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Abstract: *»Subjektivierung – analysiert am Beispiel der Biographien von Subjekt-Unternehmern unter prekären Bedingungen«.* Drawing on the life story of the emerging subject-entrepreneur outside the dominant powers in Cameroon, this paper shows how the tool of biography helps to grasp a key aspect of the dynamics of subjectivization at work in African societies. Although they do not constitute a totally objective representation of present-day realities, the life stories of our interviewees show how the figure of the subject emerges by evading the dual grip of ethnic and socially ascribed identities. Biographical backgrounds structure the understanding of subjectivization as the work of the self on the self, which leads to a logic of action that is opposed to the dominant social and political systems and holds out the hope of an alternative society emerging. In a precarious environment, the figure of the significant other sustains this utopia by reinforcing a sense of entrepreneurial commitment that is shaped by an imaginary that wants to be institutive, while placing the experience of the subject and biographical becoming in Africa within the Global Sociology perspective.

Keywords: Subjectivization, subject-entrepreneur, Utopia, precarious environment, significant other, imaginary, Cameroon.

1.   Introduction

Although it seems to be in the minority in contributions to the sociology of Africa, research on biography nevertheless provides a better understanding than other approaches of the processes of subjectivization in African societies.[1] Like other societies, these experience social dynamics that have a global resonance and that are driven by individual or collective subjects (Amougou

2021). Whether in the Global South or the Global North, the subject almost always refers to the individual who, concerned with giving meaning to his or her life, constantly strives to transform an experienced situation into free action with a view to self-fulfilment (Wieviorka 2010). The subject is revealed through the ability to question socially accepted and/or politically constructed ideas with a view to forging an individual identity. Examined through the lens of biographical experience, the subject is an individual who, "not really agreeing with or being fully satisfied with his existential expectations, looks for solutions and devises actions to undertake. They invent another life for themselves and try to make it happen" (Bajoit and Amougou 2020). Although being a subject is specific to each environment in which individuals are made, almost always and everywhere, subjectivization describes the deconstruction of fixed orders, materialized by the "rise of the individual towards the subject which transforms the former into an agent of subordination of the rules of social life to the fundamental rights of human beings as subject" (Touraine 2015, 133). Building on research carried out on the emergence of the subject-entrepreneur in Cameroon, this paper aims to show how the dream world reflecting social longings for a "good life" (Butler 2014) is reconstituted through the narrative storytelling of our interviewees' lives.

The subject-entrepreneur, as conceptualized during my doctoral research, refers to latent historical actors emerging on the edge of the dominant system who are driven by the founding vision of an alternative society (Amougou 2017). Their biographical experiences revolve around a model of so-called entrepreneurial commitment to reveal a high prevalence of the subject logics, which they strive to foster through the setting up of an enterprise, NGO, or other private company on the one hand, and through the development of a critical narrative regarding the ruling elite on the other hand (Amougou 2019). The interviewee in my research field emerges in an environment where authoritarian routines, expressed among other things by "the reluctance of the Cameroonian government to follow national or international recommendations on electoral reforms" (Pommerolle 2016, 119), are partially thwarted by a social impulse towards subjectivization coloured by social creativity (Éla 1998) and the rise of an undocile middle class (Amougou and Pleyers 2022). While the Cameroonian environment also undergoes the impact of global capitalism (Burawoy 2000), the logic of action of my respondents are fed by the international connections and interrelations accumulated during their life course. The tension between the Western orientation of the subject-entrepreneurs (such as stays abroad) and their firm relationship to intellectual figures from the Global South (including Sub-Saharan Africa) as "significant others" allows us to analyse "Southern theories" not only as alternative "identities," but also, and above all, as an essential element of Global Sociology (Pleyers 2023).

This paper is therefore aligned with approaches that seek to give analytical centrality to the individual subject in the reading of contemporary social processes (Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Martuccelli and Sindgy 2009; Bajoit 2013). It is nevertheless part of the perspective of Global Sociology that attenuates the provincial or local orientation of sociology (Go 2016). Indeed, although the sociologies of the subject may move away from classical sociological determinism, they apprehend the subject only from a social situation of subjection (Foucault 1984a; Wieviorka 2009; Bajoit and Amougou 2020). However, our field of research shows that the work on oneself that the individual realizes in order to escape from a situation of constraint is useful in certain particular historical circumstances. Rather than being reduced to a response to social structures of subjection, the biographical experience of the subject-entrepreneur shows that self-fulfilment shaped by an imaginary that wants to be institutive is also at the centre of certain instances of socialization. By advocating the enrichment of the concept of the subject in order to place it in a global sociological perspective, the interest of this discussion becomes that of the relevance of the biographical tool in understanding the historicity of African societies.

Precariousness would be a condition of the postmodern individual in so far as "Modernity constitute[s] a process of subjectivization by unalienating the individual from the community" (Pierret 2017, 122). By revealing the posture of the subject in the global world, precariousness, apprehended as a property of insecure modernity (Bréda, Deridder, and Laurent 2013), is theoretically experienced here from life stories which, far from providing information on the general state of its manifestations in Cameroon, reveals some of its aspects, thus allowing a heuristic link with certain experiences of subjectivization to be established. In this respect, the value of this research consists first of all in mobilizing a European literature constructed at the confluence of a biographical approach and a sociology of the subject (or even of the individual and personal identity), which remains largely of Western origin and scope, in order to constitute and work with African materials, whatever they may be. The aim here is to reinforce the universal nature of the concept of the subject. Secondly, this contribution has made it possible to revisit the official and no less hegemonic historiography of the nationalization of African societies by restoring social and political history to the experiences of subjectivation, opposed principally to the manoeuvres of the dominant powers to de-subjectivate the social strata. The research question explores how biographical experiences in a precarious context make it possible to conceptualise subjectivization while informing the perspective of a Global Sociology.

