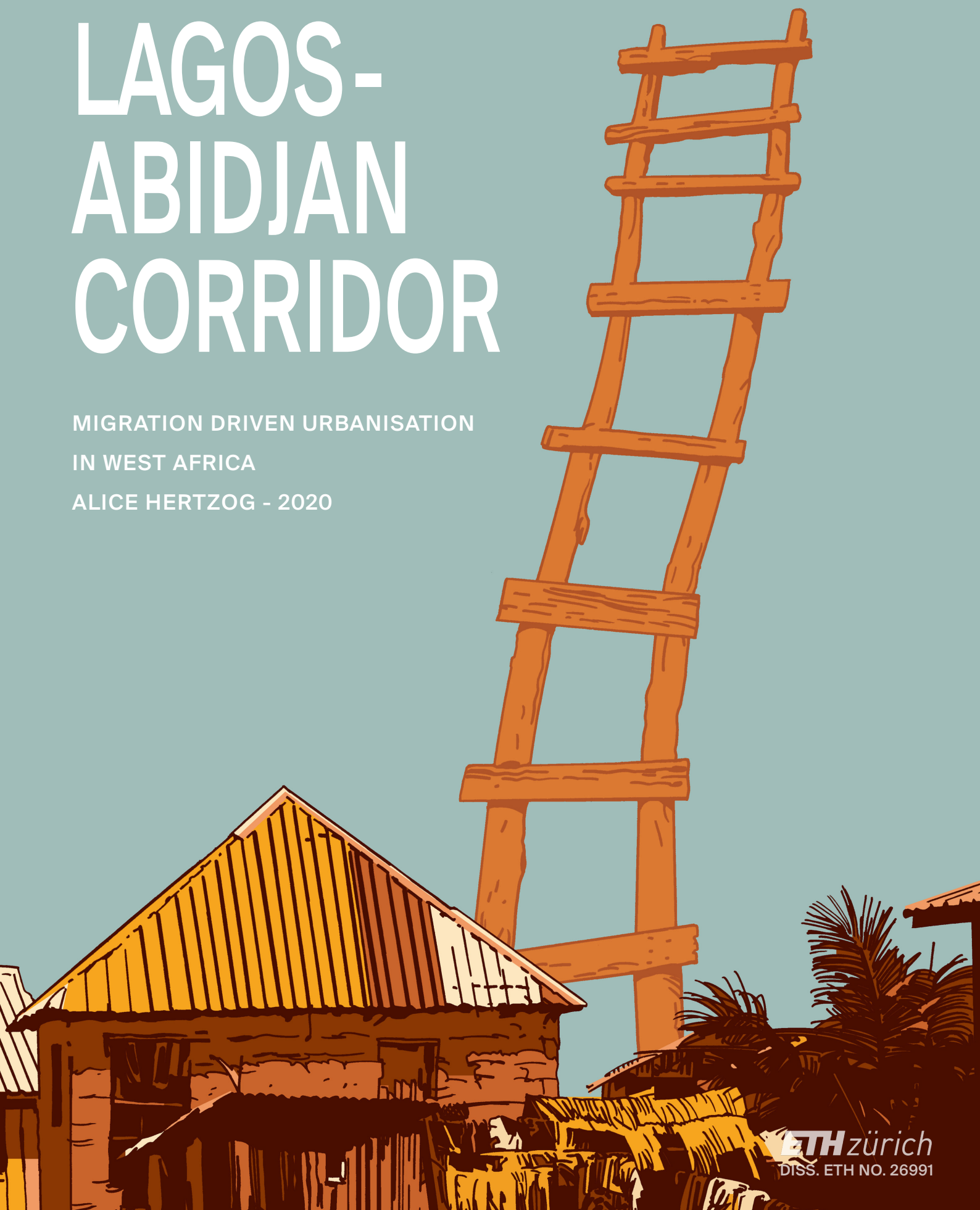
THE LAGOS-ABIDJAN CORRIDOR

MIGRATION DRIVEN URBANISATION
IN WEST AFRICA

ALICE HERTZOG - 2020



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THE LAGOS-ABIDJAN CORRIDOR

Migration Driven Urbanisation in West Africa

A thesis submitted to attain the degree of

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presented by

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Summary | en

In the context of rapid urbanisation, a metropolitan corridor is emerging along the Guinea Golf in West Africa. This corridor runs along the coast spanning one thousand kilometres from Lagos to Abidjan, bringing together a dense network of megacities, towns and villages. Mobility plays an important part in sustaining this corridor as regional migrants travel along it seeking out opportunities. This doctoral thesis addresses the intersection of urbanisation processes and migration trends. It asks how migration is driving urban transformation along this corridor. How are people on the move contributing to the growth of this urban corridor? And how is this reconfiguring specific locations along the corridor?

The Lagos-Abidjan corridor, whilst also a highly relevant region in and of itself, provides an opportunity to consider wider questions surrounding rapid urban growth, and new scales of urbanisation. The thesis draws on the theoretical apparatus of global urbanisation, and, more precisely, notions of extended and concentrated urbanisation. In analysing the role of migration in current urbanisation patterns, this thesis challenges current definitions of the urban fabric, proposing a more rigorous understanding of how exactly this fabric is produced.

It proposes knots as a theoretical device that allows us to think through the various ways in which individuals engage with the urban fabric and transform it. Introducing specific typologies of knots, the thesis demonstrates how precise ways of tying, such as hitches or binds, can provide an analytical entry-point to understand current transformations of the urban environment. Each chapter is associated with a specific knot that reflects particular dynamics of migration-driven urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This is both a conceptual endeavor, and an attempt to account for the many ways in which people on the move transform the urban fabric.

The thesis draws on twelve months of fieldwork in South Benin, along with national census material, interviews, and mapping. It employs both mobile and multi-sited ethnography, travelling through the corridor, whilst also drawing on in-depth studies of several locations situated along the Beninese stretch of the corridor. This research is part of a trans-disciplinary collaboration with the Global Programme for Migration and Development at the Swiss Development Cooperation. As such it is embedded within ongoing policy debates on the opportunities and challenges posed by migration in the context of poverty reduction in West Africa.

Résumé | fr

Dans le contexte d'une urbanisation rapide, un couloir métropolitain fait son apparition le long du golfe de Guinée en Afrique de l'Ouest. Ce couloir longe la côte, faisant un parcours de mille kilomètres de Lagos à Abidjan, et connecte un réseau dense de mégapoles, de villes et de villages. La mobilité joue un rôle important pour maintenir ce couloir, puisque les migrants de diverses régions l'empruntent dans leur recherche de nouvelles opportunités. Cette thèse doctorale examine l'intersection des processus d'urbanisation et des tendances migratoires. Il interroge la façon dont la migration propulse la transformation urbaine de ce couloir. Comment les gens en déplacement contribuent-elles à la croissance de ce couloir urbain ? Et comment est-ce que cela reconfigure des lieux particuliers au long du couloir?

Le couloir Lagos-Abidjan, tout en étant une région fort importante en elle-même, fournit une occasion pour considérer des questions plus larges au sujet de la croissance urbaine et des nouveaux taux d'urbanisation. La thèse se réfère au dispositif théorique de l'urbanisation planétaire et, plus précisément, cherche à concrétiser des notions d'urbanisation concentrée et diffuse. En analysant le rôle de la migration dans le profil des divers modes d'urbanisation actuels, cette thèse lance un défi aux définitions actuelles du tissu urbaine, proposant une compréhension plus rigoureuse de la façon exacte dont cet tissu est réalisée.

Il propose l'emploi du nœud comme instrument théorique qui nous permet d'examiner les diverses manières dont les individus s'attachent au tissu urbain et la transforme. En présentant des typologies particulières de nœuds, la thèse démontre comment des manières précises d'attacher, comme par exemple un nœud de cabestan ou un liage, peuvent fournir un point d'entrée d'analyse pour comprendre les transformations actuelles de l'environnement urbaine. Chaque chapitre est associé à un nœud particulier qui reflète certaines caractéristiques de l'urbanisme poussée par la migration le long du couloir Lagos-Abidjan. C'est à la fois une entreprise conceptuelle et une tentative d'appréhender les multiples façons dont les gens en déplacement transforment la trame urbaine.

Cette thèse s'appuie sur douze mois de terrain en Bénin du Sud, des statistiques du recensement national, d'interviews et de cartographie. Il fait appel à une ethnographie ambulante et multi-localisée, dans son parcours du couloir, tout en puisant ses données dans des études de plusieurs lieux situés le long du la section béninoise du couloir. Cette recherche fait partie d'une collaboration interdisciplinaire avec le Programme Global Migration et Développement à la Direction du développement et de la Coopération Suisse. Ainsi se trouve-t-il ancré au sein des débats qui se poursuivent actuellement sur les opportunités et les défis posés par la migration dans le contexte de la réduction de la pauvreté en Afrique de l'Ouest.

List of Abreviations

AAUD	African Academy for Urban Diversity
AFD	French Development Agency *Agence Française de Development*
ANBE	Beninese Overseas Agency *Agence Nationale des Béninois de l'Exterieur*
BUCO	Swiss Cooperation Office - Cotonou *Bureau de la Coopération Suisse - Cotonou*
D-ARCH	Architecture Department ETHZ
D-USYS	Department of Environmental Systems Science *Department Umweltsystemwissenschaften*
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETHZ	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology *Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich*
GIZ	German Development Agency *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*
GPMD	Global Programme for Migration and Development
IGN - Benin	National Geographic Institute of Benin *l'Institut Géographique National du Benin*
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMISCOE	International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe
INSAE	National Institute for Statistics and Economic Analysis *Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique*
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRD	Institute for Research and Development *Institut de Recherche et Development*
JMDI	Joint Migration and Development Initiative
LAC	Lagos-Abidjan Corridor
MIGDEVRI	Programme on Migration, Mobility and Development in Africa *Programme Migrations, Mobilités et Développement en Afrique*
PAG	Governmental Action Programme *Programme d'Action du Gouvernement*
PK10	Ten Kilometres Spot (Neighbourhood situated 10km from centre) Point Kilomètrique Dix
PTF	Technical and Financial Partners *Parténaires Techniques et Financiers*
RLI	Rhodes Livingstone Institute
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SECO	Swiss Secretariat for Economic Development
TdLab	Trans-disciplinarity Lab
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union

List of Terms Used

Dantokpa	Large open market in Cotonou
Fon	Also known as Fongbe, language of Fon ethnic group
Kotonu	Local term with Fon pronunciation of Cotonou
Kpayo	Fake or counterfeit goods
Maquis	Local restaurant
Vodún	Worship of divinities, religion practiced in South Benin
Von	Road - stands for Voie d'Orientation Nord
Yovo	White person - the term means privileged or educated
Zémidjan	Moto-taxis in Benin, also known as "Kekeno"
Zongo	West African arrival neighbourhood for traders
Egungun	Yoruba masquerades representing the ancestors

Figures

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Front Cover & Pages 0, 6, 32, 54, 214, 226, 232, 258 and 270
www.pascalgarnier-garner.com

Charts

Maps

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CONTENTS

PREFACE : THE GERS, NORDESTE & QUAI BRANLY

I arrived loaded in the field, with equipment, recording devices and notebooks, but also theory, preconceptions, and a special connection to the subject matter. This thesis has been shaped by my positionality within the field. So, without wishing to turn this into an overtly reflexive endeavour, I present here a few elements on my rapport to migration, urbanisation and Benin.

In 2001 I moved as a teenager from a small town in middle-England to the Gers, a rural department in South-West France. My family was white, and, at the time, the sterling was strong, so we were quickly categorised as expats rather than migrants. The commune we moved into was so under-populated that the arrival of our family led to an overall increase of 10% in the local demographics. And while the sunflowers were pretty, I craved urbanity and diversity, and would have happily traded them in for high-rises and sushi. Every summer, I left to au-pair in larger cities, swapping my rural setting for Istanbul or Barcelona - hauling various young children along with me as I set out to explore the city.

Since, I have been training as an urban anthropologist. First as an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge, where the anthropology department offered a specialisation in 'Cities and Space.' Then at l'Ecole Urbaine of Science Po, completing a masters in Territorial and Urban Strategies, whilst at the same time enrolled in the social sciences department of L'Ecole Normale Supérieur d'Ulm.[1] This double enrolment, which required dashing between St Germain and the Latin Quarter on my bike, was formative. It gave me two complementary perspectives that I have sought to put into practice in this thesis to bridge practice and research. Science Po trained me to understand how the urban fabric is produced through legal instruments, political decisions and economic frameworks. It taught me how planners and architects, developers and investors implement urban projects, and how these projects fail and succeed. L'Ecole Normale in the meantime allowed me to follow research seminars, build my understanding of urban theory, and practice field-work skills.[2]

Who belongs in the city? How do migrants transform the urban experience? What does super-diversity mean for municipalities? These are questions I first addressed working in migrant neighbourhoods in Paris. First, through an internship with the city of Paris in the African quarter La Goutte d'Or, where I worked on establishing a cooperative of textile traders and designers for the municipality.[3] Then, as a researcher for an arts initiative led by the *Fondation de France*, that, under the direction of Bruno Latour, sought to elevate the voices and experiences of migrants in the city.[4] And finally through my own research, on migrant trading in Belleville, a multi-

1 Whilst this training anchors me in the elite institutions of two colonial powers, it also introduced me to the post-colonial scholarship of Fanon and Said.

2 A note of gratitude for the training received from, Evaleila Peseran & Paola Filippucci at Cambridge, Brigitte Fouilland and Patrick LeGalès at Sciences Po, Florence Weber and Anne-Christine Trémon at l'Ecole Normale Sup'.

3 Internship with the Département de la Politique de la Ville et Intégration. For a further discussion of this project see OECD, 2018. Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees in Paris. OECD Publishing. p.47

4 Arts creation entitled "Cependant Tout Arrive" directed by Marie-Pierre Bésanger at the Maison des Métallos in 2011 as part of the wider initiative "Les Nouveau Commanditaires" - http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/

cultural district in the East of Paris (Hertzog, 2011; 2013; Hertzog & Hingley, 2018).

In 2013 I migrated again, this time to Zurich, Switzerland. I worked first for Urban Think-Tank, collaborating with the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, managing a research project on secondary cities in Colombia in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank. In was then in 2015, whilst based at the Trans-Disciplinarity Lab at the ETH Zürich, that we started this project in collaboration with the Global Programme for Migration and Development from the Swiss Development Cooperation.

For the previous decade I had been involved in research projects in South America, Brazil, Cuba, Peru and Colombia. In South America I find it easier to pick up on the subtleties of urban spaces, understand the tonalities of conversations, the power relations in neighbourhoods, the etiquette of sharing food and stories. In Brazil for example the scale of colour and wealth enable me to pass for a white middle-class Brazilian whilst my accent pins me to the *nordeste*. Compared with West Africa, urban research is undoubtedly easier: civil society is strong and structured into accessible NGOs, cities are well mapped and data more available.[5] Whilst Benin was a new research site for me, there were several threads that tied it to past experiences, three of which I take the liberty of mentioning here.

The first is an unexpected link with the Gers. During my time at the lycée, my history and geography teacher, Monsieur Donnadieu was the first person I met who had written a book. M. Donnadieu was invested in improving how we teach youth about the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He invited me to participate along with young people from Benin, Haiti and Cuba, in several UNESCO workshops on the topic.[6] M. Donnadieu had grown up in Benin and his research focused on the links between Gascony and the Antilles established through the plantation and slave owner le Comte de Noé (Donnadieu, 2009; 2014). M. Donnadieu further established connections between the Gers and Toussaint Louverture, the Haitian revolutionary whose ancestors were captured Beninese slaves, after uncovering his cane in a local chateau (Cauna & Donnadieu, 2008). Upon arrival in Benin, this history continued to resonate, as I made my way to Allada, to visit the ancestral home of Toussain Louverture.[7]

A second link slowly emerged over the course of my field work as I began to recognise fragments of my time spent in the *nordeste* in Brazil: a turn of phrase, a dish, a dance move, a local god, the facade of a villa. The parasols used to shade local kings in Abomey resemble those used in the Olinda carnival. The women in white making offerings on the beach reminded me of the women practicing candomblé. And the

5 Whilst the GPMD was open to the option of a Phd in Latin America, it was also clear that with no established migration programme there, there would be no bureau to collaborate with. This in turn would have limited the trans-disciplinary potential of the collaboration and closed down policy dialogue.

6 UNESCO. 2004. "Breaking the Silence: The Transatlantic Slave Trade Education Project." Paris: UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137805.

7 Still in contact with M. Donnadieu, we have worked together over the course of the Phd to compile teaching material for high-school students on urban growth in Africa.

rhythms of Beninese songs were reminiscent of the calling of capoeira. These similarities stem from a rich history of trans-Atlantic exchange, from the slave trade to the return of liberated slaves. Documented by the photographer and ethnographer Pierre Verger (1987), the links between these two territories are a reminder of how people from present-day Benin were forcibly displaced, transforming territories and bringing with them a wealth of ideas and cultures from Africa to the Americas and back again.

A last connection with Benin comes straight from the heart of the former colonial power in France. Whilst studying at university, I got a summer job working on Gradhiva, the scientific journal of the Quai Branly Museum in Paris. Sat in the offices overlooking the Seine I edited texts for an issue on *Présence Africaine* (Frioux-Salgas, 2009), corrected typos and sought reproduction rights for images. We were promoting the previous issue on collective memory in Benin (Ciarcia & Noret, 2008) and the museum had just acquired works by the Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumé (2006). It was here that I came across the 'Sculpture dedicated to the Vodún Gou', a stunning iron sculpture made in the eighteenth century by Ekplékendo Akati in Abomey and captured by the colonial French troops. It was first given to the Ethnographic Museum of the Trocadéro, then the Musée de l'Homme and is today at the Musée du Quai Branly (Murphy, 2009). A decade later, visiting the National Museum in Abomey, I recognised a replica of the sculpture, as the guide complained bitterly that it should be returned.

From the Gers, to the nordeste in Brazil, and the archives of the Quai Branly museum - three thin threads established a connection with Benin. My knowledge and understanding of the rich cultures of Benin were minimal to say the least when I started this project. I began from scratch, and as always, the hardest was not committing the basics to memory, or coming to terms with the expansive *africanist* literature, but the *savoir-faire*, or *savoir-vivre*. How to dress, walk, talk. What makes a good question? What is appropriate, what is funny, what is naive or tone-deaf? The research started well before I had acquired sufficient knowledge of the above, and I learnt en route, with the help of friends, colleagues and assistants, staggering from one faux pas to the next. In the thesis that follows, the steepness of this learning curve will be apparent, and so, in anticipation of the bumps, I thank the reader for their steadying hand.

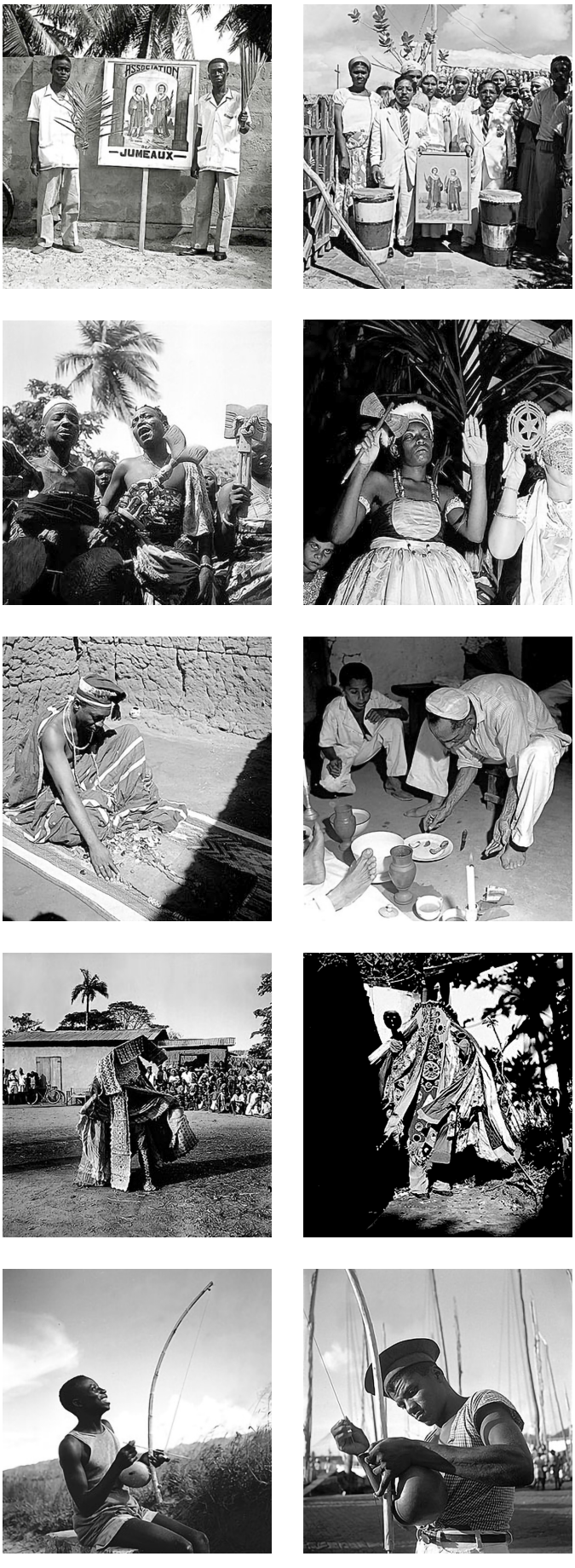


Fig.1 Flows between the Nordeste in Brasil and Benin © Fondation Pierre Verger

From top left to bottom right:
Jumeaux. Cotonou, Benin
1948-1979
Xango Rosendo. Recife, Brazil
1947

Nagô ceremony. Ouidah, Benin
1948-1953
Candomblé Joaozinho Da Gomea.
São Caetano, Salvador.
1946

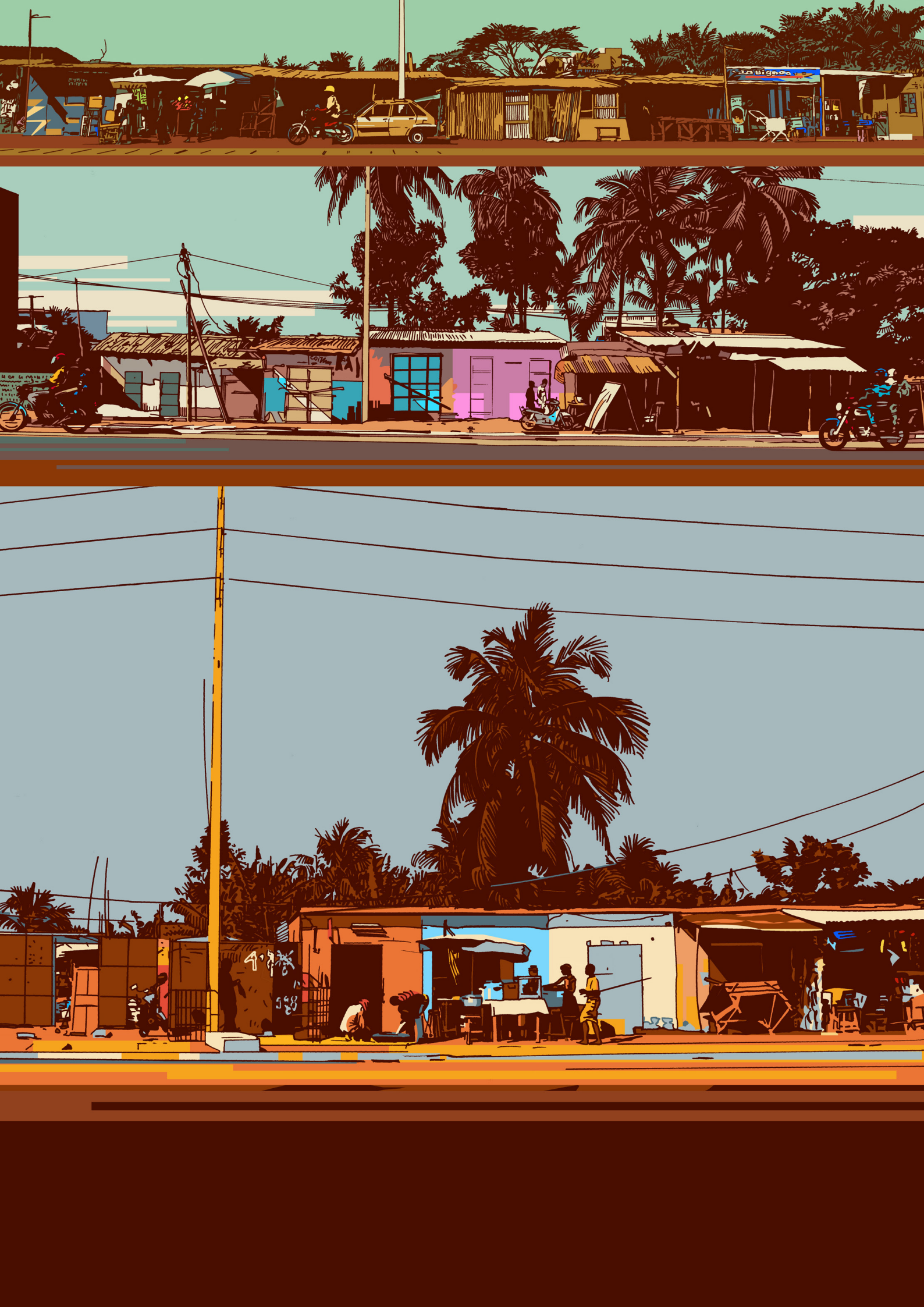
Abomey, Benin
1948-1958
Candomblé Cosme. Salvador, Brazil
1946-1953

Egun. Ouidah, Benin
1948-1953
Egun. Salvador, Brazil
1946-1953

Kamaniola, Kivu. Democratic Republic of the Congo.
1952
Capoeira. Salvador, Brazil
1946-1947

Fig. 2 Statue dedicated to the Vodun Gou, photographed in the musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro at the end of the 19th century, Paris.© musée du quai Branly

Fig.3 Statue of Toussaint Louverture in Allada, South Benin



1. LAGOS TO ABIDJAN, MOBILITY ALONG A METROPOLITAN CORRIDOR

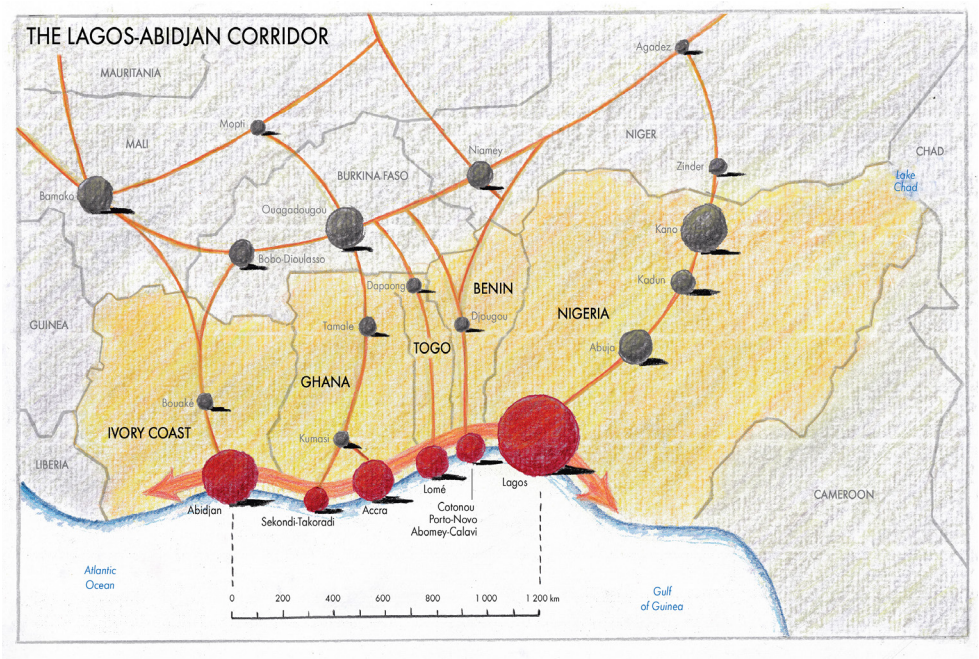
Lagos and Abidjan, two boisterous West African cities, one anglophone, the other francophone, are both hubs of urban diversity and strong destinations for regional migration. This thesis focuses on what is happening between them, where an emerging metropolitan corridor that is coming into formation along the Guinea Gulf. It asks how migration is driving current urbanisation along the Lagos Abidjan corridor. To what extent is migration transforming the urban fabric along the corridor? What kind of urban opportunities is this creating? And for whom?

