained from the bottom relate - intersect, interact, reinforce or contradict one another. His only statement on this relation is the affirmation that legitimacy from the top

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<sup>13</sup> Community Policing Forums, partnerships between civil society and the police, have been instituted by a 1995 national legislation – not only to enhance local safety and security, but also in order to give civil society a degree of oversight over the police that had been discredited by its position and its practices as political police under apartheid.

increasingly supersedes legitimacy from the bottom, to the point that the relationship between political leaders and their mandators is sacrificed towards loyalty to the institutions (Bourdieu, 1991). This certainly has many echoes in South African local leadership; but, we argue, this is not the only relationship that exists between these two forms of legitimacies.

### **3.2.1. Reinforcement between legitimacies from the top and bottom**

Legitimacies from the bottom and top often reinforce one another, as one is often instrumental to the other (or at least some dimensions of each). We have alluded to this above (**Figure 2**), when looking at elements of political capital that serve both legitimation processes; we would like to go deeper in illustrating how a virtuous circle of legitimation can work in practice (**Figure 6**).

#### **Figure 6 - African Migrants Forum and the virtuous circle of legitimation: bottom and top multiple forms of political legitimacies reinforce one another**

The AMF was born in May 2008, in the midst of the wave of xenophobic violence that swept the country in 2008; resulting in the death of about 62 people and the displacement of about 100 000 people (Landau 2011). A group of African migrant association leaders (complemented by individuals sympathetic to their cause), AMF's aim was to speak with one voice to government, as well as mediate with displaced migrants to find solutions to the crisis. Initially a very small non-profit organization, its strength lied in the variety of nationalities represented in the Forum: about 10 active African associations from different countries, and about 22 nationalities represented also by individuals. This diversity makes AMF unique, contrasting with other migrant associations with more numerous members but often grouping a single nationality, if not ethnic group. The second element of AMF's political capital was some degree of local credibility, through its partnership with Tomorrow's local (South African), longer standing civil society organizations such as TCDT and TSF (for instance, AMF chair was also the deputy chair of TSF; TCDT chair was an executive committee member of AMF, etc.).

Through these two forms of political capital (African national diversity, local groundedness in Tomorrow), AMF was first selected by the municipality as a key local partner to organize inclusive participatory forums in various areas of Johannesburg. Following the Mayor's prescription to actively fight xenophobia, a specific effort was indeed requested from municipal officials to invite African migrants into participatory meetings. A second instance of legitimation from the top was the strong link created with a high level police commissioner, based on the work a small group of members of AMF had done in 2008 in partnership with local CPFs and this particular police commissioner at the time. The link was maintained, and thanks to it (and also to TCDT own political connections), AMF was able to invite the Minister of Police Nathi Mthethwa as a guest speaker in Tomorrow's celebration of African Heritage Day, and start establishing linkages there as well.

This did a lot to increase AMF political prestige at the bottom. New members joined the AMF, including new African migrant associations' leaders, and more diversely skilled members who put their skills (academic, artistic, media related) at the service of the organization. This strengthened AMF resources – which in turn opened new opportunities for legitimation, and led to the Human Rights Commission giving the organization significant financial support - which in turn led new members to join, and further increased AMF's ability to drive its activities.

This case is interesting in illustrating how specific legitimacies from the bottom support multiple forms of legitimation from the top(s), which in turns broadens legitimation from the bottom, which reinforces further legitimation from the top(s). The multiplicity of forms of legitimation at the bottom might stem from the informality of local leaders, in a way that is specific to leadership in civil society (Houtzager and Gurza, 2010). The multiplicity of forms of legitimation from the top can be explained by the increasing complexity and fragmentation of institutions involved in urban governance: at different scales (from local to global), within different agencies and departments at each scale of government, and increasingly involving non-state actors.

### **3.2.2. When legitimacies from the top contradict or overshadow legitimacies from the bottom**

Sometimes there are contradictions between loyalty to institutions from the top, and to local constituencies at the bottom. Bourdieu emphasize the importance of legitimation from the top, key in the battle for political positions. He warns that the more political parties are institutionalized, the greater the distance between politicians and their mandators; and the more likely the political battles in the party apparatus will be disconnected from social battles on the ground:

“...The elected member of a party apparatus depends at least as much on the apparatus as on his electors - whom he owes to the apparatus and whom he loses if he breaks away from the apparatus.