The sample covered a selection of 20 interviewees[2] grouped into four different areas, namely independent media promoters (Séverin, Haman, Guibaï, Tayou); profiles involved in cultural promotion and local development (Claire, Jackson, Babi, Malet, Bob, Célestin); human rights activists (Henriette, Madeleine, Jean-Bosco, Bernard); and intellectual critics operating between politics and the public space (Ambroise, Mathias, Claude, Alain, Mbog, Olivier). The sampling was progressively built up in the field following an initial exploratory survey designed to find leadership models whose social ascent seems to owe little to co-option within the dominant system. The subject's statements became crucial, as each story collected reflected a quest to establish an alternative society. This proved interesting from an analytical perspective in that these respondents seemed to belong to the *same generation* (Mannheim 1928). Apart from Bernard and Henriette, who were born in the mid-1950s, the other respondents reached adulthood in the 1990s, a period of democratic demands, authoritarian takeover, and a rise in living standards as a result of structural adjustment plans (Owona Nguini 1997). In this way, this contribution also understands biography as a theory of the social construction by examining the way in which our interlocutors live their lives, perceive them and narrate their stories. In this condition, the relation of the subject-entrepreneurs to their "milieu" and the others in Cameroon could be analysed.

The field approach consisted in collecting narrative stories from our interlocutors in order to understand their lived lives (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000) and reasons for acting, but also to be able to interpret the entrepreneurial world under construction from their subjective postures. After the exploitation of these first stories, comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann 2011; Ramos 2015) were administered to our respondents to better identify the biographical ruptures and areas of tensions over identity as well as the limits of the action.

This article draws on my PhD thesis on the emergence of the subject-entrepreneur in Cameroon (Amougou 2017), for which fieldwork took place on a quasi-permanent basis between 2011 and 2016. More importantly, this article follows a series of publications in this field that have required new, more relaxed, ad hoc field trips to revise and refine my hypotheses on the concepts of the subject-entrepreneur (Amougou 2019), entrepreneurial involvement captured through the life course of an isolated figure (Amougou 2021), or the generation of a disobedient social identity in the face of an authoritarian political order (Amougou and Pleyers 2022). This paper aims to explore the ways

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[2]   As in previous publications, I had chosen to put their first names. This choice is justified by the fact that no one wished to speak anonymously. But also, because the stories collected make it possible to better understand the meaning of their commitment in the Cameroonian public space.

in which Global Sociology is informed by the experience of a subject, reconstructed through biographical narrative in a precarious context.[3]

2.   A Subjective Assumed Individuality

2.1   Between Mitigated Ethnic Identity and Rejecting a Socially Ascribable Destiny

Cameroon became independent on 1 January 1960 amidst a decolonization war that was marked by the defeat of the nationalist movement (Joseph 1977; Mbembe 1996; Deltombe, Domergue, and Tatsitsa 2016). Up until the 1990s, the country was ruled by an authoritarian regime, the main outcomes of which were the establishment of a one-party state, the promotion of a single way of thinking through official propaganda, and the closure of the public space. The national distribution of political prisons shows the consolidation of a police state leading to an almost universal of de-subjectivization. This period covers the childhood and youth of my interviewees. The negative effects of this authoritarian environment are repeated in a number of childhood and youth stories:

> I see a little how under the single party at the time of Ahidjo,[4] I was a child, I was in college, I saw very well that it was a masquerade, there was fear! There was all of that. I watched how people were, people were doing, the heart was not there, there was fear, you could see that they were afraid, but that the heart was not there. (Haman, Yaoundé, January 2012)

> We suffered from famine because we had to save our money down to the [last] penny, to flee Cameroon, I say: Flee! A guy like me said, "There couldn't be worse anywhere else in the world than what I saw." In addition, it was the Ahidjo era with violence. That is to say, you are afraid of me [and] I am afraid of you. I'm asked a question, I hover around the question mostly to say nothing, because you could be sent like that by Fochivé[5] to take me away. It was in this context. I say, "Shit!" (Bob, Douala, January 2012)

The life courses of my interviewees show that belonging to the same generation implies shared values, mentalities, and a certain vision of the world (Attias-Donfut 1989). As an instrument for measuring historical time, the generation to which the subject-entrepreneur belongs becomes apparent at the turn of the 1990s, as part of the process of challenging an authoritarian political order that continues to infantilize African youth (Mbembe 1985; Havard

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[3]   For further details on the research background and its theoretical or methodological issues, see my previous published papers (Amougou 2019, 2021; Amougou and Pleyers 2022).

[4]   Ahmadou Ahidjo was the first president of the Republic of Cameroon. He resigned in 1982 and was replaced by the current president, Paul Biya.

[5]   Jean Fochivé is a former head of the political police in Cameroon. His name is engrained in the collective memory as the symbol of terror under the one-party state.