This introduction starts by positioning the relevance of the corridor and argues that it is important that we gain a better understanding of current urbanisation dynamics given its projected growth, but also the aspirations tied to this territory. Yet despite its relevance, there has, until now, been very little research on the corridor. We seek to explain this gap, addressing three obstacles that have impeded scholarship on the corridor. These are the difficulty in delimitating the object of study, the colonial boundaries and the persistence of a strong rural-urban dichotomy. This gap however, can be overcome by adopting a new theoretical apparatus that enables urban scholarship to be undertaken outside of cities - therefore enabling the corridor to be studied in and of itself.

Following this we introduce how migration is problematised in this thesis, setting out how we depart from accounts of rural exodus as the driving force of urbanisation. Instead our research points to the diversity of ways in which people on the move transform the urban fabric. This introduction sets out how we draw on the concept of the urban fabric and seek to strengthen it in order to produce a more accurate analysis of current urbanisation patterns. We do this by introducing knots as a theoretical tool, one that allows us to conceptualise the varied manners in which people on the move tie into and release from the urban fabric. Indeed, as the overview presents, this thesis suggests four initial ways in which migration is driving urbanisation along the Lagos Abidjan corridor, each of which can be represented by a specific knot. These are through connecting various segments of the corridor, providing livelihood opportunities for corridor communities, sheltering in the aftermath of evictions and maintaining translocal ties.

1.1 Urban Growth, Projections and Aspirations

The West African urban corridor is one of the fastest growing megaregions in the world. Along the Gulf of Guinea, stretching from Lagos to Abidjan, numerous urban areas are growing together to form a remarkable polycentric corridor. The corridor spans one thousand kilometres from Lagos in Nigeria to Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, passing though the Beninese cities of Porto Novo and Cotonou, the Togolese capital Lomé and the Ghanaian capital Accra. Strung together by a coastal highway, the corridor is made up of major cities, but also market towns, ports, borders, and villages.[1]



Map 1 Sketch of the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, P. Rekacewicz

Such transnational metropolitan areas raise fundamental questions for future urban transitions. This is particularly the case in West Africa, where much urbanisation is still to occur. The region is experiencing the highest rate of urban growth on the continent and it is predicted that it will soon be home to more than 50 million people (Moriconi-Ebrard et. al, 2016). Over the course of the past decade, it has become widely recognised that "traditional city-based urbanisation is moving towards regional urbanisation patterns, including the emergence of city regions and their associated urban corridors, creating what is known as mega urban regions" (UN, 2008, p.94). In this particular case, the "mushrooming" of settlement along the Guinea Gulf, is forming "arguably the most clustered urban corridor in Sub-Saharan Africa" (idem.).

As an object of study, the Lagos-Abidjan corridor holds much potential for both ur-

1 Current population estimations stand as such: Lagos 23 million, Abidjan 4.7 million, Porto Novo 0.9 million, Cotonou 2.4 million, Lomé 2.1 million and Accra 3.4 million.

ban and migration scholarship. It sheds light on current forms of accelerated urbanisation that are occurring in the Global South as well as the urban forms produced as a result. Such urban dynamics are highly contrasted to the well-known trajectories of urbanisation that we are familiar with in Europe and North America. They are for example, taking place without substantial industrialisation and job creation. How, in the absence of formal and secure employment, is migration a key strategy for urban livelihoods? And what kind of urban forms is this producing? How is migration connecting various settings? Who is mobile, and who is staying put? The Lagos-Abidjan corridor is a location that can offer up wider insights into how migration transforms urban locations and mitigates economic and social vulnerabilities. It is furthermore a setting from which we can challenge current conceptualisations of the urban fabric and offer more detailed and precise accounts of the processes producing this urban fabric. This involves thinking beyond classic understandings of the 'urban' as a city centre and considering more extended, linear forms of urbanisation. As such, Lagos-Abidjan presents an ideal case from which we can contribute to ongoing research on urban diversity, the contribution of migrants to city-making and emerging forms of extended urbanisation.

Urban population growth by regions in Africa (1950-2050)

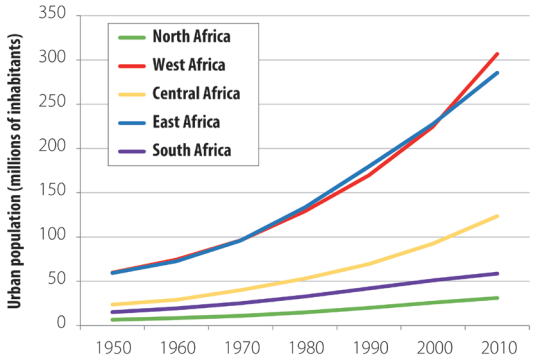


Chart 1 Source eGeopolis 2016, Produced by Pesche et al. 2016, p.20

The relevance of megaregions such as the Lagos-Abidjan corridor is only set to increase. A recent study predicts that "in Africa the evolution of population settlement is so rapid that everything indicates that the process of emergence of this type of agglomeration will intensify" (OECD, 2020, p.109). These new morphologies require both practitioners and researchers to reassess the focus and tools of their trade. For scholars, the rise of such regions raises vital questions for urban research, and interrogates current thinking about urban theory, urban society and urban policy (Sorensen and Labbé, forthcoming, p.1). Such territories bring with them new challenges in terms of governance and sustainability, as well as opening up new development paths.

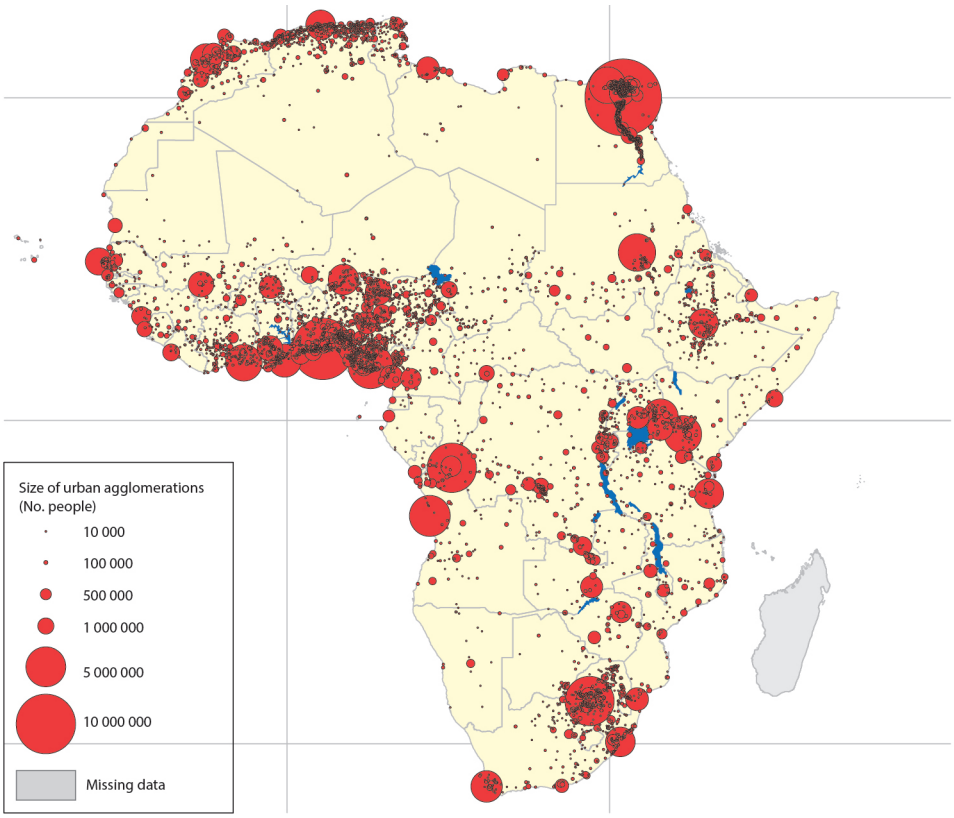
The cities along the corridor have long-standing backlogs in terms of investment and infrastructure. Examined one by one, they have "exhibited incongruous physical development, absence of a resilient tax base and a general lack of sustainable economic development patterns" (UN, 2008, p.98). These issues have been "reinforced by an

unfortunate lack of policies and interventions, as well as by the Structural Adjustment Programmes" (idem). Yet in West Africa, much hope in solving current-day challenges is pinned on the future of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. For the commissioner of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) the corridor is "a vital key for regional integration in view of stimulating economic growth and eliminating poverty" (Nepad, 2017, p.5). The Lagos-Abidjan corridor is move developed when compared to the sparsely populated and underdeveloped northern hinterland. This is further consolidated by the relative security and wealth of the coastline that centralises both economic infrastructure and political institutions, in comparison to heightened poverty, and ongoing security crisis in the Sahel (Choplin, 2015).

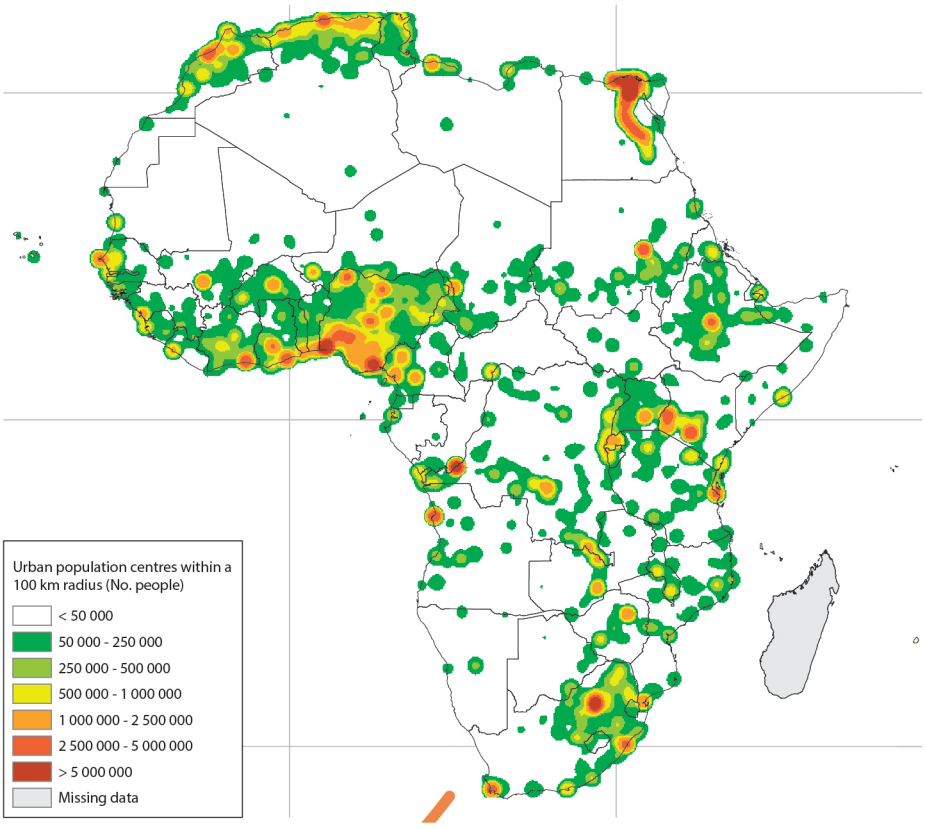
The corridor's potential lies in the high levels of diversity encountered along the coast. Whilst the cities along the corridor have experienced common deficits, they each have a specific trajectory and are highly differentiated. This differentiation produces opportunity in and of itself. The corridor traces a line across both Anglophone and Francophone West Africa, joining the dots between a series of different political regimes, currencies, economic markets, and linguistic groups. It is embedded within the Economic Community of West African States that seeks to promote the free circulation of people and goods along the corridor,[2] but is disjointed by national borders. However, these borders also create opportunity in the region, producing added value and exchange-value by creating difference, for example in currencies or available goods. And, despite the slow traffic, the spatial proximity between the main cities along the corridor is flagrant, with Cotonou at no more than 150 km from Lagos and 350 km from Accra.

The close proximity of such diverse cities along the corridor is an opportunity to be leveraged. Indeed, as Simone (2011) writes, "the most important consideration of regional urban development planning would emphasize how the differentiated resource bases, histories, and geo-economic positions of cities and towns could be most productively connected in order to create regional domains - crossing distinct national territories or rural-urban divides - with a density of synergistic relationships among diverse economic activities" (p.388). He adds that the most obvious example is how "transactions of all kinds could be maximised between Abidjan, Accra, Lomé, Cotonou, and Lagos - long imagined to be the elements of a mega-urban region" (idem). The corridor plays an important part in the political imaginary of post-colonial regional integration, abstractions substantiated through the creation of commissions, organisations and bodies to improve coordination between member states across this trans-national axis. The corridor most certainly exists as an object of regional policy, as a transport axis and as a topic of consultants' reports. However, it has failed to attract the attention of urban scholars, be that geographers, political scientists or anthropologists.

2 International treaties have been signed by Benin, that guarantee their right to circulation and residence (CEDEAO, 1975, Protocol A/P.1/5/79 de 1979)



Map 2 Population of urban agglomerations of over 10'000 inhabitants. Source eGeopolis 2016, Produced by Pesche et al. 2016, p.20



Map 3 Urban population centres within 100km radius. Source eGeopolis 2016, Produced by Pesche et al. 2016, p.20

1.2 Three Obstacles to Researching The Corridor

The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor has received little scholarly attention in contrast to other urban megacity regions, be it the megalopolis along the US north eastern coast first conceptualised by Gottman (1961), the SanSan between San Francisco and San Diego, the Pearl River Delta, the Rio de Janeiro – Sao Paulo conurbation, or the Gauteng City Region in South Africa (Greenberg, 2010). This is in part due to the fact that African urban studies have spent too long on the periphery of urban scholarship. However, it also reflects how traditionally urban researchers have focussed on individual cities along the Guinea Gulf, rather that the dynamics and urban processes that cut across them. Various factors have impeded the emergence of the corridor as a site of scholarly investigation and there is a resulting lack of knowledge about the factors driving this corridor's emergence. Several of these impeding factors are presented here below, in order to present why we currently know so little about the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. We also point to the ways in which this thesis has sought to overcome or navigate these challenges.

The site does not exist yet as an object of study and investigation, in opposition for example to better known objects of urban studies such as neighbourhoods, cities, borders, or ports. This in part is due to the difficulty in defining and delimiting the corridor. For it is not an established administrative unit and the exact territory it covers is debatable. The reach of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor is difficult to measure and quantify. Indeed, urban extensions such as corridors can no longer be clearly accounted for in hectares, settlement density, or population. Merrifield writes, "the urban is shapeless, formless and apparently boundless, riven with new contradictions and tensions that make it hard to tell where borders reside and what is inside and what is outside" (2013, p.910). The borders of the corridor vary depending on the interlocutor; policy reports at times refer to the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, whilst researchers also speak of the Lagos-Accra corridor (Choplin, 2019) and other multilateral organisations refer to the GILA, the Greater Ibadan-Lagos-Accra corridor (UN Habitat, 2008). The GILA for example positions Lagos not as an endpoint, but as the centre of a massive regional metropolitan landscape from which various urban corridors depart in different directions (idem). Whilst the end points of the corridor are contested, it is even harder to define the corridor's width. It thickens and thins, for example with the coastal highway shifting from two to eight lanes. At times, the metropolitan expansion appears to be only a sliver of row houses lining the road, at other times it bulges, pulling in market towns and suburbs. One would think that it would be easier to draw a fixed boundary for the corridor along the coast. But this too is shifting due to rapid erosion, the causes of which include the extraction of sand for the building sector, coastal infrastructure, rising sea-levels, and strong currents (Sossou & al., 2019). The fluctuating nature of the corridor's footprint creates a challenge for those wishing to study it, its territory overlies recognised boundaries of municipal authorities or national borders. Furthermore, the sheer scale of the corridor makes it a challenging task for a single researcher to apprehend. This challenge is navigated in this thesis by studying the corridor through the prism of several

cross sections situated in Benin, and yet reading those spaces of manifestations of the corridor.

A second obstacle to a more encompassing urban scholarship along the corridor is the colonial legacy of alternating anglo and francophone countries. Academic collaborations, trainings abroad, and teaching exchanges continue to privilege connections between former colonies and old powers. The linguistic geographies have resulted in anglophone scholars focussing on urban spaces in Nigeria and Ghana, whilst francophone scholars are predominant in studies of Benin, Togo, and the Ivory Coast. This is one manifestation of how colonial ties continue to play out in the funding of scientific research. In turn, both urban theory and empirical findings remain too often confined to either Anglo or Franco communities. Universities along the Guinea Gulf teach and publish in either French or English but rarely both, and their work is seldom translated. This hampers discussions on the joint processes of urbanisation that cut across these colonial divides. French and British colonialism partitioned how cities were planned, built, and governed along the corridor. These alternating modes of empire still have consequences in various aspects of urban development, from governance models, to land tenure, architectural aspirations, and toponymy - Oxford Street runs through Accra, the Boulevard St Michel cuts though Cotonou. When comparative projects occur along the corridor, they often draw on either francophone or anglophone examples. This is understandable given that the cities of Lagos and Accra provide a neater fit for comparative studies, as do Cotonou and Lomé. Rare are the scholars such as Spire (2011), who, in her analysis of strangers in the cities of Accra and Lomé, takes into account a more diverse cross-section of Anglo and Franco spaces. The contribution of such work is important, as it renders explicit the urban models imposed from France and England and provides a more diversified empirical base from which to analyse how particular urban phenomena play out in a West African context. The corridor, as an object of study that cuts across these colonial legacies provides an opportunity to further inter-regional urban dialogue. This thesis has sought to navigate the Anglo-Franco division in the region by drawing on both literatures and traditions of urban scholarship, seeking to place ideas from both schools in conversation with each other. However, to do so exhaustively would be a research endeavour in and of itself.

There is a third possible explanation for the lack of scholarship on this urban corridor. Researchers observing that there are still rural areas in-between the capital cities, have at times come to the rapid conclusion that there is therefore no metropolitan region. Indeed, when there are breaks in the cemented landscape, the corridor looks at times deceptively rural. Spire (2011) for example raises the question as to whether the corridor, in the spirit of McGee's (1991) work, is becoming an African desakota.[3] Is it "at the crossroads of the city and the country?" she asks. She continues her discussion by stating that "this hypothesis seems risky if we observe the landscapes con-

3 Desakota is a neologism proposed by McGee combining the Indonesian terms *desa* (village) and *kota* (towns) to characterise rural zones in the urban periphery with high density and co-existing agriculture and industry

stituting the 'corridor' of urbanisation between Lagos and Abidjan. The spaces between the towns are shaped by agricultural activities (coconut plantations, fields of yams…) and little village settlements whose distance to the city is not just physical, but also cultural" (Spire, 2011, p.56).[4] This might indeed appear to be the case, however upon closer inspection, one observes a pile of construction sand by the road, a hand-painted advertisement for video-production, or a blue landowner's sign, which all point to urban processes at play. Venturing into the villages, many of the 'rural' dwellers are absent, busy in town trading, or working as motor-bike taxi drivers. Their houses are built with money acquired through hustling on the Nigerian border or employed as civil servants in town while the farmland is being managed by a kin member living in the suburbs of the capital city. One of the dangers of maintaining a strong rural / urban dichotomy is that these places are not considered to be participating in the emergence of a corridor. Rural spaces are then seen as disproving the hypothesis of an urban corridor running between Lagos and Abidjan. It is possible that a focus on either rural or urban settings along the corridor has slowed down the emergence of a more comprehensive research agenda along the corridor. In order to overcome this barrier, this thesis does not take the rural and urban as bounded units but considers them as spaces that are subsequently connected by a series of linkages and ties. Indeed, it appears that the construction of rural and urban categories can at times undermine how individuals forge livelihoods across multiple nations and territories, contributing to their transformation and on-going urbanisation.

1.3 A Theoretical Apparatus for City-Less Urbanisation

Three obstacles presented above (the difficulty in delimitating the object of study, the colonial boundaries and the persistence of a strong rural-urban dichotomy) all hold some explanatory power in regards to the lack of scholarship on the corridor. However, another hypothesis remains. It is also possible that quite simply, urban studies have, until recently, not had the appropriate theoretical apparatus to apprehend the emergence of such territories. The difficulty in grasping the empirical nature of the corridor could also reflect a lack of theoretical tools fit to suit the task at hand.

This thesis takes as a point of departure Lefebvre's writings on the production of space. In doing so it explores urbanisation as both representations of space, a morphological form, and everyday practices (1996, p.111). The urban here is defined, following Lefebvre's writings, as a place of encounter, an assemblage of difference, and a priority of use over exchange value (idem, p.18). Urban form, in this sense is the simultaneity of events, perceptions, elements and the bringing together and

4 Author's translation: "à la croisée de la ville et de la campagne? Cette hypothèse semble risquée si l'on observe les paysages constitutifs du «corridor» d'urbanisation entre Abidjan et Lagos. Les espaces entre villes sont façonnés par des activités agricoles (cocoteraies, champs de maniocs...) et des petites unités villageoises où la distance avec la ville n'est pas tant physique que culturelle."

meeting of things. However, this thesis is also a departure from Lefebvre's claim that industrialisation is the point of departure for urbanisation. This sits greatly at odds with African urbanisation, that has occurred without a sustained manufacturing sector (Buckley & Kallergis, 2014; Fox, 2012; Potts, 2009).

For one, the nature of urbanisation along the corridor is far from the classical forms encountered within cities. It is urban, without necessarily resembling a city or a town. Writing about a form of *urbanisation sans ville,* Choplin and Pliez (2016) describe the corridor in question as "kilometres of buildings, hundreds of building sites, some of them uncompleted, but also cement depots, gravel and hardware shops: these are some of the markers of a city-less urbanisation. All the urban characteristics are here (buildings, infrastructure, transport, networks) but without us being able to talk about a city. Urbanity, centrality, shared spaces and cultural symbols, identity and places of shared memory are cruelly lacking"[5] (p.91). The space in question requires thinking beyond the familiar categories of the city that urban scholars are so well-versed in. In contrast to scholarship concerned with African city-ness (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004; Pieterse, 2010), this thesis proposes that there is a 'worldliness' of African urban spaces to be found outside of cities.