It also follows that as politics becomes more professionalized and parties more bureaucratic, the struggle for the political power of mobilization tends to become more and more a two-stage competition: the choice of those who will be able to enter the struggle for the conquest of the non-professionals depends on the outcome of the competition for power over the apparatus that takes place, within the apparatus, *between professionals alone.*" (Bourdieu, 1991: 196)

Leaders then need to engage in *double dealings* to appease both their allegiances to the top and bottom; sometimes betraying either of the two depending on political expedience or their political calculations – Bourdieu arguing it is generally allegiance to the top that supersedes the other.

Local, informal leaders are indeed struggling for legitimation by institutions from the top, in order to access a variety of resources that can be used for their organization and political agenda, as much as for their own survival (as, in cities of the South, political leadership is often a livelihood strategy amongst others). And, when different legitimacies clash, they will often betray the bottom for the top: this has been analyzed in particular for ANC councilors or party branches caught between loyalty to the party and loyalty to their local constituencies, in the way critiques of government policies or projects are handled (Benit-Gbaffou, 2008). For informal leaders, the groundedness of their daily activities and the recurrence of their interaction with their local constituencies might mitigate this trend. When they do betray their mandators for legitimation by the top, their groundedness makes this contradiction even more difficult to manage, almost schizophrenic, unless they leave the 'ground' and move up the institutions' hierarchy.

#### Figure 7 – Loyalty to the top, at the expense of local 'mandate' (which mandate?)

Since 2007 and in response to a series of court cases preventing the city to evict low income residents from inner city houses without providing alternative accommodation (in its drive for urban regeneration), the City of Johannesburg has embarked on a participatory process called Inner City Regeneration Charter – where different stakeholders (business, civil society and local government) are supposed to reach a series of agreements on strategies and policies pertaining to the inner city. Very few civil society groups however do participate in the process.

Inner city charter forum 2011 – The workshop, organized by the City of Johannesburg, is dominated by municipal middle rank officials and business representatives, in particular the Central Johannesburg Partnership (a powerful coalition of property investors, developers and owners in the inner city), and a strong property owners association. Only two representatives from civil society are participating in the workshop – both are from Tomorrow.

The conversation revolves around urban regeneration, and the challenges of attracting private investment in the inner city, where a strong consensus is apparent between the municipality and business (a clear 'growth coalition'). When it comes to law enforcement, and in particular police 'blitzes' to evict informal dwellers from abandoned buildings, TCDT leaders stands up and says: "We need more blitzes on bad buildings. The problem is that blitzes are once-off events, and then people come back".

The discussion continues, and never touches on issues such as housing affordability, housing policy for the poor, and homelessness – which are the TCDT leader's daily issues in Tomorrow, that he is often addressing individually without sparing his time and efforts. But he does not bring them to the table.

While Martin did not have any formal mandate from Tomorrow's residents to represent them in the workshop and the inner city charter process, he was seen in the workshop as a community representative. And yet he did not raise once the issue that is affecting his community the most, and that he is confronted with (and trying to find solutions to) daily in the neighborhood: affordable and decent inner city housing. As much as this might reflect on the ambiguities of the leader's own vision for his neighborhood (that the informal nature of his mandate in the community is probably not helping to clarify nor consolidate), this is about the difficulty of being antagonistic to legitimizing institutions, with whom this leader has established working relationships and that might also provide at times financial support for his organization.

### 3.2.3. When legitimacies from the bottom challenge those from the top

Maybe more original, as not envisaged by Bourdieu, are cases where it is legitimacy from the bottom that challenges legitimacy conferred from the top. Two stories illustrate processes through which local leadership successfully confronts legitimation processes imposed from the top. This challenge emerges in an *ad hoc*, personalized and ephemeral way rather than through a longer term challenge to the authority of the legitimizing institutions, as often in cities of the South where civil society's power over urban governance lies generally more at implementation than at decision-making and policy level (Benjamin, 2008, Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2002).