2009). Given this sociopolitical environment of the control and subjugation of social strata, the primary and family environment continues to preserve spaces for individual fulfilment. This fulfilment is the fact of living one's childhood and youth within the framework of extended families, where one's cousin or aunt are considered as one's brother and mother, where meals are shared and there is a joy of living together, and where the course of life oscillates between urban and rural areas, where people communicate in their mother tongue and in French or English depending on the circumstances. In analysing respondents' stories, the ethical substance (Foucault 1984b) at the heart of the fabric of the subject has been abundantly nourished in this socio-community and somewhat enchanted environment. But above all, national consciousness has developed during schooling, through friendships forged with other young people from different regions or ethnic groups.

With the turn to democracy of the early 1990s, the manoeuvres of the political instrumentalization of the different ethnic groups led to identity withdrawals (Eboussi Boulaga 1997). The harmful effects of manipulating sensitivities over ethnic identity, which created a need for individuality among my interviewees, are at first directed against assimilation and embedding in a fixed ethnic group. Although the interviewees remain aware of their ethnicity, no one speaks or wishes to speak on its behalf. Instead, the desire to show up as an individual singularity concerned with carrying out a specific civic activity is highlighted. Three interviewees acknowledged that they have a position of traditional notable in their respective communities. However, these are regarded as secondary (Bob and Séverin) or as a starting point for the development of a common political and cultural identity (Mbog).

This does not mean that the influence of ethnicity has not contributed to the structuring of individual identity. However, most of the information gathered in this regard will come from "*insistence*," usually during the second interviews, and very often in an evasive manner: "I was brought up within a family of Bamiléké culture. But I do not know if there was anything special because my parents were low-level civil servants" (interview with Haman, Yaoundé, January 2014). This statement reflects the respondent's eagerness to avoid the ethnicity issue so as to move on to that of citizenship, which to him seems more relevant. This need to demonstrate one's identity as a citizen is a basic reality that was prominent in all the interviews. Alain, who is a native of the Western region, showed some signs of annoyance when asked about his ethnicity, but picked himself up: "In terms of culture, I am a city dweller [...], I was born and nurtured in a small town a few kilometres from Yaoundé." Indeed, our subject is not strictly an opponent of ethnic belonging. Yet, his narrative is opposed to a certain apprehension of the facts of ethnicity.

> I have a naturally rebellious nature; I dislike identity-based folds. I grew up completely in the centre region. I face many problems when I get to the house of the chief in the village. I arrived there one day with my mother, as

she was the wife of a chief. She told me I had to take the hat off. I told her it wasn't possible, I couldn't do it [...]. I studied at Obala High School, and I was in Yaoundé where we rubbed shoulders with people without any ethnic problem. Ethnicity did not exist for me, and every time people fall back on their own identity, I get upset. (Jackson, interview, Yaoundé, December 2013)

The rejection of a certain "embedding" approach to the facts of ethnicity intersects with the demarcation of the prevailing structures of socialization. This first form of social demarcation leads to the need to escape a collectively assigned fate. The narrative of those from the "wealthy" categories presents a subject who permits himself the choice of a "surprising" professional orientation. As observed in the case of Mathias, Henriette, Claire, and Malet, whose parents are bourgeois administrators, their choices were made against family expectations that can be likened to "class" imperatives. As the daughters of administrative executives who are perfectly integrated into the dominant system, Claire and Henriette, coming from opposite positions, willingly gave up a promising professional career to found a humanitarian NGO in the former case, and to commit herself to the clandestine struggle against the authoritarian system in place in the latter. Similarly, middle-class figures show traces of a desire to distinguish themselves from their *social fate*.[6] As Guibai, a teacher's son, stated:

I never competed for the public service, simply because I wasn't interested. My mind is free, and working for the state means being ready to relocate at any time, ready to do things regardless of what you want to do, perhaps. Whereas I am a free person in mind, having defined what I would like to be, intending to do what I intend to do, stopping when I want to. (Guibaï, interview, Yaoundé, November 2013)

The failure to accept an assigned identity led to Bernard's and Haman's resignations as civil servants in 1986 and 1994 respectively to found an NGO for the development of peasant entrepreneurship and to campaign for press freedom. Although they each seem to evolve in their own field, the subject-entrepreneurs belong to a generation that makes up the undocile middle class that emerged during the 1990s (Amougou and Pleyers 2022). All of them have lived through similar experiences, albeit in different ways, and they share a common vision of politics that is opposed to the authoritarian ideology of the ruling elite. This relationship of contemporaneity, which is converted into qualitative links between individuals who observe and influence each other

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[6] Guy Bajoit (2013, 141) states that "An individual commits to a 'social destiny' when they do not choose their life path themselves, when they are limited to responding to other people's expectations and follow the itinerary suggested to them, or even imposed on them, by those who have socialized them, namely their parents, the school, and their home social environment. Social destiny is in some ways the zero degree of an individual subject of himself." Given Cameroon's precarity, social destiny also takes the form of the more or less implicit imposition of the dominant order's hegemony and a specific form of conduct on the remaining population.

(Dilthey 1947, citing Mannheim 1928), also sets them against a competing generational unit that maintains a relationship of docility with the system in place.