In past years, the concept of planetary urbanisation (Brenner, 2014; Brenner and Schmid, 2015) and in association, extended urbanisation has called our attention to new scales of urban conurbations. In the recent aftermath of interventions by Brenner and Schmid, it has been asserted that urban studies can "no longer focus on bounded 'cities' within particular national territories but should take a multi-scalar approach that discards a modernist ontology of linear, universal development and sees urbanisation instead as a global phenomenon characterised by contingent, uneven and disparate processes of spatial transformation that are continuing to produce highly variegated outputs in different places" (Sorensen and Labbé, forthcoming, p.1). Current thinking surrounding new scales of urbanisation has opened fields of investigation and come as a timely intervention in regard to the corridor in question. The territory between Lagos and Abidjan features many of the tensions debated within these debates. As a mode of urban development, it is not a relationship between core and periphery, but an urban pattern that is constituted by linkages that cut across different political, economic and socio-cultural systems.

Planetary urbanisation is the radical transformation and restructuring of urban geographies that can no longer by deciphered based on the traditional "city" and bounded singular settlement types (Brenner & Schmid, 2017). These spaces are instead characterised by the following features (Brenner and Schmid, 2011):

- The creation of new scales of urbanisation, that consolidate large polynucleated

5 Authors translation "Des kilomètres de bâtiments, des centaines de chantiers inachevés pour certains, mais aussi des dépôts de ciment, de gravier et des quincailleries: voilà des marqueurs de cette *urbanisation sans ville*. Toutes les caractéristiques de l'urbain sont ici présents, (la bâti, les infrastructures, le transport, les réseaux), sans qu'on puisse pour autant parler de ville. L'urbanité, la centralité, les espaces partagés et culturellement symbolique, l'identité et la mémoire des lieux font cruellement défaut."

metropolitan regions to create sprawling urban galaxies
- The blurring and re-articulation of the urban fabric where urban fragments are distributed unevenly across large-scale territories – dispersing outward from historical central city cores.
- The reterritorialization of the hinterland that are increasingly being operationalised to serve specific functions within worldwide spatial divisions of labour.
- The end of the wilderness as these spaces are transformed or degraded through the unfettered worldwide urbanisation
- New corridors of urbanisation, accelerated by the unprecedented densification of inter-metropolitan networks and new logistical geographies

The Guinea Gulf can be read as a manifestation of the mutually constitutive processes of concentrated and extended urbanisation. Concentrated urbanisation can be found in the main cities along the corridor where there is a "spatial clustering of population, means of production, infrastructure and investment" (Brenner & Schmid, 2017, p.54). Other spaces along the corridor are manifestations of extended urbanisation, where "activation and transformation of places, territories and landscapes (is occurring) in relation to agglomeration processes, (leading to the) subsequent uneven thickening and stretching of an urban fabric across the planet" (idem).

Throughout this thesis, what is meant by urbanisation therefore refers to the joint processes of extended and concentrated urbanisation, and explicitly considers emerging urban forms outside of the capital cities. It nonetheless pays attention to how actors on the ground are drawing up boundaries between rural and urban, and the consequences of this, both in terms of spatial transformation and the production of knowledge. For example the national census data in Benin draws up urban and rural binary categories that are based on territorial planning and the provision of urban amenities, as opposed to density.[6] Through this data there is also however the possibility of producing, and questioning alternative indicators of urbanity and this is something we seek to do. Finally, it considers the trans-local nature of urbanisation and does not claim a specific and particular form of African urbanisation, but instead seeks to put empirical observations into dialogue with broader debates within urban theory.

6 The official definitions of rural and urban, as established by the INSAE in the 2013 census are as follows: Urban areas are (i) arrondissements defined as urban in the 2002 census (ii) the capital of communes (old urban communes of old *sous-prefectures* or urban circumscriptions) with at least 10'000 inhabitants and at least one of the following infrastructures: a post office, a tax office, a water supply, electricity supply, a health center, a secondary school, a bank or decentralized financial system (iii) an arrondissement with at least five of the above infrastructures and at least 10'000 inhabitants.

1.4 Problematising Urban Migration Beyond Rural Exodus

Ongoing debates concerning the processes and nature of extended urbanisation increasingly point to importance of human mobility. Theories of planetary urbanisation argue that human settlement and the number of inhabitants are no longer a sufficient measure of urbanisation. The number of people with a fixed abode in one place is no longer a sufficient measure for tracking metropolitan growth. This now requires a more dynamic account of how people move in, out and through these emerging territories. In the context of the ongoing research project *Territories of Extended Urbanisation,* the case study of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor has been analysed alongside other sites of extended urbanisation in India, China, Europe and Brazil. Through these discussions migration, mobility and movement emerged as a key factor in the basic mechanisms underpinning urbanisation patterns. Within this project, initial conclusions drawing from fieldwork in a variety of sites indicated that:

"The production of an urban fabric leads to a proliferation of new uses, as it enables urban practices and connects people and places. This necessitates the analysis of all kinds of *movements of people* that crisscross the territory and at the same time bind it together and define it. While commuting is important to understand the reach of agglomerations and thus concentrated urbanization, territories of extended urbanization are usually characterized by longer and more varied forms of mobility. This includes various forms of circular or temporary migration, where people only migrate for a certain time or follow a recurrent pattern returning regularly to their places of departure. Concomitantly, there are also movements by people searching for all sorts of opportunities, trying to do small businesses, crossing borders to take advantage of small fluctuations of prices and exchange rates of currencies, connecting widely ramified social networks and maintaining extended family ties. With these movements and its related activities people create a multi-scalar social reality and produce large and extended urban territories that transgress all kinds of borders" (Schmid, 2019).

As the statement above makes apparent, the way in which migration is driving extended urbanisation along the corridor is quite different from the classic forms of rural exodus that in the past were held accountable for the growth of cities. While this was the case in the decades after independence, it is no longer the only factor. This thesis is not a study of the permanent relocation of rural populations in urban centres along the corridor. In fact, such migration processes fail to account for current urban growth in Africa which is instead occurring in-situ as rural areas are becoming urbanised. A recent Africapolis study states: "the extent of in-situ urbanisation across Africa also challenges the influence still attributed to rural exodus and residential migration in driving urban growth". It goes even further, suggesting that instead it is the absence or weakness of rural migration that is producing densification and in-situ urbanisation (OECD, 2020, p.27).

Researchers have for some time, been drawing attention to the limited role of rural

exodus in Africa's urbanisation. Beauchemin and Bocquier's (2003) analysis of urbanisation in eight Francophone countries in West Africa aligns with findings of Ferguson (1999) and Potts (2009) that migration's role in the growth of cities is smaller than to be expected, with capital cities attracting fewer migrants at the turn of the century than in the 1970s (Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2003, p.8). The hypothesis put forward is that this is linked both to the balancing out of the respective weight of rural and urban populations, and a context of economic crisis, whereby natural growth and reclassification have come to play a more significant role than migration in the demographic growth of francophone, West African cities (idem). Tacoli et al (2014) in turn estimate that migration only accounts for one third of urban population growth in sub-Saharan Africa and what they observe in turn, is increasing mobility and migration back and forth between rural and urban areas.

Whilst the arrival of rural migrants to African cities is well-documented, (Schildkrout, 1978; Shack and Skinner, 1979; Skinner, 1963), it is far from producing a complete picture of how migration and urbanisation might intersect. As Bakewell and Jónsson underline, "it is far too simplistic to consider African cities primarily as places of arrival or departure. The challenge is to understand, on the one hand, how mobility interacts with the development and change of urban space, and on the other, how the life of the city transforms people's mobility" (2011, p.10).

To study migration-driven urbanisation involves thinking beyond the framework of the arrival city (Saunders, 2010). The narrative of the arrival city is rural to urban migration, as people move from the village to the city, emptying out the countryside and contributing to the growth of cities and higher rates of urbanisation - the classic rural exodus. But urbanisation and migration come together in other ways too. There are multiple combinations of the two, endless if urbanisation is to be considered through the lens of Lefebvre as not just a physical manifestation or bricks and mortar, but also as a mode of territorial regulation and of everyday experience (Lefebvre, 1996).

Taking only the first dimension of urbanisation, its physical manifestation, it becomes clear in just how many ways migration might drive urbanisation. Migrants urbanise both through their presence, and in their absence. For example, migrants physically move into, through and out of both urban and rural locations. This produces specific urban forms, and in the case of rural locations it can lead to in-situ urbanisation. At the same time, despite being absent, migrants also impact urbanisation in their places of origin, through trans-local practices. Such practices can both accelerate urbanisation (for example through remittances[7], transferring urban norms and behaviour or investing in infrastructure) or delay it (for example through maintaining rural livelihoods or managing farmland from afar). Stipulating the role of

7 There is a significant field of scholarship on the role of remittances in Development, both in terms of financial transfers for on overview discussions on this in the African context see (Castles & Wise, 2008, La Croix, 2009, Gubert. et al.2010; Ratha et al. 2011). See also the special edition of Autrepart 'L'Argent de la Migration' 2013. This is complemented by work on social remittances (Levitt; 1998) especially in the case of transnational politics (Lacroix et al. 2016).

migration-driven urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor should also not overshadow how urban processes themselves can trigger movement. If the reverse causality is considered, urbanisation can attract migrants, the bright-lights theory, drawing people to the city, with its resources and opportunities. However, urbanisation can just as well force people to leave the city, as they are displaced and evicted to make room for new projects, or as they are outpriced of central neighbourhoods and relocate to the cheaper periphery.

1.5 Mixed Migration: Traders, Diasporas and Returnees

To gain a systematic understanding of how migration is transforming the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, we do not focus on one particular group of migrants to the detriment of others. Instead the boundaries of the study are those of the specific urban locations studied along the corridor. Furthermore, we approach migration from the framework of 'mixed migration', reflecting how migrants are never just economic migrants or asylum seekers, but their lives and trajectories are often a combination of both. For the IOM, "the principal characteristics of mixed migration flows include the irregular nature of and the multiplicity of driving factors such movements, and the differentiated needs and profiles of the persons involved" (IOM, 2018). These are 'complex population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and other migrants' (idem.). Many of these movements are circular migrations, fluid movement between countries, and even within countries that can be either temporary or long-term.

Nonetheless we seek to provide clarity when referring to different categories of migrants. The classic definition of a migrant is a person who is older than 15 years and who has lived for more than one year in a country where they are not nationals (OECD, 2006). We refer in this case to international migrants, or regional migrants when they are from West Africa. The three most representative groups of migrants in Benin are from Nigeria, Togo and Niger. When presenting data on international migrants, the focus is often on these three categories. There is a limited focus in this thesis on other international migrants, for example the Europeans, Indians or Chinese, that in numbers represent very small groups, even if these groups hold significant economic power. We use the term internal migrant to refer to the movement of people from one area of the country to another for the purpose of establishing a new residence. Here we define internal migrants as members of a household who have moved into the commune (the local administrative unit) within the last five years - this includes both foreigners and nationals.

We also employ the term diaspora. Many international migrants along the corridor are organised within trading diasporas, for example the Igbo second-hand clothes traders (Rosenfeld, 2013), or the Lebanese second-hand car traders (Beuving, 2006). They are organised in networks, associations or communities that maintain links with

their homelands. This concept covers more settled expatriate communities and second or third generation migrants. At times, such migrants have acquired nationality from either the host country, or third country. For example, many Lebanese residing in Benin have Ghanaian passports. The Beninese diaspora also features in the thesis in the discussion of remittance housing. The Beninese diaspora located in the north, mostly in France, America and Canada is a high-skilled diaspora, often employed in services as opposed to low-skilled work in the agricultural and manufacturing sector undertaken by African migrants from other countries such as Senegal.

There are also distinctions we purposefully do not make in this thesis. Notably, when discussing migrants in Benin, we are not concerned with distinctions between formal and informal, legal and illegal migrants. This is because of the high levels of informal movement, the rights of regional citizens to travel between countries within the ECOWAS, and the limited consequences informal status has on the everyday life of migrants - as opposed to, for example, the everyday life of a *sans-papier* in France or an *alien* in the United States. Nor do we distinguish between chosen and forced migration. Mobility along the corridor is not always voluntary nor is it part of a nomadic life choice or a desire to be on the road. Whilst many households have the ambition to stay put and lay claims to permanence along the corridor, this is often countered by the turbulence and accumulated uncertainties of urban life in West Africa. Conflicts around inherited property, state-sponsored eviction and demolition programmes, flooding, currency crashes, under-employment or political instability can quickly uproot ties to specific places, edging urban dwellers to seek out opportunities in another locality along the corridor. Whilst other times, mobility is a strategy that enables residents along the corridor to find work, accumulate capital, and construct houses back home, reinforcing their claims to a plot of land with money earned in one of the booming capitals along the coast.

It is also important to state the limits and boundaries of this research in terms of migration flows. This thesis addresses migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor and is not a study of migration from the Sahel to the coastline, nor a study of migration to Europe. Whilst movement along the corridor can be qualified as intra-urban, North-South migration is more likely to be rural-urban. Whilst situated outside of the boundaries of this thesis, it would be nonetheless important in the future to gain a stronger understanding of these North-South patterns. This is especially the case given rising levels of environmental degradation and political insecurity in the Sahel regions which render the urban areas along the coast more attractive.

There is a great disparity in the movements and circulations under consideration in this thesis. Yet it is exactly the accumulation and intersection of these movements that is transforming the urban fabric along the corridor. The important takeaway here is that migration is conceived as a far wider range of movements than rural-urban relocation and includes a diversity of categories: international or internal, trading diasporas or returnees. This is important, because we argue that it is the diversity of these movements that is producing the urban fabric.

1.6 Revisiting The Urban Fabric with Lefebvre and Appadurai

This thesis seeks to establish how migration is transforming the urban fabric along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This requires careful consideration of what exactly the urban fabric is. Textiles offer up strong imagery for urban theorists, providing a surface that is both continuous and differentiated. This thesis positions itself within this tradition, starting out from Lefebvre's urban fabric. It does not just adopt a second-hand metaphor, but seeks to move beyond textile as an analogy or metaphorical device, to question how exactly this urban fabric is produced, and the role migration plays in this process. In the following section we introduce Lefebvre's (1968) urban fabric and its production and discuss how we put this concept into dialogue with Appadurai's (2005) discussions of the warp and the woof.

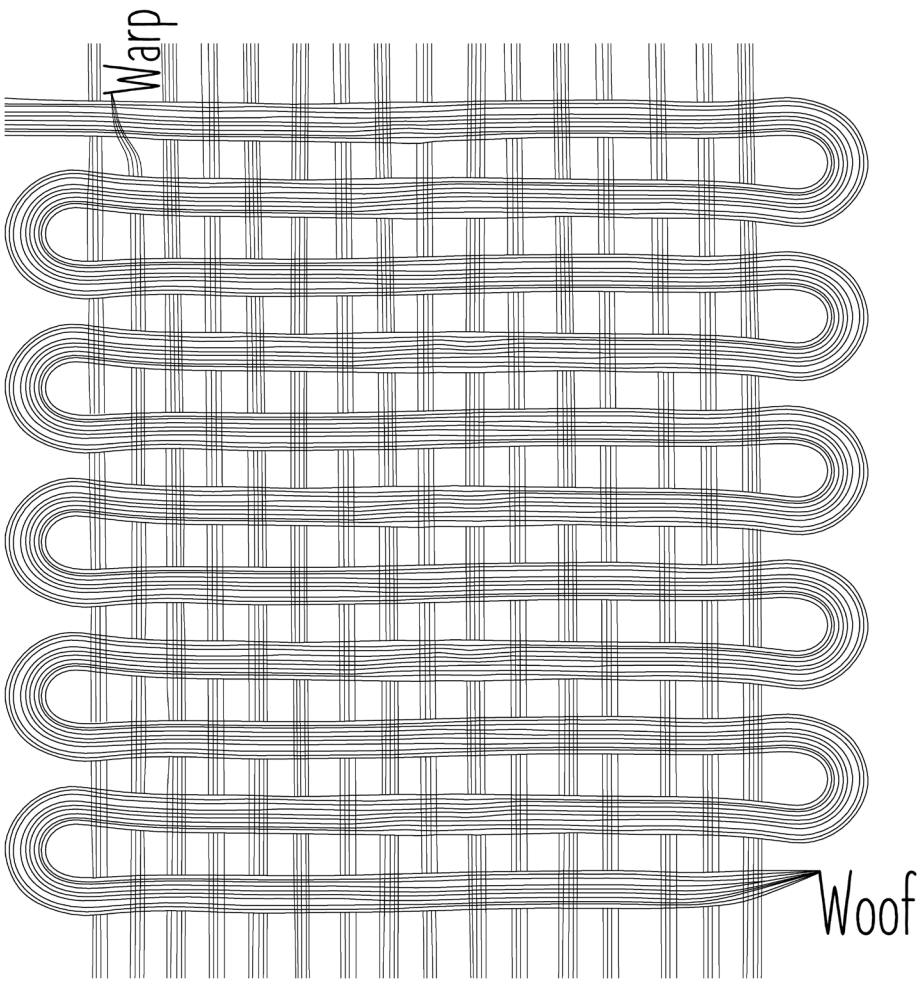


Fig.4 The Warp and the Woof

The lexical field of fabrics offers scholars a powerful language with which to describe urban space and textile analogies abound in architecture (Thibault, 2016). Textiles

and buildings employ shared materials, techniques, and functions (Ingold, 2015) and for the architectural theorist Semper, the two originate from the knotting and weaving of fibres (Semper, 2004). Textiles have become a metaphor from which to explore the 'patchwork' of migrant neighbourhoods, or how infrastructure 'hems-in' certain locations. On a more theoretical level, urban space has been discussed through the Deleuzian 'folds', 'felt' and 'quilts' (Deleuze and Guatarri, 1987) or even the 'crushed handkerchief' description of Serres and Latour (1995, p.60). Textiles, in another sense are in their most basic form a web made up of lines that cross over.

Theorists of planetary urbanisation continue to employ the term, referring to an "increasingly worldwide, if unevenly woven fabric in which the sociocultural and political-economic relations of capitalism are enmeshed" (Brenner and Schmid, 2014, p.751). This notion[8] allows us to further the investigation of urbanism outside of cities, as they use the idea of the fabric to articulate how the urban stretches to envelop everywhere (Merrifield, 2013). Along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor it is lives that are stretched, as trans-local household strategies keep people on their toes. How in this case, can movement within the fabric be accounted for?

In the context of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, people are often on the move, travelling in-between the central nodes (Lagos, Porto-Novo, Cotonou, Lomé, Accra, Abidjan), as they cross borders and municipal boundaries to trade. One of the central limitations of the urban fabric as it is currently used, is that it fails to account for the mobility of individuals. Furthermore, it depicts the urban fabric as a surface that grows of its own accord, and as such overlooks the agency of individual strategies acted upon as people move along the corridor seeking to tie into it. It mirrors an almost technocratic approach that fails to feature people. The attempt here is to unpick the urban fabric to understand how the various threads are held together. How in this sense do the many fibres come together to form a web?

As a go-to concept the 'urban fabric' has re-emerged through recent debates on planetary urbanisation, in turn coinciding with the renewed popularity of Lefebvrian terms in both academia and practice over the last decade. The notion is often evoked to refer to sprawling urbanisation or as a place holder to describe urban growth. This in turn weakens its capacity to capture the everyday experience of people as they dwell, move through, and transform urban territories. It is as though, through translation from the French original, the term urban fabric (*tissu urbain*) has been stripped of the production of the urban space (*la fabrique urbaine*). Thus the key question is: how is this fabric produced? *Comment se fabrique le tissu?* People, practices, and in the case of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, migration, are all central components of this production.

For Lefebvre (1968), the urban fabric described the growth of urban spaces in the

8 Brenner has argued that instead they refer to the "constantly imploding and exploding fabric of social relations, struggles, experiences, strategies" (personal communication to Roy, 2016, 7). The question this then raises is, how do these struggles and strategies transform the surface of the 'urban fabric?

late 20th century, extending into previously rural spaces and covering an increasing dense territory of regions, agglomerations and towns within industrialised countries (Lefebvre, 1968; Merrifield, 2013). This 'urban fabric' could form a coherent unity around several old or new towns, but also could encompass other urban forms including peripheries, trade networks, industrial zones, secondary housing, and recreational spaces. More than a fabric thrown over a territory, Lefebvre describes a "net with a varying mesh, that lets sectors that are more or less spread out slip through: hamlets or villages, or entire regions" (p. 11). This fabric[9] is presented as growing of its own accord, and the terms employed describe it as a living organism, functioning like an "ecosystem" (p.12), spreading in the mode of "biological proliferation" (p.11). It is as if the 'urban fabric' and its inevitable expansion occurs under its own agency. It is this element of Lefebvre's conceptualisation that in turn limits the agency that can be attributed to those living within such spaces.

Many of the strategies at play along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor are to do with migration and mobility, as people either seek to capture resources as they flow down the corridor or move along it on the lookout for new opportunities. People move for a variety of reasons; to seek out opportunity, to make the most of differences produced by borders, owing to currency fluctuations, or because of new policies in one country or another. Settlement here is both a luxury and a danger, as given the economic, legal and political uncertainties, tying one's assets into one urban location is a risky endeavour. Here it is that livelihoods, networks and relationships are stretched across multiple spaces, as people become infrastructure (Simone, 2004) extending the urban fabric with them. If the concept of the 'urban fabric' is to be effective in this setting, it must be able to account for this movement. Only by incorporating mobility, can the notion of the 'urban fabric' become operable in the context of the West African corridor.

We suggest here that Lefebvre's basic concept of the urban fabric can be strengthened through the work of Appadurai. Appadurai's (2005) Ethnoscapes employ a textile analogy to provide a sturdier account for how people, tourists, immigrants, exiles, and guest-workers transform the geographical and political spaces that they move through. In textiles, the warp are the threads stretched vertically in a loom that are crossed by the horizontal woof.[10] In the ethnoscape, the warp is the entrenched and adaptive structures, such as stable communities, residence or filial forms. Meanwhile, the woof represents the various modes of mobility produced by people in flux. For Appadurai (2005, p.43), the warp of stabilities is "shot through with the woof of human motion" and increasingly so in a global context of displacement, migration, and mobility. And much like urbanisation, these movements are occurring on a larger scale than previously imagined as people's translocal realities and fantasies stretch over wider territories and jump continents; and, as people on the move cannot afford to stay put, they let their imaginations settle in one location" (p.43).

9 Author's translation: "Plus qu'un tissu jeté sur le territoire, ces mots désignent une sorte de prolifération biologique et une sorte de fillet à mailles inégales, laissant échapper des secteurs plus ou moins étendus: hameaux ou villages, régions entières."

10 The woof is also referred to in English as the weft. Here we maintain Appadurai's terms.

The warp and the woof account for both the structures and individual agency that produce mobility. This metaphor has previously been adopted by scholars of West African migration (Okome and Vaughan, 2012). However, the image has the potential to be further mobilised, to understand how the urban fabric is produced through this movement. The warp can represent certain structural elements of urban expansion, infrastructure, roads, electricity lines, that are crossed with individual trajectories that, like the woof, criss-cross back and forth along the corridor. When assembled, the density and concentration of these movements produce the urban fabric.

Writing about various modes of textile production, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.475) note that as the woof dips in and out of the warp, it follows the neat framework of the weaving loom, and is determined by its size. This is not the case of the urban fabric, which rarely sticks to a pre-defined master plan, and can extend in all directions, refusing to be contained within a framework - be it a policy or administrative boundary. Deleuze and Guattari go onto contrast woven fabric with crochet which produces an open space and can be prolonged in all directions, always beginning with a knot, or the piece-by-piece construction of patchwork, made through successive additions of fabric squares (p.476).[11] If we return to the idea of the urban fabric, it indeed becomes important to be able to think about how this fabric extends, beyond the structural framework of the loom.

Here, the idea of knots is powerful in helping to understand how people tie into the surface of the urban fabric. It also moves away from the image of a smooth continuous surface to something a little more inconsistent and knottier, as the urban fabric ladders, gets holey, and is stitched back together. Appadurai can help strengthen Lefebvre's concept of the urban fabric by taking us down a level to consider in more detail how the threads hold the fabric together. However even taking this into consideration, it is still too smooth to account for novel patterns of urbanisation. In order for it to work in the context of West African urbanisation, the fabric needs to get a little knottier, a little more entangled and allow for people to tie into the framework of the urban fabric, and pull threads out to extend it into new spaces. Only by discarding the smooth, continuous, self-expanding surface of the urban fabric can we start to understand how people on the move are producing quite a different type of urban fabric. In this thesis we do so by introducing knots as a mechanism to capture how people tie into and release from the urban fabric.