The first story (**Figure 8**) illustrates how legitimacy conferred to a local leader by the 'top' can be discarded by the 'bottom'.

**Figure 8 - The bottom challenging legitimacy from the top? Leadership battles in the CPF**

Martin, TCDT director, resigned from the position of Treasurer in the Tomorrow Community Policing Forum (TCPF) to protest against CPF executive committee's malpractice – in this case, use of physical violence by one of the CPF leaders (also ANCYL leader).

He was subsequently appointed as TCPF 'advisor' by a high ranking official from the Gauteng's Department of Community Safety (in charge of the Province's CPFs).

At a TCPF public meeting, in which Martin announced his resignation from being treasurer of the TCPF as well as his new position of Advisor, in presence of a Gauteng Department of Community Safety official, Martin was harshly confronted by the leader of Tomorrow Community Forum (TCF), a turbulent civil society organization close to the ANCYL: "I wish to know how people get in and out of the TCPF. We just hear that Martin was appointed as Treasurer and now he has been appointed as Advisor. How does that happen without our knowledge as the community? Who is responsible for this? How did he become Treasurer of the TCPF in the first place anyway?"

What followed was a heated exchange between Martin and a group of people teaming up against him, which further included an ANC member and member of TCF, and a businessman involved in informal taverns in conflict with Martin. Some of them finally stood up and came to the front, initiating a fracas that almost degenerated into violence. This resulted in Martin resigning from the position of TCPF Advisor during this public meeting. However, he continued to offer informal support to the TCPF. What was observable was the silence of the TCPF chairperson during this whole fracas. The representative of the Gauteng Department of Community Safety did not do anything either to defend Martin in this case.

What appears here as a vertical clash, between legitimacy conferred by the top to Martin, and legitimation denied from the bottom (in the name of 'the community') is however not primarily intended as challenge to the top: the target is not the Gauteng Department of Community Safety official, even if its authority is here discarded in the process (hence also the official's retreat). The contestants are able to use implicitly CPF's formal legislation and community policing well-understood participatory ethos to contest a process that is indeed an attempt from 'the top' to reassert a level of control on turbulent CPFs.

This vertical battle is in fact, primarily, the form taken by a horizontal political fight – where an alliance of intertwined local organizations (ANC local branch, ANCYL and TCF – an insurgent association attempting to take the law into their own hands- all having their members in TCPF) attempts to delegitimize Martin and chuck him out of the CPF. It is a personal competition between local leaders, and a way to gain more control over the CPF, its activities and the possible resources (formal and informal) it can give access to, especially if not scrutinized by other organizations such as Martin's.

The second story (**Figure 9**) is more centrally a vertical battle, and illustrates even more clearly how local leaders can use the heterogeneous or fragmented nature of the state to fight their political battles.

**Figure 9 - African Migrants Forum and the multi-layered nature of policing authorities**

Recent legislation on Community Policing Forum as crafted in the Gauteng Provincial Community Policing Board Constitution (GPCPB, 2010) has forbidden non South African citizens to be elected as executive members of CPFs in the Gauteng Province, legislating what is seen as "xenophobic discrimination" by the AMF, as denying foreigners access to local leadership in what has become important political stakes of local control and access to resources (the legislation, does not, however, prohibit foreign nationals' participation in CPF meetings as ordinary participants).

CPF's are, for foreign residents too, an important means of engaging with both local civil society and the state, as the police is often the main representative of state authority in low income neighbourhoods. They are also a key platform to tackle xenophobia, either in seeking protection from the police, or in fighting xenophobic behaviour from the police. In AMF's view, if foreign nationals are barred from holding executive positions in the CPF, it means they will not wield enough power to put issues affecting migrant communities on the table.

This provincial legislation was seen as a blow by the AMF, which has often built some of its community activities in partnership with the police and through CPFs. The AMF leader therefore approached the inner city cluster police commissioner, with whom he has, through AMF activities, built a long lasting working relationship. The commissioner

agreed to the importance of foreign migrants working in partnership with the police, and established recommendations to all inner city CPFs (there are about four) to establish partnerships with AMF.