2.2 Socially Imposed and Subjectively Assumed Marginality[7] in a Precarious Environment

Precariousness is existential as far as it seems to be a total social fact that dates back to the very genesis of the Cameroonian state. In the wake of a brutal decolonization marked by a "hidden war" at the origin of "françafrique" (Deltombe, Domergue, and Tatsitsa 2016), the desire to eradicate the Cameroonian nationalist movement led to the implementation of an authoritarian regime that managed to instil comprehensive social fear (Eyinga 1984; Joseph 1977). In the aftermath of the proclamation of independence on 1 January 1960, Cameroonian society gradually found itself trapped in rule by a political economy of repression through the monopoly influence of the presidential office. Indeed, President Ahmadou Ahidjo's repressive conception of the government of individuals erected a system of institutional norms against the development of individuality. These techniques of subjugation by law and institutional control of all the elites not only led to the establishment of political control tailored to the needs of the oppressor (Nkot 2005). The police system put in place also facilitated the emergence of an unequivocal model of the socialization and consolidation of hegemonic political governance that President Paul Biya, who succeeded Ahidjo in 1982, was able to exploit for his own ends (Owona Nguini 1997). At the same time that the social fabric was continuing to fray under the influence of one way of thinking ("pensée unique") and the development of a process of the "passive" standardization of society, a counter-process to decongest the monolithic socio-political model clandestinely took place. This was reflected in the pursuit of resistance in an authoritarian situation by the nationalist leader Ernest Ouandié, Bishop Mgr Albert Ndogmo, the writer Mongo Beti, and the activist Abel Eyinga. More subtly, we can also perceive this trend in the discreet "*arts de faire*" of people "from below," the tinkering of an "underground" popular memory of preservation of the nationalist heritage, the circulation of rumours conceived as a discreet form of popular resistance, and in general the development of a culture of resistance that produced intractable figures (Mbembe 1988). Because they were reluctant to submit to the induced effects of the hegemonic socio-political order, my interviewees experienced a degree of marginalization during their transition into adulthood in the 1980s and 1990s. The clash between individual expectations and the expectations of the environment created

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[7]   Being marginal for the subject-entrepreneur means feeling marginal. Here, marginality is first and foremost what emerges from the analysis of the narratives and is therefore linked to subjectivity.

identity-related tensions that led Bernard and Haman to resign from the public administration:

> The way the administration works is that the hierarchical superiors present themselves as counter-models and promote destructive values such as corruption, authoritarianism and depravity of morals. And for the young person I was, that was very annoying. (interview with Bernard)

Having been socialized in this dual context of authoritarianism and the culture of resistance, my interlocutors seem to have developed a reflexivity that would have pushed them to question their sense of being in society. Following its official triumph in the presidential elections of October 1992, the dominant power took control of the democratization process by running in various institutions and emasculating the opposition parties (Meilher 1997). Since the economic crisis of the 1980s, the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the devaluation of the CFA franc by 50% in 1994 increased social promiscuity, while giving even greater importance to positions in the public administration and parastatals. The resulting socio-economic precariousness led to an increase in the informal sector of active workers, which increased from 50% in 1987 to a peak of 96.1% in 2001 (International Labour Organization 2017, 12). Meanwhile, public resources were being "privatized" by the ruling class (Éla 1998). The combination of the two main forms of political and economic precariousness will reinforce the marginalization of vulnerable social strata:

> When I arrived at university, it was the year when the grant changed sides. In other words, it was up to the students to pay the grant. And at that university we experienced a lot because we were the real guinea pigs. (Claude)

This precarious setting followed the transition to adulthood for our interviewees and set off the biographical bifurcations that inaugurate entrepreneurial commitments (Amougou 2021). To attenuate the effects of the objective and pessimistic diagnosis which qualifies his social category as a lost generation (Cruise O'Brien 1996), the young subject feeds on his subjective sensitivity in order to preserve the hope of the possible advent of an alternative society. If the individual sees himself as an autonomous being, this is also because he identifies himself first much more with his sensibility than with the diagnosis of the dominant rationality, which is influenced by the system in place. As the prevailing precariousness enhances the social practices of clientelism and colludes with the dominant authorities (Tchingankong Yanou 2021) in order to survive, the latter seems to make "surprising" choices quite frequently. This is not to undermine the rationalist aspect of the logic of action, but to suggest that his awareness as an autonomous being seems to be more indebted to his sensitivity and subjectivity. The analysis of the narratives shows that the stated effort to make choices for "personal reasons" is driven by a need for singularity. We were also able to notice that being proud of oneself pushes the individual to proudly appropriate a subversive identity for

themselves (Henriette), to make choices that would ultimately marginalize them (Alain), and even to take risks with their professional trajectory (Mathias, Malet, and Jean-Bosco). As a secondary-school teacher during the 1990s, Jean-Bosco was regularly posted to the hinterland by the public authorities to punish him for his trade union activism. Similarly, Malet risked giving up his job as a journalist in Paris to become involved in promoting the plastic arts sector in Cameroon.

The life story of the subject-entrepreneur informs the debate around biographical theory in the social sciences, which is crystallized around the different conceptions of the individual and the social (Dubar and Nicourd 2017). While some authors emphasize the predetermined social trajectory, the way in which my interviewees presented their lives was sensitive to theoretical debates "on the freedom of each actor and the ability to thwart the process of social reproduction" (Perrin-Joly and Kushtanina 2018). Without denying the influence of the social determinisms that are emphasized by the structuralist analysis on personal trajectories, my interviewees' biographical experiences led me to favour the life-course approach in so far as the life stories I collected highlight individual autonomy and a capacity to act (Carpentier and White 2013). It follows that, while the emerging entrepreneurial world allows the subject-entrepreneur to be perceived as a social individual, he or she nonetheless escapes the class habitus to some extent in order to forge a singular habitus (Bourdieu 1980, 1984) that this contribution seeks to highlight.