11 Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in their discussion of smooth and striated spaces oppose the smooth surface of felt with the seriated texture of a fabric, that is composed of long thin lines (475). Spaces they suggest are striated through the events that transform it. So, whilst the city is a striated space par excellence, the sea remains smooth (481). However, the two spaces rarely exist distinctively, with smooth space constantly being transformed into striated space, and vice versa (474). Placing this discussion side-by-side with Lefebvre's urban fabric, leads us to consider how the plotting of lines with the urban fabric transforms it, rendering smooth space striated as time and space is mapped and planned and ordered around money, work and housing (481). Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of mobility and the role it plays in producing striated spaces is of equal importance. Nomads they suggest, reside within a smooth space following meandering movements, whilst striated travel moves from A to B - distinguishing how various lines of movement contribute to the production of the 'urban fabric'.

1.7 Thinking through Four Knots

The central research question of this thesis is: How is migration transforming the urban fabric along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor? We are interested here in understanding the various manners in which the movement of people is driving urbanisation. What are the consequences of movement along the corridor, both in terms of how places are being reconfigured, and the kind of urban possibilities this is generating? We seek to answer this question from the perspective of both people on the move, and those dwelling along the corridor.

The thesis mobilises knots as a theoretical device to research the interplay between urbanisation and migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. We want to understand the various manners in which people tie into, attach and detach from the urban fabric, and the impact this has on the urban fabric itself. The intention here is that by paying attention to entanglements, these knots can help better understand the everyday mobilities, struggles, and tensions at play in the formation of the urban fabric.

Discussions on the theoretical potential of the knot (Green, 2014; Ingold, 2015) have yet to be applied to the urban setting, nor have they explored the full range of knotting typologies. In an urban context, the variety of knots present contributes to the diversity of strategies at play in the production of the urban space. Knotting is a skill set and a strategy that allows people to tie themselves into space. This is especially the case in an urban fabric that is constantly evolving, under negotiation, and where urban dwellers must re-establish their claims to belonging and negotiate their right to the city. This process of knotting and unknotting is underway along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor as people set themselves adrift, or seek to secure a toe-hole in the urban fabric, loosening the knots that tie them to their villages, moving towards the urban coastline.

Tying knots is a key skill set for many of the tradespeople making a living along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. Braiders sat in their workshops, in courtyards and on pavements tie knots and trace intricate patterns into ladies' hair. The fishermen repair their nets or pull lines of knotted rope out of the water using knots and mattress makers, seamstresses and tailors knot with their needles. Traditional weavers produce mats and partitions out of natural fibres and even spiritual practitioners knot various elements in and around their vodún fetishes. For as Calvino (2013) underlines, the knot is not just an abstract point, but always a consequence of very precise actions carried out by practitioners of a range of crafts. It is an embodied practice, a turn of hand that decides to pass one end of a line above or below, or around itself or another thread (p. 62). For Ciavolella, the knot remains at the interface of "the theory and practice, with which man, carrying out his task, passes from intention to fact, from will to getting it done, and gives shape to the outside world, untying it from other constraints"[12] (2020, para.22).

12 Own translation: Il nodo, allora, è simbolo dell'atto immateriale, alla congiunzione della teoria ("ora faccio un nodo

Knots vary greatly in their typologies, including for instance holdfasts, hooks, loops, and splices (Ashley, 1960), and range from the simple overhand, that stops a point from unreeling, to much more elaborate methods. When thinking through knots, it is important to recall that not all knots perform the same task and that they each respond to a particular need. How the knot is tied makes a difference to the urban fabric, as does the initial intention, and thought behind it, as knots can be inventive, strategic, but also rushed, or instinctive. And yet they can also provide a harbour of stability, safety and security enabling people to tie into locations they strongly identify with.

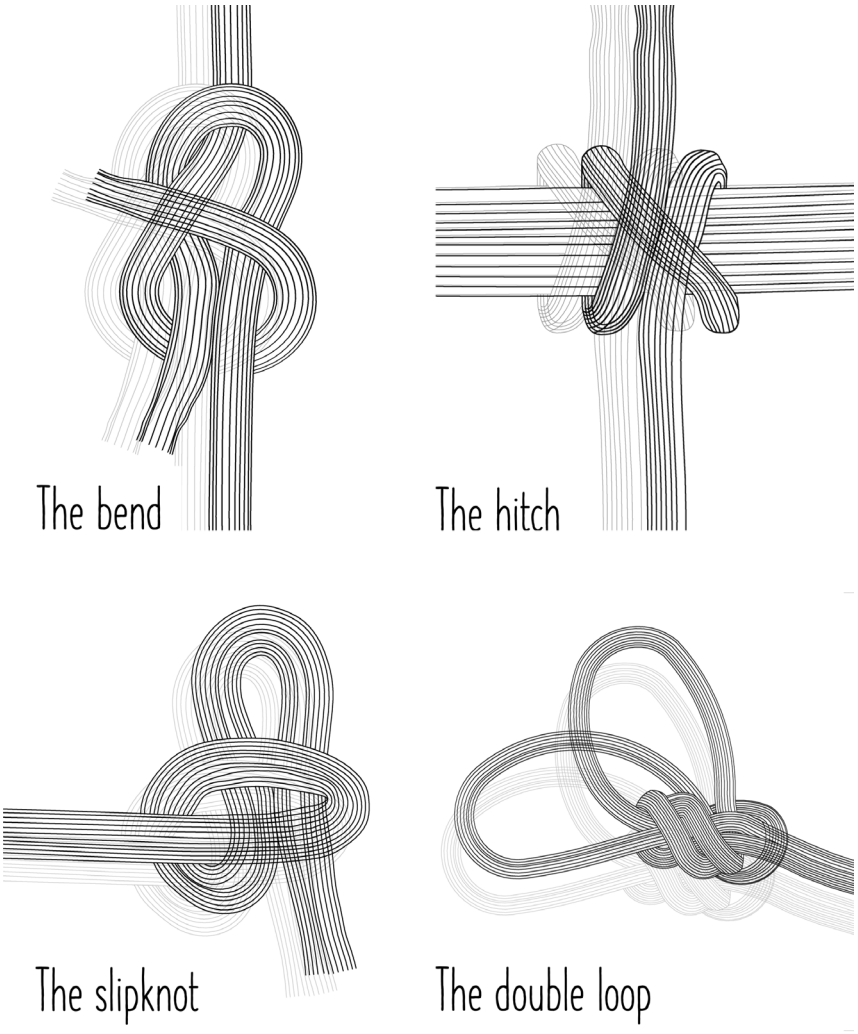


Fig.5 Four Knots: The Bend, Hitch, Slipknot and Douple Loop

così") e della pratica ("ora lo sto facendo ed è venuto così"), con cui l'uomo, svolgendo il suo compito, passa dall'intenzione al fatto, dal voluto allo svolto, e dà forma al mondo esterno, costringendolo alla propria volontà e slegandolo da altre costrizioni.

We argue that knots, as both mathematical figures and practical craft, reinforce the notion of the urban fabric and enable it to account for the interconnectedness of various urban elements across larger territories. Importantly, the extensive typology of knots can account for both tactics and strategies within such territories and loss of choice as people get tied down. For whilst some knots are designed to tie into place, others release quickly. Knots can be quick and dirty, impossibly complex, all whilst resisting varying levels of tension that emerge as the urban fabric extends.

Introducing specific typologies of knots, we show how precise ways of tying, such as hitches or binds, can provide an analytical entry-point to understand current transformations of the urban environment. Our intention here is to operationalise the notion of knots, to do so, each chapter is associated with a specific knot, that reflects particular dynamics of migration-driven urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This is both a conceptual endeavour, and an attempt to account for the many lived experiences of people on the move.

As such, this thesis seeks to pay special attention to the various lines, threads and friction underneath this surface and the entanglements that ensue. It proposes knotting as a process that both extends and repairs the urban fabric, whilst accounting for the agency of various strategies that, although not always consistent or coherent, combine to produce the urban fabric.

1.8 Thesis Overview

The structure of the thesis is as follows; the two subsequent chapters complete the introduction. The following chapter presents an overview of the literature at the crossroads of urbanisation and migration in the African context. Here we present central work on the role of migration as a driving force for urbanisation and explore how such contributions can inform our analysis of the urban fabric along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This is followed by a methodological chapter. The core of the thesis then presents four processes through which migration is transforming the urban fabric. These are each analysed as a specific knot that ties into or releases from the urban fabric: the bind, hitch, slipknot and double loop. Each knot reflects a strategy through which people on the move are transforming the urban fabric of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

The first knot is the bend, this is a knot that ties one length of rope to another. It is a connector. In this sense the bend is the most appropriate knot from which to start, it is a knot that invites us to think about how the various locations along the corridor tie together. The chapter starts from the road, the principal infrastructure that binds the Lagos-Abidjan corridor together. It asks what specific urban forms are being produced by urban movement along this road. This chosen entry point is also a methodological endeavour, what happens when we decentre studies of migration and

urbanisation, eclipsing major capitals to consider what happens in the outskirts? It pays attention to the inconspicuous manifestation and small shifts that point to the emergence of a territory of extended urbanisation. This detour involves skirting around the urban centres and observing the 'gaps' along the corridor. In seeking to understand what ties this corridor together, the chapter asks what the historical drivers of urbanisation have been along the corridor. How has mobility produced this urban corridor, and what are its various manifestations? What does it mean today to live alongside this corridor, and how does this impact local livelihoods? Having started in the outskirts, the chapter finishes by considering a central Cotonou market run by migrants, and the role this market might play in helping us understand the urban fabric.

The second knot is the hitch. The hitch is a knot that ties an object in place to keep it from moving. This knot helps shed light on how people on the move are tied down as they travel along the corridor. As a central livelihood strategy for corridor dwellers, the hitch is the means to slow down the circulation of people and goods, to tie them down in order to extract both economic and social capital. It asks if along this corridor, urban space is produced when the movements of people and things are held up or slowed down. As such, this chapter is an entry point to understand how forms of immobility are involved in the production of the urban fabric. It argues that along this corridor, in these gaps, urban space is produced when the movements of people and things are held up or slowed down. Are communities dwelling along the corridor generating revenue by slowing down mobility? If that was to be the case, what then, we ask, are the contradictions that emerge between our observations of everyday mobility and migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor and current policy discourse in terms of territorial planning, regional integration and migration management? To what extent are these policies failing to use existing opportunities along the corridor, and overlooking the challenges faced by both people on the move and those staying put? Here we argue that a better understanding of the mechanisms of the 'hitch' knot could produce more insightful policies that reflect the needs of both migrant and host populations.

The third knot is the slipknot. The slip knot is designed to allow the knot to spill instantly, all that is required is to pull on the end of the rope, which withdraws the loop immediately. The slip knot releases quickly and can be used to cast off whenever the necessity might arise. This knot best captures the precariousness and vulnerabilities of urban life along the corridor; that at any given moment, one might have to relocate. This chapter focusses on a specific case study and traces the implementation and aftermath of a nation-wide urban clearance project called 'The Liberation of Public Space.' The chapter considers the aftermath of these events, describing what happens when urban dwellers lose their toe-hole in the city, and are forced to move on, or back, to their places of origin. In doing so it provides a counter-narrative to the idea that urban spaces attract migrants, illustrating instead what happens when the city ejects them. The chapter describes how following such operations, the displaced re-produce the urban fabric - resorting to umbrellas to claim a spot in the

shade. This chapter highlights how in the face of clearance operations people must quickly release from the urban fabric, detaching themselves and moving to new sites.

The final knot is the double loop. This is a knot that ties into two places at the same time, it enables a double attachment. This chapter looks at how migrants along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor do exactly this, and maintain multi-sited attachments, cultivating ties to several locations simultaneously. As such, this chapter asks how migrants drive urbanisation through trans-local urbanisation strategies. It adopts a two-pronged approach, looking at how migrants transform the built environment in their place of origin and in the urban areas they move into. It does so through the prism of housing, first considering the remittance housing migrants finance back home, and the tribulations involved in constructing these projects. It then turns to consider migrant housing in their place of current residence, and presents findings that migrants are better housed than non-migrants and have improved access to amenities. This raises the question of whether being rooted and strongly attached to one spot is an advantage or a liability in the context of West African urbanisation.

Cutting across the thesis, this research raises several policy concerns. What are the various tensions between official policy and everyday practices of mobility and immobility along the corridor? Looking at the links between migration and development, questions arise such as why might migrants be doing better than locals, and what does this mean for development policy? In terms of remittances, what is the point of building a house back home, is it just a vanity project, or is it doing something more? How do urban dwellers respond to urban policies, such as evictions that produce yet more poverty, and why, on the surface, are such policies accepted and welcomed? These are some of the concrete questions this thesis will seek to address. Without providing prescriptive answers, it aims nonetheless to provide case studies and evidence that can better inform decision-making.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis pulls together the various findings of each chapter. It does so considering two significant impediments to current mobility along the coast. The first, being the closure of the Nigerian border and the second, the current Covid-19 pandemic. The thesis closes with the voices of three black women, who in 2018 shared tales of mobility, migration, and displacement from Benin. Their voices sung out in New York, Paris and London, suggesting that narratives from a small country in West African can resonate strongly elsewhere.

Before continuing, it is important to recognise that each knot is also the fruit of academic collaboration and exchange.[13] The first two knots (the bend and the hitch) stem from rich conversations within a Future Cities Lab project entitled 'Territories of Extended Urbanisation.'[14] This project, based on a comparison of different urban

13 A word of thanks to Abdou Maliq Simone, Bela Dimova, Rodrigo Castriota, Mark Goodale, and Muriel Cote for their feedback on my use of knots as a theoretical framework.

14 Project team: Christian Schmid, Milica Topalovic, Elisa Bertuzzo, Rodrigo Castriota, Nancy Couling, Metaxia Markaki, Nikos Katsikis, Tammy Wong, Philippe Rekacewicz, Simone Abdou Maliq

constellations - a mine in the Brazilian Amazon, Dongguan, a Chinese industrial region, or the North Sea. It draws on these cases, moving towards theory-building to elucidate urbanisation processes that are unfolding on spatial scales that go beyond the mega-city, or even the agglomeration. The research presented in these two chapters forms the basis of a planned contribution to an edited volume resulting from this project. The third knot, the slipknot, and the case study of one urban eviction programme was written in collaboration with Armelle Choplin and is intended for publication under joint authorship. The final knot, the double loop, draws in a discussion held during a workshop in June 2017 at the ETHZ entitled 'The Role of Place Attachment in the contexts of migration and urbanization', which brought together place attachment researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. This led to a joint paper exploring migration and place attachment (Di Masso & al., 2019). A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication under the title "No One Is a Prophet at Home: Mobility and Senses of Place in West Africa" in the book *Changing Senses of Place: Navigating Global Challenges*, edited by Christopher M. Raymond, Lynne Manzo, Timo von Wirth, and Andrés Di Masso and published by Cambridge University Press.

2. LITERATURE AT THE CROSSROADS OF URBANISATION AND MIGRATION

Migration and urbanisation are processes that significantly transform our social world and their intersection has been a stable topic of research in Africa over the last ninety years. This chapter seeks to provide an overview to this research, and how the relationships between urbanisation and migration have been problematised in the social sciences. We ask how this work has accounted for the ways in which migration transforms urban territories. The proposal of this thesis, to analyse migration-driven urbanisation through the concept of knots in the urban fabric, is one that builds on and complements much pre-existing work. This chapter therefore seeks to demonstrate how this thesis is grounded at the intersection of both urban and migration scholarship, a crossroads that has been well-trodden by political scientists, anthropologists, geographers and sociologists.

The chapter adopts the following structure: it first situates migration as a prevalent feature of contemporary West Africa, one that drives not only urbanisation, but many others features of every-day life. It then turns to present how the classic schools of thought have informed how we currently conduct research on urban migration - the School of Chicago and the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. The chapter contrasts the manner in which these two schools theorised the arrival of migrants in the city and compare this with a stream of French sociology that emerged at the same time. A brief overview is then presented of the literature on Zongos, the classic West African arrival neighbourhood. The Zongos have been a preferred entry point for the study of urban migration in West Africa and have provided insights into how the migration transforms both the city centres, and more recently, the outskirts. This chapter finishes by recognising the growing importance immobility has come to play in migration scholarship. This, the chapter suggests, resonates strongly with our proposal to mobilise knots as an analytical device.

2.1 Mobility as a Defining Trait of West Africa

In West Africa, whilst migration is a driving force of urbanisation, it is also a driving change in many other areas, from gender, to agriculture, the arts and education. At times, the vitality and youth of the African continent make it appear that everything is in movement or could at any point take off. However, studies of this mobility, as we present briefly below, often appear more concerned with European bound migration and quantifying flows than understanding more predominant and everyday forms of internal regional migration.

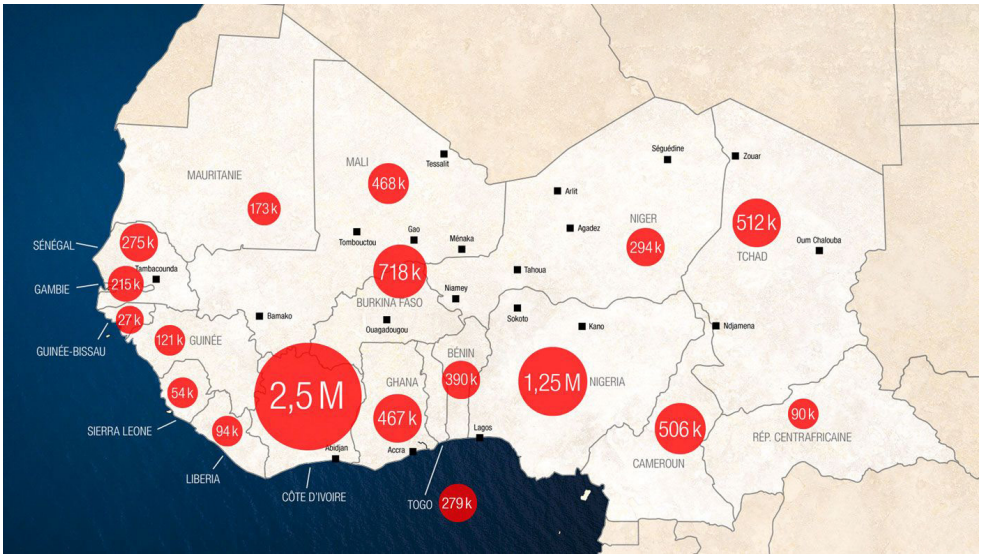
In Benin, the proverbial expression 'oxo lè wè mon non yi kpè in' translates to 'only mountains do not cross paths'. The expression is used both as a warning, to respect one another as your paths will cross again, and as a comfort to soften the blow of painful separation. In West Africa, whilst mountains stay put, everything else can be mobilised, be it people, commodities, or ideas. Mobility is a defining trait of West Africa, "fundamental to any understanding of African social life" (de Bruijn et al., 2001, pp. 2-3). Moreover, an important feature of socio-economic life in African cities is a "dedication to turning spaces into those of movement" (Simone, 2011, p.230).

Mobility in West Africa is rooted in cultures of migration (Hahn & Klute, 2007) and the region is criss-crossed with pre-colonial trade routes (Akrong, 2019; Eckert 2006). Today paths cross in markets, in taxis, in airports, and increasingly online, as mobile technologies contribute to mobility practices in West Africa (Brinkman & Bruijn, 2018). For Mbembe, mobility is a constitutive of African sociability, an essential vector of transformation and change, of the organisation of space and territories and definitions of belonging (Mbembe, 2018). Migration is not just an economic imperative, but is also tied up with personhood, for example for the young men who, through mobility, become adventurers (Bredeloup, 2008; Piot, 2019).

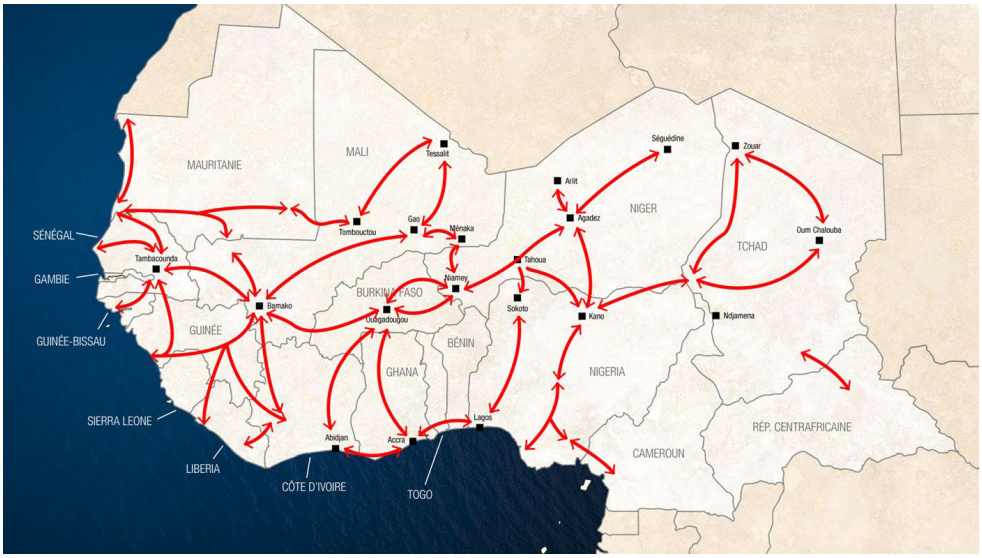
The migratory adventure was captured perfectly by the famous anthropologist, Jean Rouch, who back in 1967 produced the docu-fiction entitled Jaguar ((1967) 2005). It is the account of three friends who set out from Niger to the Ghanaian cities of Kumasi and Accra. The main protagonists experience the city in contrasting ways: as a poverty trap or a land of opportunity, but come together to open a successful market-stall, becoming "jaguars" (slang for cool kids) before heading back to Niger, their pockets full of hard-earned cash.

However, rather than focus on narratives of migration within Africa, research on African migration is often preoccupied with the arrival of Africans in Europe. This peaked over the course of this thesis, the start of which corresponded with the European 'migration crisis.' Indeed, research and policy have been preoccupied with West African migration to Europe or North America (Bakewell & Jónsson, 2013; Collyer, 2019; Schmitz, 2008). This is in line with the false but predominant assumption that all sub-Saharan migrants are heading to Europe (Bredeloup & Pliez, 2005). Approximately 70% of sub-Saharan African international migration remains within the Af-

rican Union (Landau & Kihato, 2018). Indeed, most of the migration in West Africa is inter-regional (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016; Landau & Kihato, 2018), regional flows account for 84% of movements within West Africa, seven times more than migration flows from West Africa to other parts of the world (ICMPD & IOM, 2015). In Africa, the West African region has the highest number of inter-regional and international migrants; a figure of 8.4 million, representing 2.8% of the population (IOM, 2020).



Map 4 Number of migrants registered in each country Source: IOM, DTM 2019. Produced by RFI



Map 5 Prinicipal regional migration routes. Source: IOM, DTM, August 2019, Produced by RFI

Attempts to quantify migration flows are conducted by the approximations of the informal flows of people and goods, which are hard to capture through the administrative and statistical apparatus of states (Adepoju, 2019; Bredeloup & Pliez, 2005; Jerven, 2013). Migration paths in West Africa are multipolar and shift depending on economic fluctuation crisis or growth (Robin, 2007). Indeed, migrants seek to short

the political economy of the region and move in response to the decline of some places and potential of others (Simone, 2011). In West Africa mobility remains a strategy in the face of high poverty levels, the absence of a welfare state and economic vulnerabilities that create high levels of volatility (Schmidt-Kallert, 2012). This is turn, has shaped the emergence of cities in West Africa where mobility is very much built into urban livelihoods. Indeed, mobility has been a key question for generations of scholars seeking to apprehend the African city.

2.2 The Rhodes Livingstone Institute: Theorising from the Copperbelt

Scholarship of urban migration in Africa has been historically preoccupied with the transition from the village to the city. In these accounts, the urban African sits uncomfortably alongside stereotypes of rural natives, indeed "anthropology, history, and literature have long seen Africans as fundamentally and even essentially rural creatures, while, like elsewhere, the African city itself has been perceived as an emblem of irresolvable conflict" (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004, p.353). For Coquery-Vidrovitch (2005), African cities are framed as being fundamentally problematic, associated with wicked problems such as the informal sector, urban bias or rural exodus. Instead of seeking to understand how migrants tie into and contribute to producing the urban fabric, they are often instead seen as responsible for creating problems that need to be untangled by policies. Migrants are often blamed for urban poverty, with governments trying to reduce or control rural-urban migration to the detriment of both migrants, and other low-income residents (Tacoli et al., 2014). This is equally mirrored by numerous development corporations that have reproduced the sedentary bias of colonial administrations, seeking to keep migrants in their place (Bakewell, 2008).

The colonial migrant system sought to control the movement of people. Systems of forced labour, indirect mechanisms and policies ensured that Africans had to enter the cash economy (Wood, 1968; Meillassoux, 1983). Labour migration was vital to the development of urban development and building and maintenance of infrastructure in colonial times (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1993). Colonial forces sought to displace people to work in mines, on farms and plantations, or in the colonial administration. But while colonial powers required circular migration of labour, they were also deeply concerned as to whether those workers should be allowed to settle as permanent migrants in cities (Bakewell, 2008). Should they be permitted to tie into the urban fabric and create a strong attachment to it, or should their ties to the city remain weak, ready to be cast off at any moment?