The AMF leadership, legitimized by police hierarchy (the quite powerful, cluster level commissioner), approached one inner city CPF (not in Tomorrow, where AMF is the most grounded) to consolidate a formal partnership. But, in the meeting, CPF leadership overtakes the discussion. It gives a reading of the provincial legislation discarding foreign migrants from participating in CPF executive committees, ending the conversation there and side-lining the cluster police commissioner's recommendation.

The political agenda of this CPF is here unclear: is it mere xenophobia and use of legislation to legitimize a xenophobic attitude? Is it a political battle with the police, where civil society wants to affirm its autonomy and leadership of CPFs? Is it a personalized political battle with the specific commissioner recommending the AMF? Whatever the case, CPF leadership is able to discard a strong political legitimation from the top, using a national piece of legislation. Because of the multiplicity of legitimizing institutions, the fragmentation within the state between different layers of authority (creating blurred areas on respective competencies), the 'bottom' can play with contradictory legitimations from the 'top', or rather can play legitimation from the 'top of the top' against legitimation from the 'middle of the top', to fit its own political agenda.

In both stories, therefore, the bottom wins over the top, and leaders having been legitimized by the top are delegitimized by the bottom. But in both cases, it is not necessarily good news for the community at large, as not every form of popular insurgency is necessarily democratic, inclusive or progressive (Meth 2011, von Holdt et al. 2011).

## **Conclusion – Relevance for South Africa and beyond**

The paper has demonstrated the heuristic dimension of the dichotomy between legitimation from the top and bottom, as instrumental in understanding local leaders' strategies and tactics, the sets of constraints and possible contradictions they work under. Political battles for legitimation are not confined to struggles for (formal) legitimation from the top, but also take the form of struggles to juggle diverse forms of (formal and informal) legitimation, from both the top and the bottom. To seek political legitimacy in this context entails engaging in 'double dealings', or even 'multiple dealings', in which leaders have to appease many tops and many bottoms in their struggles for legitimacy(ies). The informal nature of community leaders' position and mandate increases the requirement of constant legitimation, in contexts where competition for office or status very developed as political leadership can be, in cities of the South where formal employment is scarce, part of livelihood strategies (Simone 2002).

In South African cities and possibly in other cities in the world, the neoliberalization of urban governance systems increases the variety of institutions of legitimation from the top. In Johannesburg, competing community leaders are able to play with the state's or the party's internal contradictions and complexities – using internal state or party competition (between different agencies, different levels, different factions within the state and the party) to fight their own battles. This fragmentation of the state and the party does not however discard Bourdieu's conclusion on the importance of legitimation from the party and the state (1998), in a South African context where investing in the ANC is a long-term strategy adopted by a majority of community leaders, as the political cost of severing the links with the party is severe. But instead of what Bourdieu calls the professionalization and formalization of the political field (Bourdieu, 1984b), we observe rather, in the South African context, its informalization and complexification, particularly at the local level. The multiplication of legitimacy-conferring institutions also means that there is an increased risk of contradictions or clashes between different forms of legitimacy; thereby increasing the opacity of the rules of the game in the field of local politics, and creating instability in civil society's mobilization – where shifting alliances and competition constantly reshape the local political landscape. While this context could be read optimistically as opening a greater variety of channels for civil society mobilization, it also can lead to a rising opacity of the 'rules of the game', and some 'dispossession' of the poor from political capital and decreasing ability to navigate the political field (Bourdieu, 1991). This dispossession – by informalization and complexification rather than by

professionalization of local politics- might explain the increasing resort to collective violence (as a threat or as a realization), as the only way marginalized groups express their grievances, frustrations and claims , in line with what has been analyzed in a number of mass urban protests (von Holdt et al., 2011).

Beyond South Africa, what does this paper teach us about urban leadership? One of the key benefit of applying Bourdieu to a theorization of local political leadership (formal and informal) is a normalization of the 'double dealings' or 'multiple dealings' that each political leader has to engage in – a relationship to their constituency (around their needs, a cause, a vision that both responds to and possibly reshape theirs); and an equally important relationship to formal institutions, power and resource holders, to access positions in which long-lasting change could be implemented. The battle for political position or networks is therefore not read, as is usual in both urban politics and social movement literature, as only 'self-serving' or motivated by a greed for personal power: it is a condition of political leadership. The question with each political leader is the balance she will strike between these two mandates, or dealings, that often become contradictory. Then, there are possibly more specific debates that this paper can open within each of the literatures presented above, that we can only briefly mention here.