The subject's sensitivity leads to the adoption of a "marginal" subjective posture. This self-assumed marginality is the result of a process of self-improvement that nurtures an entrepreneurial identity in the face of the socially damaging effects of the prevailing precariousness. The claimed marginality is firstly a structuring aspect of the biographical narrative. This claim would mainly enable them to assert their specificity, which is essentially defined in symbolic opposition to the dominant system and its "politics of the belly" (Bayart 2009). For academics, this distinguishes them from intellectuals who are subservient to power for subsistence reasons, and who are described by the philosopher Eboussi Boulaga (1999) as "*ventriloques*," or ventriloquists. For activists, their culture of struggle is understood as a form of marginality that sets them against the "docile" majority (Amougou and Pleyers 2022). Although Henriette's marginalisation is understandable, given her considerable experience of fighting clandestinely under the label of the Cameroonian nationalist party (Joseph 1977; Mbembe 1996), this is no less true of Bob (promoter of the Higher Institute of Management), whose career path shows no sign of political commitment:

> I am an outsider, and I am not offended by my marginality. I am marginalized because we do not get these earth vibrations in the same way as others. I can see a problem where there is no possibility of seeing it. And what a privilege to be able to feel that! (Bob, interview, Douala, November 2011)

The subject-entrepreneur's social and political environment is primarily utopian, which is why he aspires to an alternative society. In the current configuration of Cameroon, which is dominated by the strengthening of surveillance and security measures (Eyenga 2021), his commitment is simply to preserve a few areas of hope, rather than to attack the existing burdens in any profound way. The entrepreneurial world is more a work in progress than a socially established force. Although there are relationships of imitation between them, they were mainly concerned with consolidating their entrepreneurial projects. This is why their relations with the political and administrative authorities, seen as the opposite world to their own, are tinged with tension (Bernard, Jean-Bosco, Claude, Henriette, and Haman) or indifference (Tayou and Ambroise), but sometimes with tactical collaboration (Claire and Olivier) or "strategic collaboration" (Malet, Haman, Séverin, Bob, and Mathias). Marginality as viewed by the subject-entrepreneur would thus only be a subjectivized form of their specified individuality and distinct from other forms of individuation. The subject bound to their individuality would try to limit the effects of some constraints. In so doing, they adopt an approach that is close to their sensibility, which sometimes comes at the expense of reason. This makes them *marginal by default*, and then proud of their identity. This provides them with a self-esteem that pushes them towards the search for new forms of sociality to promote an alternative, yet unlikely society.

3. The Subject in a Quest for New Forms of Sociality: The Significant Other as Support for Utopia

3.1 Significant Others as a Basis for Entrepreneurial Identity

Within a precarious environment where the ruling elite is able to perpetually maintain an authoritarian regime through the continuous unravelling of the social fabric (Owona Nguini and Menthong 2018), the significant other appears as a major legitimate mediator with the utopian or alternative dream society. As for the individual subject, utopia seems to be an unattainable project for better living conditions, especially those under the dominant sociopolitical system (Bajoit and Amougou 2020). The significant other refers to a privileged mediator, close or distant, who plays a central role in the building of individual and/or social identities (Mead 2006; Berger and Luckmann 1967). According to Mead, the self, as the product of conservations between the I and the Me, is indebted to interactions with others. Because these conversations or interactions are at the heart of permanence and change in society, Mead defines the conscious being as having the ability to identify with others. That is why Mead's (2006) notion of the significant other implies an

analysis of the process of structuring entrepreneurial identity, particularly in relation to figures that inspire or fascinate us, or with whom we share a common vision of the world.

This recognition of the self through the subject-other (Wentzel 2007), with whom my interlocutors interact directly or symbolically, reinforces entrepreneurial commitment. In the entrepreneurial world, which is both real and utopian, the significant other enables the individual-subject not to give up on the meaning of his or her struggle. Facing the undivided reign of the authoritarian state, the significant other acts as a "normative authority" that enhances the entrepreneurial identity in order to achieve the "three principles of identity": self-esteem, a sense of existential continuity, and the uniqueness of the individual. When this other is lacking, "the identity system remains weakly structured and the individual lacks normative reference points" (Muniglia and Rothé 2013). The biographical stories indicate that the significant other is a central player in the construction of the subject-entrepreneur's vision of the world and their identity, in so far as it is also through constant interaction with them that they "validate the world in which [they live], as much as [their] identity" (Céroux 2006).

Although our interlocutors operate in specific fields and individually, each seems to be aware of belonging to a small group of individuals who are committed to the utopia of potential change. This utopia, which has become urgent since the complete defeat of the *Muntu*,[8] presupposes a gradual conversion from a space of domination to a space of recovery (Eboussi Boulaga 2014; Minfegue 2021). Madeleine and Henriette see themselves as "sisters in combat," while Guibaï admires the "bravery" of his fellow journalist Jean Bosco. Guibaï is in turn considered by Haman to be one of the best Cameroonian journalists, while Haman and Jackson have a certain mutual esteem.[9] Discreetly, Malet observes and analyses the critical postures of Mbog, Mathias, and other leaders of opinion. But instead of acting as a single social force operating in a coordinated manner, they *primarily* act as single individuals who are at the same time close to and distant from each other, because they are driven by the same political project (doing things differently) and are motivated by a desire to affirm their respective identities. Regardless of how directly they relate to each other, the entrepreneur-subjects mediate and consolidate the entrepreneurial universe by constituting themselves as significant to each other, even though some narratives emphasize the points of demarcation.