Colonial administrations were keen on understanding the impact urbanisation and migration was having on their subjects and their ability to govern. To this end they

funded several research initiatives. In the 1930s, the British Government opened a research centre, the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI) in the Zambian Copperbelt. Also known as the Manchester School, it hosted scholars including Max Gluckman, Godrey Wilson and James Clyde Mitchell. Their studies of urban-rural migration investigated the changes Africans underwent as they moved from their villages to work in the extractive industries. They posed questions such as: Could Africans be tribal in town? How were they maintaining connections to their village? What was happening to social networks? Who were they interacting with? Were they becoming integrated urbanites? Or would they remain rural folk? These questions asked by the RLI, are questions that for Ferguson, "have all depended, in different ways, on an underlying meta-narrative of modernization" (1999, p.20).

The RLI shared much ground with the Chicago School of Sociology, notably a preoccupation with the integration of newcomers into the urban fabric. Reading these two schools side-by-side, the geographer Amandine Spire (2011) offers an insightful comparison. The School of Chicago focused on processes of acculturation and residential mobility through which the migrant would blend into the city, becoming eventually invisible (idem, p.48). For the RLI however, migrants who had arrived to work in colonial enterprises continued to draw on various social, cultural or ethnic networks to negotiate their spot in the city, as they chose to dissimilate or reveal their identities to their hosts. So, whilst for the School of Chicago, migrants slowly lost their 'ruralness' by becoming integrated, the RLI described urban migrants in Central Africa adopting a situational approach, alternating between rural and urban practices. The emphasis placed on multi-sited livelihoods is also reflected in this thesis. The notion of knots, specifically the double loop knot, illustrates one way in which people tie into the urban fabric, but also maintain strong attachments elsewhere. As such knots enable us to conceptualise these linkages.

The Manchester School were in fact proposing a substantial criticism of the School of Chicago, and taking a significant step away from the work of Louis Wirth (1964), whose writings opposed urban to folk cultures and employed rather rigid categories and teleological analysis (Robinson, 2003). Unlike the Polish peasant in Europe and America (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918), the studies undertaken by the School of Manchester indicated an urban way of life being forged by new arrivals to the city (Gluckman,1955; 1960; 1961). This new urban life was not produced by cutting ties to rural settings, in fact, urban linkages remained an important feature of urban life. These ties did not impede migrants to identify as urban workers, and to share their concerns with urban workers elsewhere.

Part of the novelty of this approach was to take the African city seriously as a unit of study and start from the premise that Africans could also be urbanites. As Robinson writes, "with their wider reference community of urban anthropologists, the scholars working in Southern Africa shared a determination to inject their analysis of city life into the mainstream "theory" of western urbanism" (2003, p.283). The implications of this was to research African urban life as part of the field of urban studies, rather

than African studies, folk studies, or tribal anthropology. The Manchester School enriched urban studies elsewhere with results of African case studies, challenging the homogeny of theoretical models from the West. In this sense, it adopted a position (that is upheld for example at the African Centre for Cities) that the African city is not a particular, or exceptional category, and that findings from urban Africa can inform our understanding of locations elsewhere.

Gluckman's now famous quote that "an African miner is a miner; an African townsman is a townsman" (1955, p.659) hammers down the point that African towns are urban, and their inhabitants, urbanites. As such they are not to be analysed through the prism of their tribal or rural background. This body of work, anchored in the concerns of the period, and a colonial context in which Africans did not have full citizenship, has contributed to the taken-for-granted fact that today urban Africans have a claim, and right to the city. As Potts (2005) reflects, the aim of scholarship today, "is not to prove that African urban dwellers should, or can, create urban institutions and concepts in order to justify their urban voice but, rather to encourage and strengthen their existing political voice. In other words, the question of whether, either politically or methodologically, an African townsman is a townsman, is not deemed of significance. Happily, it is simply, and quite correctly, assumed that this is so" (p.605).

2.3 Parallel Paths in Brazzaville: The Work of George Balandier

Whilst anglophone researchers developed urban scholarship in Southern Africa, francophone sociology was undertaking similar quests in the study of urban Africa. Working at the same time as Gluckman, Balandier published a seminal text on Brazzaville in 1955. This text explored the transformation of the Fang and Ba-konog groups through the lens of processes such as political mobilisations, migrations and shifts in population and migration. He analysed for example how forced migration and urbanisation under colonial rule in Gabon led to shifting gender relationships and improved status for women (1955, loc. 9271). Balandier's central contribution to political anthropology positioned the city as a laboratory for social change. For him, "urbanisation, labour migration, improved communication, and heightened moblity (…) are all processes that impose the same types of problems, independently of large cultural differences" (1955, loc. 9277).[1]

Comparing anglophone and francophone research, Gervais-Lambony remarks that these "parallel research initiatives asked the same questions at just about the same

1 Author's translation "L'urbanisation, les migrations de travailleurs, l'élargissement des communications et l'accroissement de la mobilité, la réduction des groupements villageois en raison d'une sécurité devenue permanente, etc., sont autant de processus qui imposent les mêmes types de problèmes en dépit des grandes différences culturelles."

time, yet answered them separately" (2014, p.359). Both currents sought to measure linkages with rural areas and concluded that it was never a case of either-or and that urban citizens did not cut themselves off from their rural settings (idem). For Chaléard and Dubresson "there is indeed an urban citizen component with various rural strategies … [and] … there are also rural components with urban citizen strategies" (1989, p288 cited in Gervais-Lambony, 2014, p.359).

Today the work of Balandier and the RLI continues to resonate in current day research, well beyond the case studies of Brazzaville and the Zambian Copperbelt. They helped reveal the fluid and playful nature of migrant identities in the African city, and today inform contemporary notions of tactical cosmopolitanism (Landau & Freemantle, 2010) or the improvised lives (Simone, 2018) of people on the move in African cities. They sought to theorise urban migration from Africa, providing theory from the South. As such, these authors can be read as precursors to the southern turn in urban studies (Robinson 2003; Roy 2009; Simone 2001) and have called for the production of urban theory away from the metropoles of the global North.

However, this does not mean that findings from the Zambian Copperbelt seventy years ago can be easily transferred to West Africa. The case of the Zambian Copperbelt was particular in that urbanisation was connected to formal labour in the mines. This is far from representative of urban growth in Africa. Along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, formal employment is the exception rather than the norm, and manufacturing is almost absent. Migration to urban areas in West Africa has occurred without industrial development (Beauchemin & Bocquier, 2003; Coquery Vidrovitch, 1993). People continue to migrate to African cities despite the absence of formal employment opportunities (Hansen & Vaa, 2004; Hart, 1973).[2]

Indeed, migration patterns in the absence of formal employment are far more variated. Without jobs, people are less inclined to move to the city and to stay there. Since the work of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, mines in the Copperbelt have closed and unemployment has become a more regular feature of urban life. Writing in the 1990s, Ferguson described the exodus of redundant staff from the mines, who, returning to the rural areas were replaced by a new form of mobility as young people headed back to the Copperbelt (1999, p.12). Potts has gone on to demonstrate a counter-urbanisation of the Zambian Copperbelt in a context of urban decline, with cities experiencing clear net out-migration (2005). [3] In the Zambian Copperbelt, as elsewhere, livelihood vulnerability keeps people on the move, as they navigate in and out of cities, circulating between multiple locations. It is this tendency that we seek to illustrate in this thesis through the concept of the slipknot. The slipknot is a knot that ties into the urban fabric, but also releases swiftly, allowing people to move on and out of town in times of crisis. In this thesis we use this knot to describe the process by which people detach

2 Hart, K. (1973) 'Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11(1): 61–89.

3 This echoes work from Beauchemin and Bocquier (2003) in West Africa that shows slower rates of urbanisation than expected in eight francophone countries.

from the city, leaving it behind in the face of eviction, unemployment, or crisis.

For Potts, "one outcome of livelihood vulnerability has been an increased propensity for mobility, not just into towns, but out of them as well" (Potts, 2013, p.10). Much of the mobility within West African cities can be accounted for not just through classic theories of rural push and urban pull, but also increasingly through the urban push (Jedwab et al., 2014) Patterns of economic problems, insecurity of urban life, and threats of destitution all produce factors of circular migration. This is the kind of 'strategic nomadism' Bakewell and Jónsson (2011) describe in Lubumbashi, where African migrants move constantly back and forth between the city and other locations (p.5). In West Africa one of the key locations for urban migrants arriving is the Zongo, a gateway neighbourhood that enables many of arrivals and departures to the city.

2.4 The Arrival City: from Central Zongo to The Outskirts

'Zongos', are a specific feature of West African cities, they are arrival neighbourhoods for strangers that pre-date colonialism. The modes of sociability, integration, and trade within these Zongos has been an entry point to examine the urban life of migrations in West Africa (Agier, 1983; Cohen, 1969; Schildkrout, 1978). Zongos predate the colonial period and functioned as special wards, where "African strangers were under the control of the local African political authority and stayed only at the sufferance of their hosts" (Skinner, 1963, p.308). These neighbourhoods were often founded in the early 19th century, they are known as 'Hausa settlements' because Hausa is often the lingua franca, but are nonetheless multi-ethnic (Olawale Albert, 2003). The Zongos mark the presence of stranger communities in West African cities and are embedded within merchant networks and commercial diasporas. Home to Muslim trading populations from the North, Zongos are visibly 'other', with their mosques and call to prayer. In Benin, much like the other countries along the corridor, the North is predominantly Muslim and the South Christian and Vodún, with the Zongo of Cotonou becoming a place of anchorage from Muslims (see maps 6 & 7).

Research on Zongos has often focused on the co-habitation of various ethnic groups. Unlike much of the literature, this thesis does not address the arrival and insertion of one ethnic group among another (Agier, 1983; Cohen, 1969), nor does it consider conflicts surrounding certain ethnic groups within a nation (Babo, 2013; Viti, 2016). This is in line with Glick Schiller's call to move beyond "the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or the sole object of the study" (2006, p.613), and scholarship emerging within the last decade on super-diversity (Caglar & Vertovec, 2010; Vertovec, 2007; Vertovec, 2016). Super-diversity highlights the high levels of differentiation both within and among groups - recognising that migrant groups are "new, small and scattered, of multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified" (Vertovec, 2007, p.1024).

This is not an attempt to catch-all, or a theoretical plea for inclusiveness, but a response to the diversity encountered in the field. Along the corridor, various categories of migrants navigate within the same spaces. It would be misguiding to assume a homogeneity of migrant and host populations. In their recent publication, Landau and Bakewell run into similar trouble, explaining that "in many of the urban spaces we discuss in this volume, it is all but impossible to identify clearly defined host populations. In such spaces, the mixing of disparate elements: citizens, long-term residents, new arrivals, transit migrants and others are giving rise to varied and novel socialities" (2018, p.9). For as they explain, national liberations and the effect of structural adjustment programmes, have left African societies in deep flux and processes of self-definition that continue today (idem. p.8).

For Schildkrout (1978), the Zongo in Kumasi, Ghana, was a means to explore ethnic identities and citizenship in the African state, along with shifts between first and second generation immigrants. The French scholar Agier (1983; 2015) has traced the Lomé of Zongo for over three decades, first studying the Soudanese traders noting that "the welcoming of immigrants and travellers, just like their departures, is only thinkable in the Zongo because, before being a neighbourhood in Lomé, it is an element of a social and commercial chain that goes from city to city, from the lands of Soudan up to the coast" (1983, p.275).[4] Zongos have enabled the geographical mobility of people in the region providing a network of hospitality with repetitive hosting practices.

The Zongo is also a central feature of Spire's work, in her study of the specific urban forms of *"ancrage"*, the anchoring of migrants in the cities of Accra and Lomé (2011). The Zongo here appears as one possible urban manifestation of migrants in the West African city, and although it is by far the most visible, it exists among multiple, more discrete ways of inhabiting the city as a migrant. Spire's work moves from the Zongo as the epitome and main focus of urban diversity to other locations in the city. She provides an analysis of the multiple, and multi-scalar spatial practices of urban migrants, presented through the micro-geography of spaces such as cafeterias in Lomé or kiosks in Accra.

Whilst Zongos are a feature of the inner-city, they also shed light on migration processes at the periphery. Early monographies of the Zongo (Agier, 1983) were already concerned with manifestations of urban migrant communities in the outskirts. This was partly driven by the continuous and repeated displacement and relocation of Zongos,[5] to the outskirts of capital cities (Agier 2015; Spire 2011; Spire & Gourland, 2018). In current research the Zongo has become a starting point from which to explore further transnational migration, and peri-urban settlement. For example, Pel-

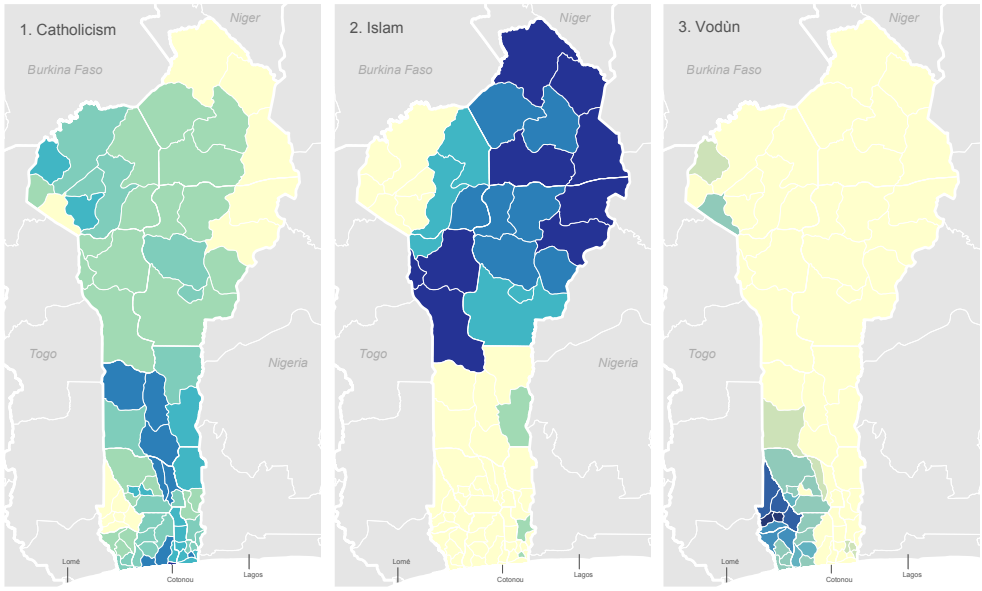
4 Own translation, "L'accueil des immigrants et des itinérants, comme les départs, sont pensables parce que le zongo, avant d'être un quartier de Lomé, est un élément d'une chaîne sociale et commerciale qui va de ville en ville depuis les pays du Soudan jusqu' ceux de la côte." (Agier, 1983, p.275)

5 Zongos, like migrant neighbourhoods worldwide, have systematically been deemed too informal, dirty and dense to reside within the city boundaries.

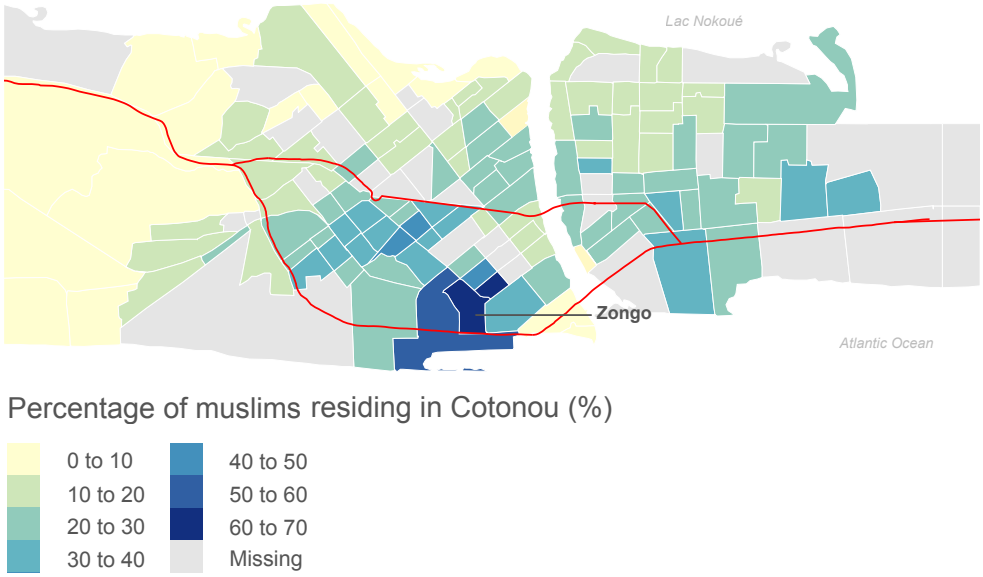
low (2008), has documented how the Hausa residents in the Sabon Zongo in Accra migrated abroad and remitted money back home to build in the new peri-urban margins of Accra. In a similar line, Bertrand (2010) calls for closer attention to be paid to the effects of *métropolisation* produced by the creation of new Zongos in the suburbs of Accra by traders from the Zambara bourgeoisie. Today's Zongo reflect the cities along the corridor, these spaces are undergoing continuous transformation and are being redefined as new populations arrive, inhabit and reshape them. For example, the Zongo in Cotonou is the site of recent infrastructure investments from the French millionaire Bolloré, and its religious fabric is being reshaped through the arrival of new funds from the Middle East. Indeed, the centres of African cities remain in flux as their edges expand.

These new spaces of urban migration are no longer in the centre of cities but accompany the increasingly extended forms of urbanisation along the coast. This thesis inscribes itself within this line of enquiry, considering central nodes of migration in the city, but also urban practices of migrants outside of the arrival neighbourhoods. In doing so, it seeks to pay attention to spatial forms produced through migration along the Guinea Gulf in Benin. It seeks to consider forms of urban migration *outside* of the city, within territories that appear to be increasingly urbanised, but do not share the features of concentrated urbanisation normally associated with cities or towns. This in turn follows Simone's (2011) call to take into consideration the "unofficial practices that link cities on a daily basis and the spaces of rehearsing integration that may be located somewhere else besides the city" (p.380).

The contributions migration has made to shaping the city, the role of migrants as new urbanites, the co-habitation of various ethnic groups, and the persistence of rural-urban linkages - these are all topics that have been addressed by African scholarship, be it in southern Africa in the Zambian Copperbelt, or in central Africa in Brazzaville. Studies of migration in West Africa have, as we have seen, focused on Zongos, at a neighbourhood level. This thesis adopts a different framing, considering migration not within a single neighbourhood, but along a corridor. To do so it draws heavily on the work of Simmel, bringing together two aspects of his work that are often read separately, his writings on the notion of the stranger, and on urban mobility.



Map 6 Share of Religious Groups in Benin, Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



Map 7 Percentage of muslims residing in central Cotonou districts. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020

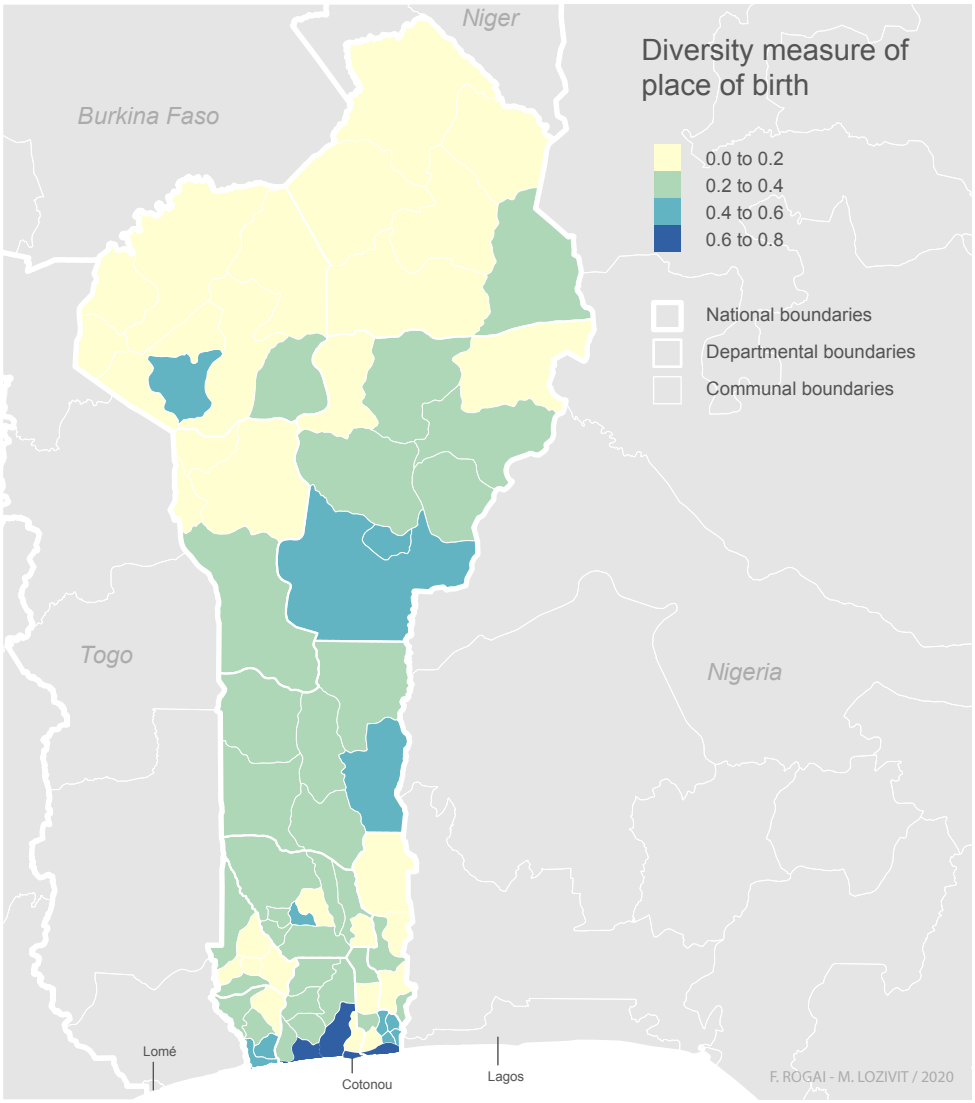
2.5 The Category of the Stranger

Four national borders cut across the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, dividing the territory between five nations. In this context, national borders, drawn up by colonial powers, do not necessarily define who is foreign or a stranger within a given community. Ethnic groups, kinship groups and linguistic groups are spread over these lines. They enable a form of continuity along the corridor, maintaining connections across national borders. For example, the Ewe group that resides both to the West of Benin and on the other side of the border in Togo, or the Yoruba residing in Porto Novo in the East but who feel equally at ease in Nigeria. Difference is more marked with groups from the North, predominantly Muslim, poor and rural, than for those in the South who are predominantly Christian, wealthier and urban. Coastal dwellers along the corridor are therefore more likely to share certain commonalities between themselves, than with respective nationals living in the north of their countries.

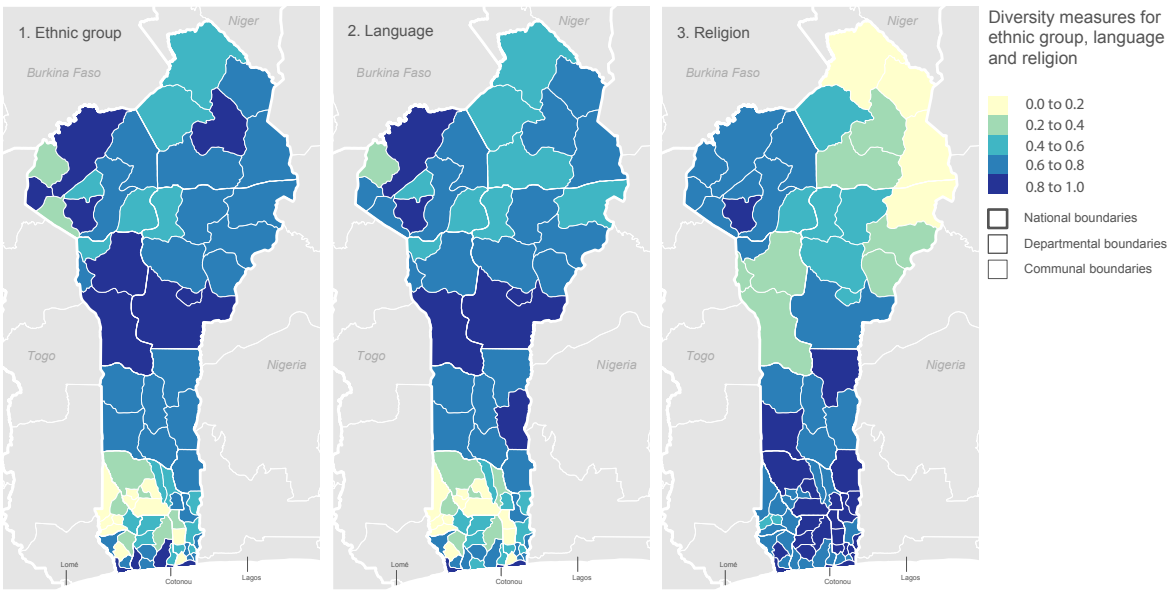
This raises the question then of who is a migrant? Who belongs and who does not? For Bøås, this question is "among the most crucial and controversial in African politics" (Bøås, 2009, p.20, cited in Whitehouse, 2012, p.13). Yet, while migration is a process, migrant is a label. As an emic category, it sits ill at ease with local constructions of identity and belonging. As opposed to European regimes of migration, a migrant in the Beninese case is not necessarily a foreigner - Beninese who move within the country are also referred to by policy-makers and planners as migrants. In urban areas in Benin there are higher levels of diversity in terms of place of birth (see map 8.) marking the presence of more 'strangers'. However, within the country there are also high levels of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity – with forty-eight distinct languages being spoken (in addition to French) and just as many ethnic groups. As such, levels of cultural diversity are significant throughout the country, and not just in the main urban areas (see map. 9).