The notion of informal leadership and the legitimacy challenges that this informality creates, might be useful for the study of leadership in social movements. A key difference with the community leadership analyzed here is the much greater importance of antagonism and contentious politics embedded in social movements. Whilst the informal nature of social movements' leaders still raise the question of their legitimation from the bottom, their greater autonomy from the state might render the need for legitimation from the top less compelling, and the contradictions of double dealings less prominent. However, we can nuance this statement, and reinvigorate the relevance of the Bourdieusian approach of double dealings, on at least two accounts. First, it can usefully enter in dialogue with the debates on the formalization of social movements into bureaucratized organizations, which has often been seen as leading to the betrayal of the movements' ideal as well as modes of action (Barker 2001). At this stage of social movements' cycle, hierarchized positions within the movement develop, thus opening a competitive political field (Barker et al. 2001), in which leaders are often accused of forgetting the grassroots – in a similar way than the community leaders referred to in this paper. Secondly, students of social movements are currently reconsidering the nature of social movements' links and networks with the state, and increasingly focus on the complexity of these networks, beyond radical autonomy or opposition (Auyero 2007, Oldfield 2008): the establishment and maintenance of these networks with the state might have similarities with the community leaders' strategies presented here.

When it comes to formal local political leadership, and urban governance and politics literature, Bourdieu's double dealings might initially appear of less relevance, in particular because many authors on city mayors' leadership stress the mayors increasing autonomy from national levels of power as well as national politics (Le Gales 1995). They also tend to downplay the role of party politics, and read the ideological crisis as the end of party politics (Pasotti 2009, Borraz and Jones 2004). Whilst it is not here the place to fully debate these statements, we can stress that many case studies show on the contrary the remaining centrality of elections in explaining mayors' politics; the importance of party political networks (even if they are to be broadened); and the mayors' frequent national political ambitions (Stone 1995, Borraz and John 2004, Greasley and Stoker 2009). There, an analysis in terms of quest for legitimation from the top (in the party and in higher tiers of the state) might be relevant. As for the mayors' increasing function as their city's ambassadors towards external stakeholders (John and Cole 1999; Leach and Wilson 2002; Borraz and John 2004), in particular as a way of finding extra-local (from other tiers of government) and non-state (global institutions and private companies) sources of funding. An analysis in terms of legitimation from the top is there possibly less relevant, as these external stakeholders have no direct stakes in the mayors' link to their local constituencies. But these funding networks require and generate similar types of ties (maintaining network, being visible, demonstrating success, being loyal), possibly also at the detriment of mayors' commitments to their constituencies. Stone's statement on mayors'

avoidance of socially relevant, but politically difficult tasks (such as a redistributive urban policies) is witness to the fact that the politics of 'double dealings' are certainly no strangers to urban mayors:

"Mayors have room to pursue a variety of aims, some of which may derive from personal wants and ambitions [...]. Because many socially-worth aims have a higher degree of difficulty, they tend not to be pursued in a sustained manner because of the personal [political] costs and risks. Therefore it is not surprising that community groups may be at cross purpose with city hall and that community-based organizations can accomplish goals that city hall is often unwilling to attempt. It is not that community based actors are necessarily more ethical as individuals. It is that they operate in a different context, one in which aims of personal ambitions play a lesser role and the need to energize followers is greater." (Stone 1995: 153).

Our paper helps understanding, and nuancing, this emerging comparison between formal and informal political leaders. Community based organization leaders are not, we argue, necessarily freer from personal political ambition than city mayors - a 'personal ambition' that we read in more structural terms than Stone, as political positioning in various apparatuses, or the quest for legitimation from the top. They are certainly closer to their followers and more accountable to their claims, as in constant need for their legitimation in a competitive terrain not regulated by formal terms and regular elections. As for their ability to 'accomplish goals that city hall is often unwilling to attempt', it depends on the specific balance that leaders of movements or organizations are able and willing to strike, between top and bottom.

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