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[8] The Muntu is defined by the Cameroonian philosopher Eboussi Boulaga (2014) as the man in the African condition who must assert himself by overcoming what challenges his humanity and puts it in danger.

[9] In this respect, it was Haman who, following an interview, drew my attention to the figure of Jackson.

3.2 Global Sociology Informed by Western Orientation and the Influence of Intellectual Figures of Global South

The commitment of the subject-entrepreneur is structured by his ability to articulate the Western influence that has made it possible to see that another world is possible with the other intellectual figures who are influential in the Global South and have reinforced belief in the utopia of another humanity. Bob enthusiastically recalls his first lectures at the University of Strasbourg, where he was impressed by the contrast between the simplicity of his new lecturer and the inaccessibility of the lecturers at the University of Yaoundé. In the same way, Malet, Henriette, and Séverin were shaken by their visits to Cameroon because they realized the gap between the prevailing inertia and authoritarianism and the democratic ideals of the Western societies where they had studied. At the same time, it was also from the West that Ambroise drew his fascination with the writer Mongo Beti, while Malet fell under the spell of African artists such as Manu Dibango and the Toure Kunda music group. As for Tayou and Mbog, they were fascinated by the Cheik Anta Diop lecture in Paris. This decisive biographical turning point stimulated and reinforced Mbog's attachment to Egyptology. These different influences, to which must be added parental figures during primary socialization, show how the perspective of a Global Sociology informs the direction of entrepreneurial commitment in Cameroon.

Eighteen respondents out of the twenty in my samples were living in the West. Some had grown up there, had studied, and had started working. This is the case for Malet, who arrived in France at a very young age in the 1970s and worked as a journalist for *Africa n° 1*, before returning to Cameroon in the mid-1990s to promote the plastic arts. Although imbued with Western values, in particular the subjectivist cultural model, Malet has always remained attached to his continent, his country, and his Bassà language. Just like Malet, openness to the global world has streamlined the commitment of the other subject-entrepreneurs in Cameroon. Bernard took great advantage of his proximity to Belgian engineers, the friendship of José Bové (the French anti-globalist), and his presidency of the NGO SOS Faim, to advance the cause of the peasant world in Cameroon.

Usually, the influence is direct, channelled through the proximity of a *rigorous or genius* intellectual figure. Cheikh Anta Diop, Mongo Beti, Jean-Marc Éla, and Fabien Eboussi Boulaga appear as the most recurrent reference figures in the stories I recorded as committed intellectuals and critics of the dominant orders. For Claude and Jean-Bosco, referring to a mentor seems to serve mainly as an argument and as a means of justification, while for Ambroise, Mbog, and Tayou, the narrative really emphasizes the decisive role of a biographical reference that will radically change one's life trajectory. This is the case for the Ambroise/Mongo Beti pair, or Tayou/Cheikh Anta Diop.

The latter also reveals that being a significant other does not always require a face-to-face encounter. The Senegalese scholar's writings, for instance, turned the world-views of Mbog and Tayou upside down, as they considered him "one who opens doors." Similarly, the other three names symbolizing intellectual dissidence in Cameroon undeniably influenced the views of the academic figures in our sample. The writer Mongo Beti has been one of the most virulent critics of Françafrique since the 1970s. The sociologist and theologian Jean-Marc Éla has long denounced the closeness of the Catholic Church to the authoritarian and prebendary political powers. In this respect, he was very close to the philosopher and defrocked Jesuit, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga. A significant other thus appears to be a vital link that eases the way for the "self" from a "lower" to an "advanced" subjective stage, always in such a way as to bring the entrepreneur closer to the making zones of social history.

However, the actual encounter of the individual during the various phases of secondary socialization with a biographical reference model constitutes a symbolic moment that is likely to seal the committed identity in a lasting manner. This "significant" moment is the one that most reinforces meaning, direction, and clarity in the young entrepreneur's trajectory.[10] An often memorable experience that helps to erase fears and hesitations while strengthening a committed identity, it is an opportunity to retool new "weapons" in the quest for the self. This is also a moment almost of renewal, a place of transformation, or even transfiguring the "I" in its continuous process of change through the internalization of new norms. It is also the place for revitalizing and redeploying the entrepreneurial commitment:

> I first met Mongo Beti in 1981. As I said in the book *Mongo Beti parle*, prior to that I had never met him. What draws me to him is the journal he was publishing. Mongo Beti was a writer, and I could criticize him, criticize his works; there was no need for me to meet him. I would read the book, and I could write what I thought and [what] seemed to address my concerns. However, he took on a new dimension when he founded the magazine *Peuples Noirs Peuples Africains*. He is no longer just a writer, he is no longer just an activist, he has become the committed scholar who puts his earnings into a publication and allows other scholars to express themselves. And that was an absolutely tremendous dimension that we didn't know about, that we hadn't known about much in Africa. So at that time, when I went to defend my thesis in Paris, I phoned him to tell him that I would like to meet him, to know his concerns, how he proceeded, how he could be a high-school teacher, live in Rouen and publish the journal in Paris. All this was quite amazing in terms of commitment, in terms of dedication, passion, and cost. So this is all I wanted to understand, and that's why I decided to meet him. He gave me an appointment, and I went. We talked a lot, we shared a