Furthermore, claims to national citizenship are not immediate or guaranteed. In Benin, school leavers are often awarded with birth-certificates, marking their entry into l'Etat Civil, and their recognition as citizens. Citizenship, place of birth, length of residence or nationality are not necessarily aligned with the status of being a stranger. Indeed, as Simone (2011) notes, "Africa, with its long history of incorporating strangers into societies, has been equally adept at turning long-term residents into strangers" (p.382).

In Benin, the term in Fon 'jõnɔ', refers to stranger, but can also mean expat or visitor. It is used to refer to someone who is an outsider in regards for example to the household, or a work institution. The French term étranger captures both the idea of stranger, and that of the foreigner. However, as we will see, the concept of the stranger is a strong one in the study of West African migration and is also at times employed as an Anglicism by certain French scholars (Bertrand, 2010, p.310). Fourchard for example uses the term to designate a number of historical categories such as non-native, aliens or non-indigène, used by colonial administrators to refer to people who are not "rooted in the soil" (Fourchard, 2009, p.187).



Map 8 Diversity measure of place of birth by commune. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



Map 9 National levels of diversity for ethnic group, language and religion. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020

In the context of African migration, the term 'stranger', as proposed by Simmel, is theoretically sturdier and resonates more closely with African cultures than the term 'migrant'. Simmel's writings on the metropolis have been central to urban scholars' understanding of the transformative potential of urbanisation (Brenner & Schmid, 2017) or recent examinations of the African metropolis (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004). Simmel's seminal text "The Stranger" is regularly mobilized by scholars of urban migration in Africa. From studies of Ghaneans in Lomé (Spire, 2011), to Malians in Brazzaville (Whitehouse, 2012), Sub-Saharans in Fès (Berriane, 2018) or British returnees in Uganda (Binaisa, 2018), researchers return to Simmel to problematise the category of the stranger and the spatial consequences of migration in the African city.

In Simmel's terms, the stranger is not the "wanderer who comes today and and goes tomorrow, but rather the person who comes today and stays tomorrow" (Simmel, 1950, p.402). The stranger is defined by a possible future mobility, for "although he has not moved on, he had not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going" (Idem). This passage, as Spire notes, shows Simmel's intention to distinguish the traditional stranger itinerant of the yesteryear, to a 'modern' concept of the stranger, tied to the notion of urbanity, and the town where the stranger settles (Spire, 2011, p.41). The stranger here, is only ever a stranger vis à vis a host population, and his "position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning" and that he has certain characteristics, or qualities that differ from the host community (Simmel, 1960). Strangers are, as Fortes points out "inassimilable aliens" that remain the polar opposite of kin in terms of language, social organisation, or religion (Fortes, 1975, p.245). For the anthropologist Whitehouse, this is captured in the Malian expression "however long a log may float in the water, it will never become a crocodile" (Whitehouse, 2011, p.203).

Simmel's stranger is one that is defined through interaction, a tension that exists between those on the move, and those who stay put. Indeed, as Levine underlines, their status depends not on how long they have been in a place, but their relationship with the host community (Levine, 1979, p.30-32). Simmel provides this powerful insight, suggesting that stranger-ness (as opposed to strangeness), is about being *in* a place, but not *of* a place - and is a distinct mode of being in the contemporary world. Agier, mobilising Simmel in his analysis of the Haussa in the Lomé Zongo, describes how as strangers, they refer to their homes as "chez eux" in the strangers' neighbourhood, and, as such become 'established' in the Togolese capital (Agier, 2015, p.17).

From the perspective of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, the notion of the stranger resonates deeply. It establishes the premise that strangeness is always negotiated with other urban inhabitants, rather than being a fixed category ascribed by the basis of nationality. The corridor is an incredibly diverse location and it is within this corridor that diverse populations are crossing paths, but also settling down in proximity to each other. If thought of as one territory, the corridor is on the brink of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). In this context, the notion of strangeness is "invoked to ration-

alise the alienation of others, for example from workplaces, support networks and supply chains, but also facilitates self-alienation, for example from regimes of government taxation and social obligation" (Monteith, 2017, para1). As such, strangeness become a tactic, and at times a ruse, with which to navigate along the corridor. This is especially true given the cross-border trading, for as Simmel (1950) reminds us, the stranger appears everywhere as the trader, or the trader as the stranger.

There is an implicit urbanity to Simmel's stranger, who is described as "fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries" (Simmel, 1950 p.403). This, accompanied with the theoretical premise that stranger-ness is an interaction with host populations, creates a focus not just on the part of the city inhabited by strangers, the ghetto, but in the relation between these spaces and the rest of the corridor. The focus on host populations is equally one that is adopted by post-migration scholars, who critique the study of 'migrant' populations, and instead call for more systematic research into how migration as a process has transformed both guest and host communities (Yildiz, 2016).

2.6 The Migration Mobility Nexus

Simmel's notion of stranger provides a sturdy definition of how people from elsewhere remain as the 'other' along the corridor. However, it does not necessarily capture the mobility along the corridor. Simmel's strangers can be sedentary, well-established individuals no longer on the move. And whilst stranger communities contribute to the urban fabric of the corridor, movement is, in this thesis, positioned as an essential character of how this space is constituted. This mobility is undertaken by strangers, but also by locals who move back and forth along the corridor. The rhythms of this movement, for example in the case of trans-border trading, or educational migration are quicker, shorter, and more repetitive than both circular seasonal migration in the region, and household relocations to the coast.

Sheller and Urry (2006) draw on a different text of Simmel's as a theoretical resource for mobility research. Building on another body of his work, they highlight how Simmel's theoretical agenda "connects mobilities and materialities in a way that more recent theorists are continuing to pursue" (idem, p.215). For Sheller and Urry, Simmel frames urban life through the tempo, interactions and pulse of the city which drive the formation of both social, economic and infrastructural formations - but also the subjectivity of the urban dweller (idem.) For Simmel, the modern city can be characterised by the "unexpectedness of onrushing impressions …. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life" (Simmel, 1997, p.175 cited in Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.215). A study of migration and urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor requires both Simmel's stranger, and Simmel's theorising of mobility, that is, in his terms the "will to connection" that produces the "miracle of the road" (idem, p.171).

However, whilst his work on the stranger resonates deeply in the context of West Africa, Simmel's work on mobility appears at odds with West African epistemologies of movement, especially in the context of the corridor. For Simmel, the tempo of mobility creates a stark contrast between city life and life in small towns and rural areas (idem. p.175). This is not the case along the corridor where mobilities are intra as well as inter-urban, and instead, drag moments of urbanity into the surrounding areas. Furthermore, for Simmel, the complexity of urban life requires a new level of punctuality and precision, indeed he argues that "without the strictest punctuality in promises and services, the whole structure would break down into an extricable chaos" (idem, p.177). This sits at odds with the contemporary African city, where things and people connect without abiding to strict schedules, and various temporalities co-habit. Finally, for Simmel, mobility within the city leads to the "brevity and scarcity of inter-human contacts" (idem, p.183) producing an urban personality that is more reserved and detached. However in the West African context, where the social capital of relationships is vital for the production of livelihoods, mobility is instead a means to enrich and nurture these inter-human contacts, and interactions far from being just for the sake of themselves, are deeply embedded in urban subjectivities.

Simmel's framing of mobility as an essential feature of urban life remains relevant to the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, it is taken here with more caution, and awareness of the local specificities of mobility in West Africa. Simmel's theoretical framework of mobility calls to be integrated into grounded studies of contemporary mobility in West Africa (de Bruji & al., 2001) and a radical decolonialisation of knowledge on mobility and transport (Schwanen, 2018). To do so would contribute to the rich scholarship on infrastructures of mobility in West Africa, for example, across borders (Hoehne & Feyissa, 2013; Igué & Zinsou, 2010; Lentz, 2003; Simone, 2011), or along roads (Beck & al., 2017; Klaeger, 2017; Nielson, 2012).

Many scholars are choosing to adopt 'mobility' (Bakewell & Landau, 2018) or 'movement' (Simone, 2011) rather than 'migration' as their lens of analysis. This thesis brings together mobility and migration within the same analytical framework. It draws on Simone's (2001) use of the overarching category of movement, as a process that "has given shape to African cities and regions" (p.390). It responds to the proposal of Melly (2016), an anthropologist working on Senegal, to bring together within the same frame of analysis both migration and mobility. Moving through the city, is "as much about what it means to be part of, to move through, to inhabit and construct the African city as it is about the desire and imperative to mobilise labour capital and knowledge on national and global scales" (p.9). Packaging together the analysis of migration and mobility, Melly writes of mobility as an enduring, elusive, and collective value, that both embodies expectations of migration, and exceeds the binary geographies of arrival and departure (p.9). It could be argued that, in comparison to Senegal, this is even more the case along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. For whilst Senegalese migration is traditionally more anchored in routes to Europe, migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor occurs along the same roads as everyday urban mobility.

This positioning is also inscribed within current research trends in the European context. Researchers working on the 'migration-mobility nexus' in Neuchatel, Switzerland are seeking to bring together these two categories of analysis and of practice, focusing on the interplay between these two ways of framing movement (NCCR– on the move, 2019, para 1). This approach questions how and why mobility are bound together, asking if they are exclusive conceptions of movement, or if individuals navigate between mobility and migration contexts (idem, para. 6). In the West African context, it appears that the fluidity between these two concepts is greater.

If we take the example of one location for a study, a toll booth along the corridor, it becomes apparent how these migrations and mobilities intersect. The family managing the toll booth and several of the stands around it are of Yoruba descent, and their ancestors originally migrated from Nigeria. Other migrant groups sell at the toll booth, for example ethnic Fulani women selling fresh cheese. Often referred to as local nomads, observations showed that in fact this group was sedentary, remaining in place day in, day out over several years of observation. Various migrants moved through the toll booth: cross-border traders belonging to international diasporas, returnee Beninese coming home from Ghana and internal migrants. This is also combined with everyday mobility, as people travel along the road on everyday business.

Many decades of research at the intersection of urbanisation and migration in Africa has unearthed the multitude of ways in which migration is driving urbanisation. Scholarship in the field has depicted the many ways in which migrants tie into the urban fabric. This can involve maintaining urban rural linkages, whilst establishing a legitimate claim to the city as described by the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. Or negotiating the seismic shifts of the city as a laboratory for social change, as underlined by Balandier. And whilst migrant-driven urbanisation can revolve around mobility within the city, as in the case of the Zongos, it also calls for more nuanced understandings both of urbanisation outside of the city, and of modes of immobility.

2.7 Immobility as a Constitutive Mode of Migration

Recent work on the Zongos points to the fact that urbanisation might be happening outside of the city. A similar reversal in perspective suggests that migration processes are also largely tied up with forms of immobility. So quite the contrary to expectations, the study of migration-driven urbanisation also involves closely looking at how immobility occurs outside of the city.

Is everything and everybody in continual flux along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor? Most certainly not. Migration studies in West Africa have at times overlooked the role of immobility despite early calls from Hammar & al. (1997) to pay closer atten-

tion to why some people stay put.[6] This is being slowly remediated through the work of Carling (2002) on the 'involuntary immobile' in the Cape Verde as a consequence to the impediments to mobility, or Mondain and Diagne (2013) on immobile people in Senegal who are nonetheless embedded within migration processes. In the meantime, Bertrand (2011) working on residential mobility in Accra and Bamako has described a category of young people who are mobile but tied up '*ballotés*', and dependent on external decisions from elders (p.283). As Jónsson argues, understanding the impact of movement on people and places also requires paying attention to the absence of movement (2011, p.14) The binaries of static categories such as sedentary or mobile are not helpful in the context of West African migration, where, for example 'immobile migrants' get stuck and are unable to reach their final destination (idem, p.10). Such people for example are often referred to as 'transit-migrants' despite their situation which is "characterized by the absence of mobility and by immobility" (idem, p.14).

Gaibazzi (2015) in his study of young bush-bound men in a Gambian village provides an account of West African migration from the perspective of permanence. He seeks to re-calibrate the migration literature with an account of why some people do not move and how they stay "sat" at home. He suggests ways in which we can "conceive and investigate sedentary livelihoods as an integral element of migration" in order to "disturb the received view of immobilities as a static, natural or residual category and instead show how movement and stillness combine to animate social life" (p.3). The lives of those who 'stay put' and hold the fort whilst others leave is as an integral component of migration patterns. The rural Sonike setting is a far cry from the context of this thesis: the urban expanse of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. Nonetheless, immobility and permanence are both factors that also underpin circulations along the corridor, and the thesis attaches itself to various 'moorings' (Hannam et al., 2006) along the corridor, considering mobility from the perspectives of those in place. The immobility of certain groups along the corridor is linked to the mobility of others. People dwelling along the corridor are in fact shaped by processes of migration and mobility as much as the migrants themselves.

Gaibazzi's work is not to be misunderstood, it is not that in West Africa the village is the space of immobility, and the city the location of mobility. Urban lives are equally tied up in various forms of immobilities. Here the work of Melly (2016) on bottlenecks has informed recent readings of movements and blockages in the African city. Working in Dakar, Melly adopts the bottleneck, or *embouteillage* in French, as both a theoretical and literal entry point to engage with both the experiences of mobility and suspension, or immobility. The bottleneck brings together the two within the same ethnographic framework (p.8), and features as a term "that enabled people to speak about various circumstances of narrowed passage and restricted flow and the effects these processes had on everyday lives, policies and landscapes" (p.7). The bottleneck brings together both the flat tires and road surfaces of the city, and the

6 See also the work of Salazar and Smart (2001) on anthropological approaches to (im)mobility

experience of being stuck, of immobility, experienced by urban residents and bureaucrats in the face of migration regulation in the structurally adjusted city. The Lagos-Abidjan corridor has its own bottlenecks, or *embouteillages* from the go-slow in Lagos, to the road works and roadblocks that hold up the traffic.

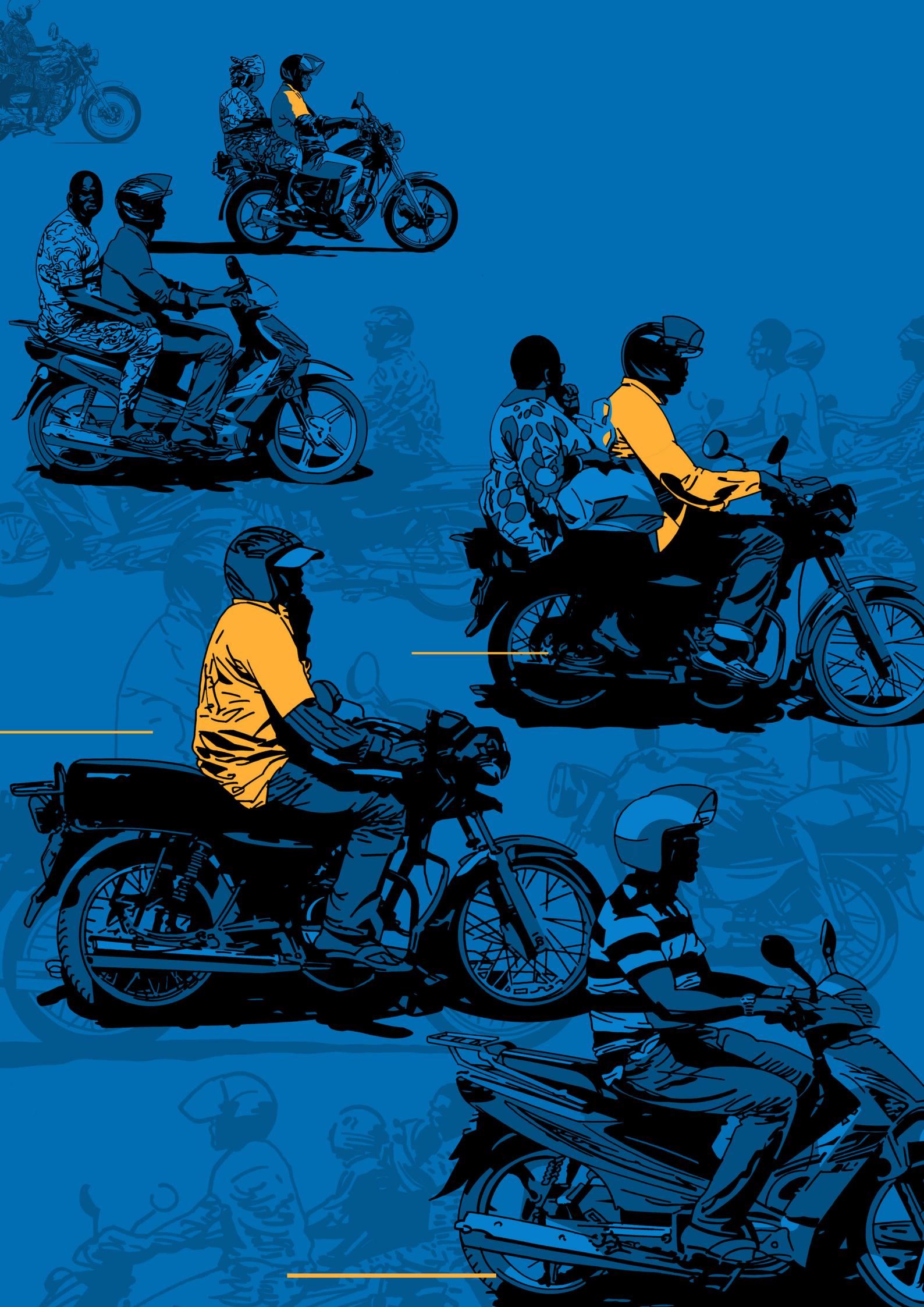
The checkpoint, like the traffic jam, is another point in the urban fabric where things get caught up. For Das & Poole (2004) the checkpoint disrupts assumptions about the state and identify it is a 'tension-filled space' where things get unsettled (p.10). As Jeganathan (2004) argues in the same volume, checkpoints are moments of confrontation between expectations of legitimacy and everyday practices and moments that govern the entrances and exits of the city (p.69). The checkpoint, in this sense is not just a moment of slowing down, but spaces in the margin of the state, where sovereignty is experienced differently (Das & Poole, 2004).

Such discussions are echoed in the current work of Carse, Cons and Middleton (2018) on chokepoints. Chokepoints they write are "sites where the flows upon which contemporary life depends are constricted or 'choked'" (Carse & al., 2018). Framed as both obstacles and sites of opportunity, chokepoints become important nodes where issues are negotiated, and power dynamics can be reversed. Chokepoints are at times sites where "the dominant become vulnerable, connectivity becomes a liability, and marginalised voices and forms of agency are amplified"(idem). This, as will be presented, is the case at times along the corridor, where actors seek at times to disrupt, stem, or slow down the flow of people and goods, for example by deviating goods or slowing down cargo. Chokepoints reminds us that flows do not always flow, and that mobilities are easily disrupted and deviated, becoming enforced immobilities. The notion of chokepoints as presented by Carse & al. picks up on the vitality and vulnerability, and on the obstacles and opportunities presented by various actors. It reminds us that "for the city planner, traffic congestion is a problem. But for the smuggler, it is a camouflage. And for the roadside vendor, it creates a captive market" (Carse & al., 2018, para.4).

Moving along the corridor, this thesis explores how mobility, and immobility is leveraged by actors along the road to generate an income or livelihood, from vendors on the roadside, to a neighbourhood chief who is generating a local revenue from truckers. It seeks to include both mobility and immobility within the field of inquiry and considers urbanisation dynamics occurring outside of the city. The bottleneck, the checkpoint, the chokepoint, these concepts have all been introduced by authors to discuss how people get tied down. This thesis, by introducing the notion of knots enables us to cluster these various concepts underneath the idea of the hitch knot, a knot that ties people down. This knot is central to understanding how it is also the slowing down, and not just the acceleration of people and goods on the move that explain the emergence of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

As we look back at the rich reservoir of work on migration and urbanisation in Africa, the notion of knots can help distinguish the various mechanisms being de-

scribed. Scholars have focused on specific ways in which migrants tie into the urban fabric, and by translating these into knots, we are able to cluster or distinguish these mechanisms. For example, gathering the checkpoint, bottleneck and chokepoint under the category of the hitch. As such, using knots to analyse the role of migration within the urban fabric serves not only to elucidate empirical observations, but also can be leveraged to analyse existing scholarship.



3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out the adopted methodologies of this thesis. It first presents how this research is grounded in a trans-disciplinary collaboration with the Global Programme for Migration and Development. This informed both the framing of the research questions and the various roles embodied during the project, from anthropologist to policy advisor or consultant.

In the second section, the chapter then turns to address how the topic of mobility was addressed methodologically through mobile and multi-sited ethnography. Drawing on the example of one of the sites of investigation, it illustrates how I embedded myself within sites of mobility along the corridor. The chapter also address how my whiteness shaped this research and the conditions under which it was undertaken.

The third and last section address the methodological pluralism and the teamwork involved in this thesis. It seeks to acknowledge the many actors who contributed to the production of knowledge in this thesis, from assistants to teachers and drivers. It also presents the various individual methods, in addition to participant observation, that were used to collect data, from interviews to census material, and audio-visual material. It ends by considering the various inter-disciplinary exchanges that informed the thesis over its course. From a multi-year project on extended urbanisation, to a short summer school on urban diversity in Africa, these moments were key to the formation of the ideas presented here.

The core methodology adopted in this thesis stems from my training as an anthropologist, but it has also been informed by my three supervisors, Christian Schmid, Pius Krütli and Armelle Choplin, all of whom, quite exceptionally were able to spend time both in the field in Benin during data collection, and in Switzerland over the course of data analysis. This has been a precious asset and has enabled me to combine various inputs, from comparative methodologies on new forms of urbanisation, to transdisciplinary approaches, and grounded empirical investigation.

3.1 A Trans-disciplinary Collaboration

3.1.1 A Partnership between ETH Zurich and The SDC

This project is situated at the interface of science and practice, and is the fruit of a trans-disciplinary collaboration between 'academics' from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zürich) and 'practitioners' from the Global Programme on Migration and Development (GPMD) at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Trans-disciplinarity can be widely defined as seeking to "work on socially relevant issues, across disciplinary paradigms, and engage in participatory research" (Pearce & al., forthcoming). At the Trans-disciplinarity Lab (TdLab) at the ETH Zürich, this approach is defined as research and teaching that is driven by the following four elements: 1. Starts from a real world problem, 2. Involves actors from outside of academia 3. Meets the needs of practice as well as science 4. Is intended to create change (Krütli & al. 2018).

In the tradition of action-research, it is an approach that integrates interdisciplinary perspectives, but moves beyond them in order to produce knowledge with partners outside of the university. (Hirsch Hadorn & al., 2006; Polk, 2015.) Trans-disciplinary research aims to increase the "relevance, credibility and legitimacy of scientific research by securing the active participation of non-academic actors in research" (Jacobi & al., 2020 p. 22). In this context the involvement of partners in co-design (jointly framing the problem) and co-production (jointly generating knowledge) are key (Lang et al. 2012, Jahn et al. 2012). As such, it provides a path to bridge science and policy (Pohl, 2008) and develops tools to improve the societal relevance of research projects by rendering scientific practice more reflective (Pohl & al., 2017).

In an African context, with its many development challenges, much research is already action-focused, or commission-driven given the limited financial resources available for theoretical research. As Van Breda and Swilling (2018) argue, transdisciplinary methods developed in the North cannot be simply transferred and replicated in developing world contexts, where levels of complexity, conflict and social fluidity are greater. Classic transdisciplinary approaches they suggest, need to be more fluid if they are to engage with the "complex, heterogonous, hybridized and hodgepodged" nature of African urban systems (idem, p.2).

Another factor to consider is that in West Africa there is not the luxury of framing research questions purely driven by curiosity, and research colleagues frame their projects to align with the interests of development agencies. This is in part a commitment to transformative knowledge, for as scholars such as Allen, Lampis and Swilling write, theorising urban change, "without an axiological discussion of what type of action might be possible or desirable can be purposeless, confining our understanding to multiple readings of complexity while overwhelming any sense of what trans-

formative change might mean or entail" (Allen & al., 2016, p.7). Trans-disciplinary practices in the West African setting could provide a means for local researchers to make the power relations between international donors, researchers and community partners more explicit - as well as contributing to the framing of the research problem and co-producing the terms of reference.