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10 Be it the lecture on Marxism delivered to Mongo Beti and his friends by Um Nyobè, or his meetings in Paris with Cameroonian students during his visits to the United Nations, the moment of encounter is one of rediscovery, one in which the individual can think of himself as touching reality.

lot, and this encouraged me to appreciate more the work he was doing. Because being an activist is good, but investing as he did in the review he created, not only materially but also intellectually. This enabled a large number of African generations to express themselves, and that was quite something at the time, because it was a space where not just literary articles or political pamphlets were published, but reflection on another condition, which was extremely significant at that time. (Ambroise, interview, Banganté, January 2014)

The biographical experiences of these intellectual figures are catalysed by a number of structuring global intellectual figures in the Global South, ranging from the ethical substance drawn from the traditional African environment to the democratic values acquired during their sojourns in the West, and including the spirit of commitment built on a process of working on oneself as a universal value (Éla 1987; Assogba 1999; Kom 2006). Like these reference figures, our interlocutors' development as subjects is the result of self-management in the midst of several cultural influences that necessarily invite "global thinking" (Morin 2015). The way in which these influences are reworked by the subjectivity of our interlocutors involved in the precarious socio-political environment that is Cameroon informs on the local logics of action. The latter challenge the thesis of the emergence of an alternative identity adapted to the South, while reinforcing the universal character of the concept of the subject by making it "the result of a transcultural consensus rather than the result of the generalisation or universalisation of values rooted in a Euro-American context" (Hanafi 2022).

Indeed, the other person only becomes significant in so far as he or she guarantees the maintenance and meaning of the dynamics of change across time and era. This is what allows the multiple and diverse nature of the scattered dynamics of social change to be linked to a sense of meaning capable of conveying a biographical coherence.[11] Building on this medium, the individual, instead of being compelled to reproduce it identically, values it – while at the same time achieving self-fulfilment – only by turning it into a vital reference for his or her own productivity, which in turn stems from the unprecedented. A significant other acts as an indirect *vocation* factory within the strict framework of historical processes of change. They are indispensable historical intermediaries in perpetuating social memory. It is the connecting thread that enables the dynamics of subjectivization to relate to historical time whilst finding original modes of expression within the new generations. This mediator's experience, established as a *model of exemplarity*, effectively brings

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[11] The figure of the philosopher Eboussi Boulaga, in acting as a "significant other," provides a link between several entrepreneurs and enterprising young people evolving in various fields, from the university to the media arena, from economic entrepreneurs to young trade union members, from the clergy to political actors.

about the acceptance of an enthusiastic challenge by the "fan."[12] Usually, the latter completes or refines those areas of the structuring of identity that have not yet been filled in by subjectivity.[13] As a result, it plays a role in reinforcing existing convictions, and thus in consolidating a committed identity trajectory.[14]

4.   Logics of Action Shaped by an Imaginary World that is Intended to be Instituting

Entrepreneurial commitment is fuelled by an imaginary that seeks to establish and oppose the established or dominant political imaginary. In Cameroon's socio-political arena, this never-ending tension, which constantly creates new imaginary meanings, is the driving force behind social and political history. It thus informs the social imaginary, defined by Castoriadis (1975) as a process of creation, at the foundation of the social-historical and the psyche, and which is understood as an inexhaustible and always indeterminate source of meanings (Giust-Desprairies 2019). As a reservoir of meaning and a condition for the emergence of new meanings (Binder 2019), the social imaginary of the emerging entrepreneurial world shows how fantasies and wishes for the emergence of an alternative society feed a critical discourse towards the ruling elite and instituted imaginaries: "I feel that they and I do not see the future of Cameroon in the same way" (Haman); "I've realized that this is not my milieu" (Bernard); "I don't understand why people are in a position of impossibility, when I see so many opportunities" (Malet).

These three extracts tell the story of a crucial moment in the lives of these subject-entrepreneurs, during which they face an identity tension that leads to a biographical bifurcation as they enter adulthood. Haman and Bernard, who were strongly opposed to the dominant ideology and its instituted imaginary, resigned from the civil service to embark on a more autonomous entrepreneurial path. Malet, for his part, gave up his career as a journalist in Paris to challenge the "inertia" in Cameroon by setting up a cultural enterprise. While the inertia being challenged is revealed in everyday life through various forms of social and economic insecurity, it seems to be structured mainly through an established political imagination that tends to trivialize and naturalize the presidency of Paul Biya, who has been in power since 1982.

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[12] From another perspective, but using a similar mechanism, Edgar Morin speaks of the "complex of identification and projection" in analysing the relationship that fans share with their heroes (Morin 1958). I would like to thank Jean-Marcellin Manga for drawing my attention to this book.

[13] Following Claude's testimony, Séverin Cécile Abéga played this role in his career, especially in carrying out field research, writing, and "scholarly" intervention in the media.

[14] This function proves to be decisive in times of considerable turmoil and tension, which often plunge the individual into a boiling zone of identity uncertainty.