3.1.2 Building Bridges between Science and Practice

The overall collaboration between ETH Zürich and GPMD entitled "Building Bridges in Urban Migration" functions like an umbrella project, under which various outcomes have been developed. As such, this thesis is one of the outcomes, but not the only one. It is, as to be expected, the most academic in form - compared to, for example, input papers generated for policy meetings that were also produced (Hertzog, 2019). However, we have found that there is not a strict linear reverse correlation between how theoretical and how applicable an idea is. For example, one idea advanced in this thesis, the 'breakages' along the corridor, has been taken on board by a governance practitioner developing a project with trans-border communities along the corridor seeking to tie-down wealth as it moves along it. The concept of "planetary urbanisation" (Brenner & Schmid, 2014), a theoretical idea that nonetheless resonated straight away with practitioners working on global development programmes, is another topic of exploration in this thesis. As such, theoretical thinking, if part of a trans-disciplinary conversation, can also provide frameworks of analysis and action for practitioners on the ground.

In line with this methodological approach, actors from both the GPMD and ETH were involved in the negotiation, framing and agreement of the research activities. There are many advantages to creating co-ownership of such a project with partners from practice, one of them being that this in turn facilitates rapid implementation of scientific results. So rather than merely being consulted as stakeholders or funders,[1] practitioners have played a central role in the conception of this project. This involvement has fluctuated across the various phases of the project; as academics we have sought to inform, consult, collaborate but also empower non-academic partners (Krütli et al., 2010). Specific trans-disciplinary tools have been trialled to structure this collaboration. In 2015, TdLab and GPMD jointly hosted a problem-framing workshop at IMISCOE, an international migration conference. As the research project evolved, we applied a ten-step tool designed to best align the research project with the requirements of transdisciplinarity (Pohl & al., 2017). The steps sought to match the research question with societal knowledge demand, identify the disciplines and societal actors to involve, and think about who, when and how they could be involved to reflect about the impact of the project. Later on in the project, in 2019, we drew on transdisciplinary tools like the "research market" or "story wall"[2] as we worked together with practitioners on fieldwork results and stakeholder configurations.

1 This research project was joint funded by the GPMD and ETH Zürich.

2 These tools are from the TdLab toolbox developed in collaboration with the td-net of the Swiss Academies. They are simple and straightforward and facilitate the co-production of different scientific disciplines between science and society. They can be accessed at https://tdlab.usys.ethz.ch/toolbox.html

Following the work of Mitchell & al (2015), a three-fold outcome framework was developed, focusing on situation, knowledge and learning outcomes. The first outcome space is improvement within the 'situation' or field of inquiry, that is, the everyday world of the involved researchers, development practitioners, beneficiaries, and migrants. These changes may be institutional (e.g. a shift in a policy), or social (e.g. more acceptance of urban migrants). Outcomes in this space include for example, the creation of projects on urban migration with local organisations in Benin. The second space, the 'knowledge outcomes' include rigorous scholarly knowledge (doctoral thesis, book chapters, academic papers), as well as other forms of knowledge (position papers, blog posts) in order to make insights accessible and meaningful to both research participants as well as broader beneficiaries. The final outcomes are the learning outcomes, that seek to increase the likelihood of persistent change, which include, for example the strengthening of the "urban pillar" within the SDC. This was an important part of the trans-disciplinary collaboration; the SDC over the course of the last few years has been seeking in-house to strengthen its urban expertise and reflect more upon how it could develop its activities in urban areas. As such, the research team also played a role as a sounding board for these new ideas. We participated in an in-house 'learning journey' on rural-urban linkages and took part in various events where the SDC sought to sketch out how and where they could intervene as a development agency in the urban sector.

Whilst applying our tools, we also acquired new trans-disciplinary methods by partaking in various activities organised by the Swiss Development Cooperation. Indeed, while at times SDC was a stakeholder for ETH, the contrary was also the case.[3] The organisation has a unit devoted to knowledge and learning and produces inventive methods to transfer knowledge between its departments and among its stakeholders. For example, as Markus Reisle, the director of the GPMD, prepared to move on from his post, an event was organised with the incoming director, team members and project partners. He reflected on his professional experiences through a selection of objects that represented each significant moment in his career. Through his sharing of knowledge and insights about his personal trajectory, he "handed-over" much more than just the project portfolio.

3.1.3 Problem Framing during the Migration Crisis

As ETH Zürich and the GPMD launched discussions in 2015, the topic of urban migration was emerging in both the academic and the development field, as cities were positioned as primary responders to the European 'migration crisis'. As nation states struggled to respond, cities emerged as new partners for the governance of migration. Along with Bettina Etter from the GPMD, I attended the High-Level Conference on Migration and Cities at the IOM in 2015.[4] Director General W. Swing called for development to explore the opportunities for both migrants and the city,

3 One example of this is when we issued a formal response as a stakeholder to the upcoming development agenda

4 High Level Conference on Migration and Cities, IOM, Geneva 26-27 Oct. 2015 see resulting publication. IOM. 2015. "Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility." World Migration Report. IOM.

insisting that mayors were closest to the ground. Migrants, he said, are increasingly moving between cities, not between countries, and it is in the city that migration is lived in the most immediate way. He presented migrants as agents of local development, not just creating social disruption competing for jobs and welfare, but also creating resourceful, creative and inventive city makers. Throughout the discussions, we heard from various leaders that "cities have become major actors on the frontline and that mayors are the new face of safety and solidarity",[5] that "migrants are an important part of the urban development, they contribute to the growth of cities",[6] or that "cities are places where integration fails or succeeds, we as cities are the ones who have to deal with it."[7] A. Kacyira from UN Habitat, responded, that yes, they might be, but research "needs to be anchored in a science, in what constitutes good urbanisation, we need to know the basics of the sciences." Since, given the political context, the topic of migration has continued to gain prominence in the development agenda and upcoming strategies. This has occurred, whilst in-house practitioners have continued to further problematise the topic of urban development through an 'Urban Learning Journey.'

Our collaboration emerged because there was real demand for knowledge at a pivotal moment in the formation of this topic on practitioners' agendas. An opportunity had emerged to anchor the topic of urban migration with evidence-based policy and break away from depictions of migrants as part of the problem rather than the solution. The GPMD had already accumulated experience working on migration in the urban context, for example with the "Call of Barcelona" from the Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development (2014) that reflects the need to highlight the role of cities at the front-line of addressing migration and promotes migration as a primarily positive urban phenomenon. In the first stage of our collaboration I was invited to become familiar with their other ongoing projects on the topic, contributing for example to the City-to-City project currently focused on urban forms of migration management in larger cities around the Mediterranean, the Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI). I also participated in a joint training initiative for GIZ and SDC staff on migration and development, contributing a module on urban migration.[8]

The collaboration came at a moment when, within practice there was an increased awareness but little knowledge of the migration-urbanisation nexus in the Global South. Together with the GPMD we identified several shortcomings in the development sector that could be addressed through the project. The first was the absence of urban migrants as either actors, or beneficiaries of development cooperation, along with a persistent reticence from many municipal and national governments to recognise the contributions of migrants to cities and to urban development. We also iden-

5 Marta Cyan, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission

6 Wu Hailong – Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the UN, Geneva Switzerland

7 Thomas Fabian, Deputy Mayor of Leipzig, Germany, Chair of the Social Affairs forum of Eurocities

8 "Shaping Migration for Sustainable Development" March 20th-23rd. 2016 Freiburg

tified an incomplete understanding of how migrants, notably internal migrants, are bridging rural and urban development through transfers of capital, knowledge, services, values and ideas.

Together, based on several criteria, it was decided that I would base myself out of one of the regional offices of the GPMD, working with the local team to co-produce knowledge on urban migration in the region. After an initial fieldwork visit, and in discussion with the GPMD, Benin was selected as the research location. However, the focus would not be a single city, or specific ethnic group, but mobility along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. There was a clear understanding from the local team that cities along this corridor would experience unprecedented growth in the years ahead and would become a clear component of future migration management.

3.1.4 Shifting Roles from Anthropologist to Independent Consultant

Over the course of this project I was embedded for two periods of six months within the West African bureau of the GPMD, which is based in the Swiss Bureau for Development Cooperation (BUCO) in Cotonou. There is a long history of anthropologists working with development agencies, both as anthropologists of development, who produce ethnographies about development (Escobar, 1991; 2012; Ferguson, 1990) and development anthropologists who work as consultants within international cooperation (Green, 2016; Melly, 2016; Mosse, 2005; Mosse & Lewis, 2005). Sardan, the French anthropologist of West Africa has written, "the dialogue and cooperation between operators and development institutions on the one hand, and social-anthropologists on the other hand, although difficult and full of misunderstandings at the fault of both sides, is quasi inevitable, necessary and useful. There can be no 'applied' social anthropology of development without 'fundamental' social anthropology" (2001, p.5).[9] As mentioned above, this is even further the case for West African researchers, many of whom, unable to rely on funding from research institutes, regularly conduct studies and evaluations for the development sector.

However, coming from a trans-disciplinary perspective, my presence at the Cotonou bureau was neither "working for them" as a consultant or intern, nor "studying them" as an ethnographer. Instead, we were seeking to work together to co-produce knowledge that could help address issues of urban migration that were being jointly framed. This was a new mode of collaboration, and the local bureau struggled at times to pin down my role, settling for the title "independent consultant" in the end. Another part of this role, that was never explicitly specified, but was often acted upon, was as a connector between the local office in Benin, and the headquarters in Bern. Whilst there are many institutionalised modes of communication between the two locations, my presence and mobility between the two sites enabled an additional

9 Own translation: "Le dialogue et la coopération entre opérateurs et institutions de développement d'un côté, socio-anthropologues de l'autre, quoique difficile et tissé de malentendus imputables aux deux parties et quasi inévitables, est nécessaire et utile. Mais il ne peut y avoir de socioanthropologie du développement "appliqué" sans socio-anthropologie du développement "fondamentale."

mode of communication. Another aspect of this was my direct contact with migrants ie, beneficiaries. A programme manager in Bern will oversee national programmes abroad, where staff will identify local partners, who often then subcontract consultants, who themselves will talk to migrants. Through my research, I was able to share directly my research and takeaways from the field with the team in Cotonou and Bern, providing them with more direct accounts of migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

Integration into the BUCO was vital for the undertaking of this research. On a practical level it provided a welcome access to air-conditioned offices, a generator, doctor, printer and internet. During fieldwork I spent my mornings at the BUCO, writing up notes, organising interviews, and planning logistics. But beyond the infrastructure, the real added value was the opportunity to interact with the development practitioners, both the Swiss expatriate staff and local Beninese team.

In Benin there is a brain-drain, not just to countries abroad, but also to international agencies, and the local staff working for the BUCO were among the most informative stakeholders encountered during fieldwork. The Beninese staff provided much input to the research, sharing tacit knowledge about urbanisation and migration, making suggestions regarding relevant fieldwork locations, facilitating contacts and access to data. This sustained contact provided access to information for the research, but also an improved understanding of how projects are implemented in the West African region. This in turn helped me understand how best we could contribute relevant outputs for the GPMD.[10]

3.1.5 The Professional Mobility of Partners in Practice

The Swiss staff working in the Swiss Development Cooperation are on rotation - meaning that every four years they switch position and country. Over the course of the project there has been an almost complete rotation of staff at the GPMD. This means that the collaborators involved in the framing of the project are different from those involved in the diffusion of the results. This was even more accentuated in the West African bureau, where over the course of the project the first programme lead left, to be replaced by an interim, and then by another, who after a year was relocated to Dakar. In this context, local staff, who are immobile are even more important for the continuity of the project.

However, there are also several advantages to these shifting partnerships within a transdisciplinary approach. The first is that as partners, we can help bridge changes, to contribute to the institutional memory, and to assure continuity in discussions. The second point observed is that staff move with insights from the collaboration, transferring them to new locations. As such the knowledge produced 'travels' with

10 I travelled with staff to various project locations throughout the country, using the long car journeys to better understand their profession. As a newcomer to the city, the staff also integrated me into their social lives, inviting me to weddings, graduations and family celebrations.

them into other sectors. For example, Serge Oumow, first head of programme we collaborated with in Benin, relocated to Laos, but continued to work on the topic of urban migration. Another key member of the GPMD, Pietro Mona has since become ambassador for development, forced displacement and migration at the Department of Foreign Affairs, and in this new role collaborates with the city of Zurich. Bettina Etter went on to work as a senior migration governance expert at the permanent mission of Switzerland at the United Nations in New York during the Global Compact for Migration.

Indeed, what was originally seen as a challenge within this trans-disciplinary project has in fact shown silver linings, as new collaborators also arrive with refreshing questions. This impedes the collaboration from becoming routine and introduces new elements and backgrounds. Furthermore, SDC staff are trained to do this, it is part of their professional praxis to pick up, or hand over projects, something that we could learn from in academia, where research projects are more closely tied to individuals.

3.2 Conducting Mobile & Multi-sited Ethnography

Trans-disciplinary research projects often aspire to employ a wide range of methodological tools. On the one hand this methodological pluralism is well suited to research in African urban areas, where it makes sense to vary one's livelihood skills, adapting to the situation and opportunities presented. Working in Benin, data came in various forms: WhatsApp messages, whispered conversations and CD-ROMs of oddly formatted numbers. Making sense of this information and combining it with more structured methods required resourcefulness. It led to an ongoing triage and re-evaluation of data, a constant questioning of what could be re-employed within this thesis. There was rarely the luxury of waiting for information to resurface in a cleaner, more employable format. On the other hand, there are clear limits to attempting methodological pluralism within a thesis project. Whilst one of the core trans-disciplinary practices is crossing disciplinary borders, this can create uncertainty. As a one-person project, with specific disciplinary training in social anthropology, it was challenging to multiply methods and keep up with the skills required to implement them. I start here from the core of my methodology, presenting the various ethnographic strategies employed, before moving on to present complementary methods.

Over the course of this project, I spent just over 12 months in Benin based in Cotonou. This time was structured into two longer stays, from Nov. 16 - March 17, and then again from Oct. 17 - April 18, and punctuated by two shorter trips in Nov. 15 and May 16. This time was needed to understand the urban processes at play along the corridor and engage coherently with various actors living and working along the corridor. I adopted participant observation, a research technique developed largely by anthropologists, in order to gain access and social acceptance in various locations

along the corridor, and immersed myself in the corridor in order to better attain a comprehensive understanding of the internal structure and processes at play. I have danced through the night, attended church, paid into tontines[11] and shopped in markets, seeking to maximise my exposure to the city. This involved both moments of rootedness, living in various neighbourhoods, and movement, as I moved along the corridor. Over the course of my fieldwork, I lived in three different districts of Cotonou, learning from each location, a central market district, an expat neighbourhood and a new area on the outskirts.

3.2.1 Mobile Ethnography

Much of the ethnography conducted here was done en route, in the company of others as I moved through the corridor. This approach is inscribed within the 'mobile methods' within the (not so) new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Itinerant ethnography includes for example walking with informants, travelling along bus routes (Choplin & Lombard, 2010) whilst all the time, observing, recording, interviewing, making notes. For Büscher et al., "shadowing, stalking, walk-alongs, ride-alongs (…) enable questions about sensory experience, embodiment, emplacement, about what changes and what stays the same, and about the configuration and reconfiguration of assemblies of objects, space, people, ideas and information" (2001, p.13). Such methods have jumped the boundaries of anthropology and are now equally common practice in geography (Novoa, 2015) and migration studies (Faist, 2012).

Fieldwork started as I compiled visas, visited embassies on the outskirts of London, in Basel and Geneva, prepared bank statements, and gathered letters of invitation from people I barely knew. During this process, observations of waiting rooms, conversations with embassy staff and fellow travellers became part and parcel of this research. The hours spent in the migration office in Cotonou, waiting for a stamp, became an opportunity to interview the Chinese migrant and his Beninese translator, or the Indian family who had just arrived in West Africa. A long queue at customs got me chatting with the lady in front of me about the remittances she sent from Nantes to Natintingou. Some opportunities were sadly missed, a delayed flight in Cotonou had me waiting next to John Igué, the Beninese geographer for several hours, only to realise his identity as we stood to board. Mercy for the tired passenger seated next to the anthropologist. Of course, I was not the only one to instrumentalise these moments. Regularly as I passed borders, I was required to hand over my visiting card, quizzed about my travels, and asked to provide contact details. On several occasions, customs officers or border agents followed up with messages and hopes of a night out. They were of course understandably less interested in discussing migration trends in the region.

I travelled between Paris and Cotonou, but also within the region, seeking to make

11 A tontine is a collective savings group

up for my lack of familiarity with the West African context, trying to understand the specificities of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor and its urban form compared to other well-trodden routes or cities in the region. Between 2015 and 2018, I travelled with development practitioners to neighbouring countries including Nigeria, Togo, Niger and Burkina Faso, and then further afield to Senegal and Ghana.

Migration studies have warned against the dangers of methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002; Faist, 2012). This they define as the assumption that the nation-state is the natural and social form of the modern world, a naturalisation of the nation-state that limits cross-border comparative studies. It has been an ongoing struggle to overcome this and research Benin within the context of the trans-national Lagos-Abidjan corridor, and not remain bounded by the borders of the nation state. For as much as colonial borders are artificial lines that divide homogenous groups, they are also very concrete infrastructures with guards and stop barriers. With no official residence in Benin, I had to apply in Switzerland for individual visas to travel to Nigeria and the Ivory Coast which made it difficult to move across these borders.[12] My (im)mobility was increased in 2018, when the SDC advised against travelling through Togo for security reasons. Nonetheless many of my informants skipped passed the official border posts, passing through parallel informal routes on motorbikes or boats. However given my visible presence, to take me along would have compromised their passage and slowed them down, "No way!" explained one close contact when I asked if I could go to the Lagos market with her to buy cosmetics, "I have enough problems like trying to pass off as Nigerian when I am there, and then carry my goods back without too many *tracasserie,*[13] what would we do with you tagging along as well?"

On my first fieldwork trip to Cotonou, I became acquainted with the city by shadowing an estate agent. In the early morning, I would set out on my rounds with him, visiting various properties in the outskirts of the city, picking up rents, organising repairs, dropping paperwork off with neighbourhood chiefs. This was a good introduction to the city, it took me into various urban areas, it allowed me to visit the inside of houses and legitimised my presence in the city. The agent also had a wealth of knowledge about urban development, the planning process, the history of various areas, building practices and the prices of amenities. He was able to provide background information on the arrival of foreign tenants, and the local governance of neighbourhoods. As we drove around the city in his run-down Mercedes he would scold his younger male apprentice comparing him to me, "look how many notes she takes - and you, I train you for years and you never write a thing down" . Over the course of my fieldwork I continued to shadow many other people as they drove around for their jobs, for example drivers, development practitioners, traders or journalists. As I travelled by car, but also by moto-taxi, car taxis or mini-buses, I

12 This is not to under-estimate the extensive privilege of being able to travel on a European passport, which enables a much higher freedom of movement than a Beninese passport. The website passport index ranks a UK passport with a mobility score of 168 in comparison to 65 for Benin. www.passportindex.org accessed 28th April 2020.

13 Annoyance or nuisance – here this refers to everyday corruption.

gathered information from fellow passengers and developed a better understanding of mobility along the corridor.

Upon arrival, I made my way around the city by moto-taxi, and aware of the numerous road accidents, I bought a helmet for my second field trip. By the third trip I had a car. Celestin Alloeiti worked as my driver, and was of great contribution to this project.[14] Drivers are, as Melly underlines, "key participants in the circulation of political rumours, gossip and tales, as well as possessing inside knowledge about brokered deals and shadowy liaisons" (Melly, 2016, p.54) Drivers are often sidelined in ethnographic accounts, yet they are the "means of our research - the roads and vehicles that move us through and connect us with our field sites, the intermediaries that facilitate our itineraries, the cultural translators who explain the terrain, the journey and commutes we make to field sites (…) they have long lurked in the shadow of ethnographic accounts" (Melly, 2016, p.55).

Celestin knew the Beninese section of the corridor well, having worked as a runner, driving second-hand cars from the port to the sales plots near the Nigerian border. He had also worked as a petrol smuggler, driving petrol over in a car he had altered to include a hidden reservoir. The work was dangerous, and when he started a family, he became a moto-bike taxi driver in Comé, a small town towards the Togolese border. He lived with his family in a small village situated off the corridor and used a rich military uncle's house as his base in town. Celestin provided me with a wealth of understanding into urban-rural linkages and how spaces such as his village are being transformed along the corridor. He taught me about Beninese kinship, politics, and religion, and patiently helped me learn Fon. Whilst driving around he got me out of trouble with police officers and locals when I was asked too many questions. He translated and decoded interviews for me, pointing out when he thought people were exaggerating or taking me for a ride. His investment in this project was of great value[15] and enabled me the freedom of being able to move up and down the corridor with ease.

3.2.2 Multi-sited Ethnography

Mobile methods were combined with a multi-sited approach, in the tradition of the much-cited work of Marcus (1995) that called for anthropologists to test the limits of

14 I feel a certain reticence, an admission, to having a driver. A white woman being driven around the city in a 4x4 by a black man: the visuals are not good. So radically different to the Peace Corps volunteers with their hair braided into corn rows driving in on the back of motorbikes.

Drawing on my drivers insights recalls the jet-set speakers at international events whose chat with the uber driver on the way from the airport appears to be their only contact with the city, as they open their keynote with "so I was talking to the driver on the way here…"

Yet to remain silent about the role played by Celestin would be even worse, overlooking the contribution of an important collaborator in the field.

15 Celestin's mother is a vodún priestess, he insisted she wanted to do a ceremony to ensure the jury will approve this PhD, just give me the names of the committee they told me and we will make sure it goes through. For ethical reasons, the names were not provided.

ethnography and adopt multiple sites of observation. However, whilst Marcus called for a shift away from conventional single-sited sites, my research design had kept me in motion, and I was struggling to understand local experiences of mobility. Whilst being on the move was productive in generating encounters, collecting information and experiencing the corridor, it also produced data that was often fleeting and difficult to verify. As soon as an observation had been made, things were once again in motion. If we were driving, we made emergency stops and rapid U-turns, but the moment had often already passed. In the second fieldwork trip, I decided to embed myself in four spots along the corridor (see map. 10). The intention here was to spend time with communities living along the corridor, observe their relationship with the corridor, and try and understand how this was transforming their spatial environment. These spots, all along the Beninese section of the corridor reflect various facets of urban migration that feature in the chapters of this thesis. I was not able to embed myself for equal amounts of time in these locations, and some became more meaningful engagements than others. The first, a toll booth, allowed me to observe movement through the corridor. The second, Missébo, an inner-city clothes market, provided insights into migrant trading along the corridor. The third, PK10, a new Nigerian quarter is an arrival neighbourhood in the periphery. The fourth, Kraké, was on the border with Nigeria. Here I will briefly present each site from West to East, explain how I gained access to them, and the methodological strategies employed.

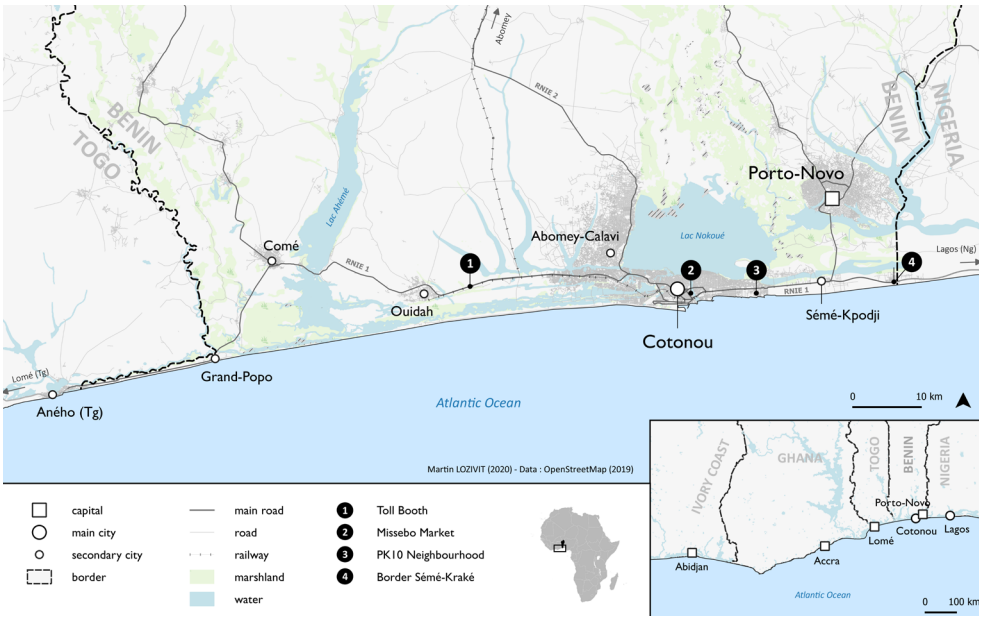
The first site of observation was a *maquis* (a food stall) at a toll booth situated between Cotonou and Ouidah. I worked in this *maquis* as a waitress once a week during my 2017 - 2018 fieldtrip. I observed the goods in circulation along the corridor and conducted interviews with migrants as they stopped off on their travels. The location was an ideal spot to observe how people and goods were transforming the areas they passed through. This site is presented as an example in more detail below and features in chapter one.