In collective conversations, in bars and cafés, and even in speeches made by the political elite, it is not uncommon to hear expressions such as: "The day he dies is the day he will leave power"; "There is nothing to be done"; "The old man is here to stay"; "We are all Paul Biya's creatures." This dominant and instituted imaginary is suited to the perceptions that many Cameroonians have of politics in the present day, which are conveyed through banal conversations, nourish practices, and cement behaviour. This shows how this society presents itself and others with images that often end up creating myths. In the face of this apathetic vision of the world, the actions of the entrepreneurial subject contribute to the existence of "alternative imaginaries that dream of another country."[15]

Alternative imaginaries, although not as socially significant as the instituting imaginary, work from the margins to bring about an instituting imaginary that is inscribed at the heart of social historicity. In Castoriadis's perspective, the radical self-institution of society is the work of an anonymous collective that is reducible neither to individuals taken as a whole, nor to a transcendent instance separate from individuals. This anonymous collective "connotes individuals in so far as it refers to the imaginary meanings in which they participate and which they embody in different ways" (Chapel 2008). The subject-entrepreneurs share a common dream of "another country," and each of them works individually, and sometimes in isolation, to bring that dream world into being. It is this desire that is buried deep within them that has led to the biographical shifts that can be seen in the various life stories we have recorded. As a result, Bernard became involved in empowering farmers' organizations and led a major fight against the fraudulent importation of frozen chicken into Cameroon, while Haman became a major player in the independent press in Cameroon. As well as creating his own newspaper in 2008, he intends to set up a publishing house with a view to encouraging and diversifying forms of expression.

Longing for "something else" is a stimulus to a sense of social responsibility. This responsibility to the environment would lead the subject to confront some of the challenges raised by the environment. As the narrative is articulated, the commitment is conceived as a contribution to the emergence of an alternative society because the subject-entrepreneur claims to oppose the official media for the dissemination of the dominant ideology. If my interlocutor's longing for a new city allows them to think "differently" about their society based on the aspirations and projections they make of it, it also presents a subject who is open to the world and to the future. As a result, there is a kind of openness to the socio-political environment that is projected and constructed, thereby committing themselves as an actor. The desire to "mingle"

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[15] This argument on political imaginaries has benefited from discussions with Cameroonian sociologists Claude Abe and Armand Leka Essomba.

with their world against a system that pretends to ignore their individuality would justify their attachment to utopia.

This muted yet enthusiastic battle lies at the core of the social, political, and cultural dynamics of contemporary Cameroon. Instead of being linear and coherent, it is made up of ruptures, partly or totally questioning oneself, making attempts to reverse, or even readjusting one's relationships with others. From this symbolic and equally historical confrontation with oneself and the other, the subject-entrepreneur is almost convinced that they are in line with history, even if it is not immune to a possible reversal, given the high cost of commitment in an environment that is becoming ever more precarious, and the manoeuvres of the elite in power. It is not unusual for my interviewees to be perceived as marginal, misfits, or strategists who only want to integrate into the system. Obviously, the esteem the interviewee receives subjectively from their claimed identity comforts them in taking responsibility. And because they perceive the existing condition as undesirable, they project themselves socially through their business plans, which strive to match their global vision of this environment, considered also as their own.

5.   To Sum Up…

This research has set out to examine the way in which biographical experiences in a precarious context make it possible to conceptualize subjectivization while informing the perspective of a Global Sociology. Based on the life course of the subject-entrepreneurs evolving on the fringes of the dominant powers in Cameroon, the field study showed that they are largely inhabited by a subjective assumed individuality. This subjective stance enables them to attenuate the hold of ethnic identifications and social destiny during their various phases of socialization. Faced with a marginality that is socially imposed on them because of the precarious environment in which they live, but also because of their insubordination, my interviewees oppose a subjective assumed marginality in response to the harmful effects of the dominant system. In their search for new forms of sociality to escape the grip of the dominant ideology, the figure of a Significant Other serves as a model and support for their identity. In this way, the tension (or articulation) between the ethical substance acquired during primary socialization, the adoption of democratic values during the stay in the West, and the influence of intellectual and dissident figures from the Global South, has emerged as valuable material for analysing the processes of globalization, rather than being reduced to the construction of an alternative identity. It follows that the logics of action of the subject-entrepreneur, because they are shaped by an imaginary that aims to institute, constitute the driving force behind entrepreneurial commitment.

These empirical results show that the study of biographies is particularly useful in a precarious environment in order to gain a better understanding of subjectivization experiences. On the one hand, they make it possible to revisit a certain dominant and all-conquering approach to political and social history, which presents a "politics of the belly" (Bayart 2009) and identity-based withdrawal as total social phenomena. Rather than the product of a class habitus, the biographical experience of the subject-entrepreneur reveals above all the structuring of a singular habitus that can be apprehended through the theory of the social individual or the historical-social personality based on "a complex, dynamic, historical compound of capitals" (Legrand 1992). On the other hand, studying biographies helps to strengthen the perspective of a Global Sociology by making the concept of the subject more universal. Because it is, alongside positionality and comparatism, one of the three principles on which Global Sociology rests (Hanafi 2022), moderate universalism has been at the heart of this contribution in that it has enabled us to start from the universal concept of subjectivization in order to address the Cameroonian context. Looking beyond Cameroon, this discussion is aligned with the counter-history of modernity, in so far as it sheds light on and enables us to think differently about history in order to gain a better understanding of the world we live in (Dozon 2017). If the history of the modern world seems to be redefined differently through the prism of Africa, it is because the processes of subjectivization and de-subjectivization that are to be observed within the continent resonate fully with other global problems such as violence, social disparities, social movements, oppression, and mutual hostility.

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