The second site was Missébo, a clothes trading district in the centre of Cotonou and is discussed in more detail in chapter four. Located adjacent to the Zongo,[16] Missébo is a classic example of a migrant neighbourhood in the city centre, providing trading opportunities for newcomers. Nigerians and Indians trade second-hand clothes and yards of cloth, inserting themselves into global commodity trades that reach beyond the corridor. I first gained access to this site by shopping, and accompanying others to shop, and continued with observations, and interviews with local leaders and community organisers. I documented the demolition of large sections of Missébo in the 2017 evictions discussed in chapter three.

The third site was PK10, situated ten kilometres east of Cotonou, the neighbourhood had an influx of Nigerian students when a private Anglophone university opened a campus there. The area is a good example of how migration transforms the urban fabric in

16 Zongos are the traditional arrival neighbourhoods for Muslims from the North in the Christian south.

the periphery. Here I spent time with the local governance, an emperor, king, and local chief, interviewed local residents and conducted focus groups and mapping sessions with young Nigerians. I also documented the upgrading of the neighbourhood with the arrival of new infrastructure for the protection of coastal erosion and water drainage.



Map 10 Research sites along the Beninese section of the LAC. Source: OSM 2019, Produced by M. Lozivit 2020

The final observation site was Kraké - located on the border to Nigeria. This was the most challenging area to conduct research; officials, hustlers, traders, and passengers are tense, and situations flare up quickly. One interview with a border officer was interrupted as he went to beat a Togolese migrant, returning to answer my questions calmly after. I officially passed the border four times when travelling from Benin to Nigeria and was able to spend more time on the Beninese side than the Nigerian side. I interviewed officials, and local leaders, made observations and took photos. I also chronicled the construction of new border infrastructure. I found the back office of a money changer where I could have calmer conversations. I was much assisted here by Open Street Maps Benin, who, having documented this area for prevention measures during the Ebola crisis, agreed to return to the site with me. This allowed us to move freely between the no-man's land area and the border zone. Each of these sites required a bricolage of various entry methods, some I could spend considerable time in, others required taking quick measures. In the next section, I present in more detail how I gained access to the first site.

3.2.3 Learning Through Doing: Putting on an Apron

I became a regular at the *maquis* when I would stop off at the toll booth to buy fruit - cheaper and fresher here than in the town markets. I had been driving up and down

the corridor in cars, motorbikes and minibuses. I had been focused on collecting census data, and newspaper articles, interviewing planners, truckers' associations and migrant traders and trying to map out emerging urban forms to grasp the extension of this sprawling metropolitan zone along the coast. At the *maquis* I would take a break, drink a coke, and chat with Julie. She would place orders, "You're going to the Togolese border? Bring me back some Ghanaian Sugar Bread". She shared news she had gathered from people passing though. One week she warned: "Careful chérie, there's been some violence in the North, don't linger too much in Lomé, it's getting tense" and showed me photos on her phone of military killings. The next week I got the same advice from the head of security at the Swiss Development Cooperation. Julie as always was one step ahead of the game – well-informed of the various goings-on along the corridor.

I asked Julie if I could come and work with her and became her ad-hoc, clumsy waitress.[17] Wearing a yellow apron, I would run across the lanes of traffic to deliver meals to vendors on the other side of the road, take morning orders from the staff in the toll booths, sell water to passers-by, scrabbling to get the change in time before their cars took off. Spraying off the flies with paraffin and moving around rags, ice and containers to keep the cold goods cold and the hot food hot. In the afternoons, after the lunch rush, I would run errands and make visits with Julie - walking away from the road into the surrounding settlements before coming back to nap, an eye half-open in case a lorry pulled up. My agreement with Julie and Nina intrigued our patrons, some stayed longer, ordered more, and were pleasantly surprised to have a white woman serve them local dishes.

The toll booth also gave me insight into how families are historically tied into multiple sites along the corridor. Julie's was Nagos.[18] Her family were descendants of Oyéwolé from Ile-Ife in Nigeria, whose ancestor was kidnapped as a child in Nigeria and brought to Danhomey, and, having escaped enslavement in Porto Novo, was adopted by the Aidasso family in Ouidah. The family continued to maintain connections with Nigeria whilst other kin had settled in Togo, and described Ouidah as the "*trait d'union",* the hyphen, between the Nagos in Nigeria and the Nagos in Togo." I was accepted in this family, invited to participate in Egou-Goun ceremonies, birthday parties, and get-togethers. Julie's daughter had married the toll-booth manager, and they welcomed me into their newly constructed home in the outskirts of Cotonou.

The *maquis* grounded me, allowed me to stay still and observe how people and goods moved along it, or got stuck in place. It became a vantage point, passengers would get out of their vehicles, have a drink and sometimes agree to tell me a little about

17 For a wider discussion on drinking and urbanity in West Africa see Wolputte, Steven van. 2010. Beer in Africa: Drinking Spaces, States and Selves, and for a discussion of the West African cafeterias "Chez Diallo" see Spire, Amandine. 2011. L'Etranger et La Ville En Afrique de l'Ouest. Paris: Karthala. p.329

18 The word Nagos derives from the word anago, a term that the Fon-speaking people used to describe Yoruba-speaking people, it also refers to Brazilian Yoruba and their descendants (Martory, 2005; p.38)

where they were going, what they were taking, when they would be back. Over time, I was able to tell apart the various movements, those just popping into town, or on a long haul, on their way back from university or just out for a wander. The land around the toll booth provided a good cross-section of how the corridor is under transformation and how the land conflicts, extraction of natural resources, and new forms of urbanity are emerging.

3.2.5 White Privilege and Learning to be Yovo

As a white woman, my presence along these sites was unexpected. These locations were in-between spaces, neither the urban centres nor the rural villages were used to visits by white development workers, tourists and missionaries. The Beninese term for white is "Yovo" which rather than designating a colour means "privileged" or "educated."[19] It is used as an interpellation to call out the presence of a white person, but also to describe a general attitude of haughtiness, superiority, and social ineptness.[20] Splitting the bill, admonishing a colleague, sticking to rigorous schedules - such things can equally lead to a Beninese being called out as Yovo. This is especially the case for returnees from Europe who are often seen to have lost touch with local "realities."[21] As a Yovo, my whiteness made me highly visible, and both opened and shut down various paths of investigation. I was observed, photographed, commented on by those around. When living with the development workers, my movements were carefully noted down by the household guard, as were my comings and goings from the Swiss Development Cooperation.[22]

On race, the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says, "I wasn't black until I came to America. I became black in America. Growing up in Nigeria, I didn't think about race because I didn't need to think about race" (cited in Hope, 2018). I had a similar experience working in Benin, realising, properly, for the first time that I was white. This whiteness carried a power that I handled uneasily, it produced deference (authentic or feigned), signalled an economic power and drew uncomfortable flattery; "I would love my sons to grow up and marry a pale woman like you", one informant told me, "it's my dream to have some paler skin in the family". In Benin, whilst working as a young woman came with a few occasional inconveniences,[23] the intersectionality of gender and race put my whiteness above being female. As such, whilst I experienced whiteness for the first time, I also came close to experiencing the latent and structural privilege of maleness.

19 See. Guedo and Coninckx 1986 for a detailed ethno-linguist account of black and white in Fon.

20 As anthropologists turn to study whiteness in Europe, see for example Wekker 2016 on the construction of whiteness in the Netherlands - West African understandings of whiteness have much to contribute to the discussion.

21 This expression returned often, "ce sont les realités d'ici" meaning these are the local conditions. However, it also captured the idea that there are multiple realities - ways of knowing the world and that to make sense of Benin, local epistemologies must be adopted.

22 One of the house guards was an anthropology student, working nights to cover his studies at the University of Abomey Calavi. Commenting on my privilege as I came back one evening he told me, we can study "but you Yovos - you get the projects - tell me about how to get projects."

23 Rarely did I feel unsafe or threatened in Benin an exception being the Kraké border zone towards Nigeria.

My affiliation with the Swiss Development Cooperation placed me again in a position of power. Being of both French and British origin, it was a relief not to be affiliated to a previous colonial power. Whilst Switzerland's history is nonetheless rooted in colonial relations,[24] its presence in Benin as a development actor is more subtle than the French counterpart. In comparison to the Agence Française de Development, the Swiss presence was presented by various sources as a more honest broker, and their long-term financial commitment to project, met with approval. Nonetheless, many informants saw our encounter as an opportunity to access project funding from the SDC. As much as I tried to manage expectations, and clarify my position, this shaped such interactions. Understandably, informants sought to pitch their various initiatives, but also tried to align their objectives with what they imagined to be Swiss priorities for migration and urban development. Given that in interviews I would ask open questions and refrain from opinionating, this often created frustrating situations in which both the interviewee and I were fishing for information.

Other vested interests were less subtle. Arriving at my first interview, I was floored by a smiling secretary asking "*où est mon cadeau?*"[25] and waiting for a gift before announcing my arrival to her boss.[26] By the end of my fieldwork I had become better at playing this game, knowing when to laugh, flirt, wait, feign anger, get help or just give in. My skill set got sharper, and was put to use when, as I flew out of Benin for the last time, a security guard at the airport held up my baggage hoping for a bribe. These interactions were even more complicated given that the Swiss Cooperation Bureau expects its staff to be exemplary in this field, personally embodying the "*redevabilité*" - accountability that it promotes in its governance programmes. For example, any project merchandise and gifts received by staff members were pooled and then re-distributed through a lotto system at the end of the year. Yet, as anthropologists, we know that gift exchange is key to social relations, and that the sharing of things often leads to the sharing of ideas and information. As researchers, we take from our informants, we take time and contacts, keep them from their everyday activities, and bother them with questions. To ask "*où est mon cadeau*" is a form of banter, one that called out my privilege, tested my street-worthiness, and highlighted that I had arrived from afar and should come bearing gifts.

Whilst learning to be Yovo, I also invested time to learn basic Fon, the dominant language in South Benin. I took group classes, and private tuition at the Institut Français with the Professor Bienvenu Azenhoungbo, a prince from the kingdom of Abomey and linguist from the University of Abomey Calavi. These lessons provided a sense of progress when fieldwork was stalling, a refreshing scholarly classroom away from the constant exposure to the city. The classroom became a place where I could ask questions, reflect on fieldwork from the week, and correct misunderstand-

24 For discussions on the colonial heritage of Switzerland see Purtschert and Fischer Tiné, 2015

25 "Where is my present?"

26 For further discussion of everyday corruption in the West African state see De Sardan and Blando, 2001; 2007

ings. I learnt for instance that 'corruption' did not exist as a word in Fon, and people claimed that its neologism had been invented by journalists. I also learnt the word "Nuɖuɖonumɛ", which means "to eat something from somewhere". Learning Fon was of assistance in understanding the local expressions in French that were often direct translations such as "avoir son chez", "tu as fait un peu?" or "bonne assise."[27] Having basic vocabulary enabled me to introduce myself in the field, and when I received help from people translating, I was able to roughly estimate how accurate they were. However, knowing the vocabulary and various phrase structures was not enough. Based on western norms of basic language acquisition, we started with the A1 skills of introducing ourselves and formulating basic questions, spending hours practising asking people where they came from, how many children they had, what they were called, or what they did for a living. Only, after hours of this, following a hunch, did I ask Prof. Azenhoungbo if people in real life asked these questions. *"No never!"* he exclaimed, *"never would I ask someone if they have children, or where they live - and even less what their name is!"*. To do so, he went on to tell me, would expose them to unnecessary vulnerabilities, attract jealousy, and possibly witchcraft. So, whilst my notebooks full of vocabulary and verbs were of some help, they were clearly not enough to teach me key phrases of local society.

3.3 Methodological Pluralism & Teamwork

This thesis adopts a trans-disciplinary framework, working primarily with participant observation, either on the move, or located in specific spots along the corridor. However, as stated above, it integrates additional methods that will be presented below, along with the collaborators who helped implement them. Often field work assistants are thanked in the acknowledgements, however here, they did not just assist me, but contributed knowledge and methods that significantly shaped the outcomes of this project. These actors, language teachers, drivers, assistants often "slip out of the ethnographic frame" in anthropological studies as the services they provide fade into the background to be replaced by a single voice (Clifford, 1997, p.27 cited in Melly, 2016, p.55). Finally, among the people who accompanied me in this fieldwork, Armelle Choplin stands out. I was in the very privileged position to be in Benin while Armelle Choplin was conducting research at the IRD, the French Institute of Research and Development in Cotonou. This was invaluable and provided many opportunities to share insights, contacts and observations. To the extent that I can, I seek here to underline the contribution of these actors to the knowledge produced in this trans-disciplinary project.

3.3.1 Interviews

27 Expressions in Beninese French, meaning "to have one's home", "have you done a little bit" - meaning have you worked today? and "good sitting" - meaning enjoy your rest.

Everyday life was scattered with conversations, ranging from an informal chat to structured official interviews in ministries. Around a quarter of the semi-structured interviews were recorded, others relied on note taking during the discussion or jotting down and immediate recall. Some good conversations were caught up in movement along the corridor and lost, the situation not always allowing immediate documentation. Recorded interviews were undertaken in English or French and transcribed, accounting for over three hundred pages of script. These include for example interviews with urbanists, architects, planners, migrant associations, local chiefs, regional governance bodies, development practitioners or NGOs. I am grateful for the assistance of Beatrice Koumenougbo, a Beninese development practitioner, who at times accompanied me to interviews and debriefed with me afterwards, checking I had correctly understood statements, and providing corrections when I had not. Beatrice Koumenougbo also assisted in the re-transcription and provided input on the transcription of Fon expressions.

In the final data set, there is, as to be expected, a misbalance, with powerful stakeholders more likely to be included in formal interviews, whilst with poorer residents, I undertook more informal discussions. And whilst the Beninese elite often speak a very articulate French, the level of French spoken by those with less formal education and indirect turns of phrase often left me frustrated with not being able to collect "good" verbatim. Information would often emerge slowly, over the course of several conversations, and not necessarily in neatly-packaged comments or discussions. This was quite in contrast to my experience of English in Ghana or Nigeria where elaborate and articulate accounts of everyday urban life were to be heard on every street corner. I have sought nonetheless to try and balance the voices heard, and in my analysis, have applied a principle of epistemological equity. Another clear limit is the gender balance of those I formally interviewed- primarily male - which reflects the gender structure within those organisations, but also an internal bias on my part.

3.3.2 Statistical Analysis

I was also able to gain access to the results of the 2013 National Census implemented by the Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique which covered over 10 million individuals and asked a series of detailed questions that enable us to analyse both migration patterns (place of birth, previous place of residence, dialect spoken, nationality) and urban patterns (housing typology, land ownership, rental status, building materials used, access to urban utilities such as water, power, waste disposal etc.) as well as other variables such as access to consumer goods or education levels. This enabled us to produce a rich statistical portrait of migrant urban households.. More detailed analysis of certain data is presented within the chapters. The process of acquiring this data included participant observation and required months of patient trials; as I neared the end, the director of the statistics institute was ousted for political reasons, creating significant setbacks. Nonetheless final access to the data was clearly facilitated by my affiliation with the Swiss Development Cooperation who had provided financial support of 1.8 million CHF to the Beninese govern-

ment for the completion of the census.

Two people were of great assistance in this process - Martial Kpassè, recommended by the Swiss Development Cooperation, had worked with the INSAE and had a good understanding of the process - he was able to provide insights into how the data had been collected, how the nine hundred agents on the ground had implemented the census, and the limits and dangers of certain variables. It was especially important to understand how migrants had been included in the census. For example, Nigerian inhabitants living in Benin along the border in two localities, Monrigourou in the commune of Nikki and Oigamoin in the commune of Perere refused to partake in the census because they did not want to be 'counted', arguing that they used Nigerian public services on the other side of the border. In the analysis of the data, Federico Rogai, a Masters student in applied statistics at the ETH Zürich was of invaluable support in producing the data set, identifying inconsistencies, de-coding the catalogue of variables, and providing reliable and nuanced outputs. Federico Rogai travelled to Benin in 2018 to complete the data set with assistance from the staff at INSAE and to better understand the context in which the variables were produced.

3.3.3 Mapping

The mapping activities in this thesis took a two-pronged approach. In the first instance, I collaborated with Sam Agbadonou and Saliou Abdou – founders of the Open Street Map collective in Benin. This grassroots organisation seeks to produce local cartographies in a context where maps are often hard to access - but also participates in a global community of cartographers, for example mapping remotely accessible routes in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake. Working with Open Street Map, we mapped the four spots of investigation along the corridor, as well as various mobility hubs, documenting for example the various informal transport hubs in Cotonou, and the links they provide along the corridor. Most of the data is difficult to present here because of its online, interactive format as it was uploaded directly onto the Open Street server. Whilst the final results of these mapping sessions were not always sufficient, the process of participating in this collective mapping initiative was incredibly formative in my understanding of both urban spaces, and how young West Africans are re-appropriating mapping tools to reclaim representations of the city.

The second approach was in collaboration with the cartographer Philippe Rekacewicz, whose approach to mapping was more conceptual than Open Street Maps. Philippe Rekacewicz has followed the development of this work through the project "Extended Territories of Urbanisation" at the Future Cities Lab in Singapore. Over the course of five encounters in Singapore and in Zurich, discussion and sketches led to the production of several maps that illustrate the processes of urbanisation along the corridor.[28]

28 At the time of writing, Philippe Rekacewicz was in lockdown in Norway due to the covid-19 pandemic with three small children to homeschool. The maps we have yet to finalise will be completed once the situation allows and will be integrated into the body of this thesis.

3.3.4 Audio-Visual Material

Over the course of the research, a great deal of audio-visual material was produced. These included elevated photos from the top of a port crane and go-pro footage of the length of the Beninese section of the corridor taken from a motorbike. I also researched the production of images and representations of contemporary urban imaginaries. These included, for example the work of a local sculptor, Oswald Adande, who produces wooden cases portraying scenes of Beninese cities. Building on his observations of contemporary West-African streetscapes, they encapsulate both the aspirations and frustrations of city-dwellers (Hertzog, 2019).

Another[29] key project in the compilation of this material was the production of a Canal+ soap opera entitled "Kotonu" by the film director Aymar Esse. In collaboration with the Swiss Development Cooperation, the soap opera explored topics of migration in the city, from migrant trading to remittances, and the returnee diaspora (Hertzog, 2017). Through the soap opera, and observing the production team, I was able to tune into how local stories and narratives are being told about migrants in the city.

3.3.5 Inter-disciplinary Exchanges

An important methodological feature of this thesis has been the ongoing inter-disciplinary conversations with urban scholars, and migration scholars from the global south. Often these conversations, deemed informal or secondary are side-lined in methodology write-ups. And while accounts of stakeholder workshops or conversations with informants are legitimised, fellow academics often appear only through citation of written work. Yet such moments have been instrumental in guiding and challenging my research and have helped me position my findings within contemporary debates and among peers. Given the solitary nature of a thesis, collective peer discussions are key for the framing of problems, the development of theory and organisation of data.

Over the course of this thesis I had the opportunity to partake in the project "Extended Territories of Urbanisation" led by Christian Schmid and Milica Topalovic within the framework of the Future Cities Lab. This project, that was presented briefly in the introduction, accompanied the development and maturation of many of the core ideas presented in this thesis. The project brought together a team[30] of both junior and established researchers, who were undertaking fieldwork in territories of 'extended urbanisation', in areas that until recently have not been the focus of urban scholarship. For example, the North Sea, a copper mine in the Amazon, or the agricultural belt of the North American Mid-West. Through a series of comparative workshops, we were able to read across these cases, digging into them to produce a

29 See blog post A.Hertzog 2017, "Urban Migration on Screen," Shareweb, SDC Network.

30 Project Team: Christian Schmid, Milica Topalovic, Elisa Bertuzzo, Rodrigo Castriota, Alice Hertzog, Nancy Couling, Metaxia Markaki, Nikos Katsikis, Tammy Wong, Philippe Rekacewicz, Simone Abdou Maliq

more systematic understanding of these new dynamics of urbanisation. In terms of the development of this thesis, these workshops probed my findings when they were fresh from the field and became a space to present and test new ideas on how we conceive the urban fabric.

Another three significant moments that were key in this work, all of which involved South African institutions.[31] South Africa plays an important role in structuring academic conversations in both the fields of urban studies and migration studies. It hosts both the African Centre for Cities and the African Centre for Migration Studies and leads in the development of African scholarship in these fields. Indeed, South African researchers have led the way in the southern turn of urban studies (Kihato, 2013; Pieterse, 2010; Robinson, 2013). This comes of course with its own *problématique,* given levels of development in South Africa in comparison to the rest of the continent and its specific urban heritage in the aftermath of apartheid. It also runs the risk of overlooking the francophone debate due to the interest and focus on anglophone cities.

In September 2015, I participated in an International Social Sciences Council seminar in Durban, along with a dozen other "World Social Science Fellows."[32] The workshop was organised in partnership with the Cities Alliance[33] around the Sustainable Development Goal 11.[34] The researcher Mark Swilling led the seminar, challenging us to consider the implications of undertaking trans-disciplinary research in the settings of African cities.

The second South African encounter occurred in Basel, where the university has an ongoing partnership with the African Centre for Cities. In September 2018 Sophie Oldfield and Laura Nkula-Wenz led a block course on African Cities. Starting from central theoretical provocations of southern urban literature, we explored the challenges of post-colonial development, and drew on literary and cinematic landscapes to explore themes of mobility, belonging, representation, dwelling and identity in the African city. As a group, we immersed ourselves in the writings of Mbembe, Pieterse, Myers, Ong, Roy, Parnell, Swilling, Kihato, Simone, Teju Cole and De Boeck. Having read these authors alone, there was a new joy to revisit them with others. This encounter encouraged me to be more playful with theory, but also encouraged me to engage more seriously with fictional and artistic representations of the city.
The third event, organised by the African Academy for Urban Diversity also took

31 Other events have also been key, these include two editions of the Migdevri, a SDC-funded initiative to foster exchange between junior West African migration scholars. This provided an opportunity to exchange with doctoral students from the region, and receive input from Oliver Bakewell, Olivier de Sardan, Angèle Mendy and Eric Hahonou.

32 Coming from a multitude of settings, we discussed emerging modes of urban governance in the developing world, and the challenges of tackling urban growth, urban poverty, environmental unsustainability. Conversations continued over the course of the PhD, be it with Andre Ortega, a geographer working on the spatial politics of peri-urban transformation and transnational migration or Karim Buyana, a policy advisor in Uganda who focuses on gender inequalities and climate change adaptation and now collaborates with the Trans-Disciplinary Lab at ETH Zurich.

33 The Cities Alliance is a global partnership formed jointly by the World Bank and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements to tackle urban poverty.

34 SDG Goal 11: "Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable"

place in September 2018. The AAUD is headed-up by Loren Landau, director of the African Centre Migration and Society, and Léonie Newhouse, a senior research fellow, with the African Urban Diversity cluster at the Max Planck institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. The key idea behind the AAUD was to bring together a new generation of scholars from Africa, the US and Europe to refine their research focus, promote professional development, and build trans-national scholarly communities. The cohort in 2018 brought together post-fieldwork doctoral students for theory building and cross-disciplinary discussion. Together we workshopped dissertation structures and questioned the arguments and contributions we planned to make, all while considering the impact of diversity in our various case studies: local market economies in Ouagadougou, informal street traders in Accra, urban social movements in Harare, Somali refugees in Nairobi and a post-colonial neighbourhood in Cape Town. Particularly significant were discussions led by Paolo Gaibazzi (2015) on the analytical and conceptual possibilities of focusing on movement rather than place in relation to discussions of African urbanity and urbanisation.

These moments, along with other academic engagements, conferences and workshops, provided the inter-disciplinary insights that are often tricky to gain in a thesis project. Indeed, as much as the intention is to combine various methodologies, and create a wider team to collaborate with, the thesis is ultimately a one-person project, and the author trained with disciplinary methods. Such encounters are even more necessary in inter-disciplinary PhDs, providing both a community of fellow scholars and leveraging knowledge from the crowd.

This is a thesis, undertaken by an anthropologist, in an architecture department supervised by a sociologist, environmental scientist and geographer, all whilst adopting a trans-disciplinary framework. An inter-disciplinary challenge, but also one that multiplied perspectives and methods. The various methodological entry points produced more data than it is possible to present within the context of this thesis. This is one of the drawbacks of multiplying methods in the hope of producing a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of the processes at play. The analysis of the census data, or of urban representations within West African soap operas would maybe suffice in a strictly disciplinary perspective. It also limits the depth in which each method can be implemented, as time is spent jumping between registers. However, the almost opportunistic bricolage of methods is also one that corresponds to the constraints of conducting fieldwork in West Africa, as one method comes to the help of another, filling in inconsistencies and gaps in the data. This was an approach that sought to '*faire feu de tout bois*',[35] for when life serves you lemons, you make lemonade (Beyoncé, 2016).

35 ''to make fire from all kinds of wood' guidance received from Armelle Choplin

Fig. 6 "The main objective of training is not knowledge but action" - a motobike plate in Cotonou, Benin

Fig. 7 Discussing data results with Pius Krütli (TdLab), Simone Giger & Anne Tourchine Savary (GPMD)

Fig. 8 Storyboard of research collaboration - researchers in blue below timeline, practitioners in pink above timeline

Fig. 9 Celebrating Women's Day at the Bureau of Swiss Cooperation, Cotonou
Fig. 10 Workshop on urban development, Cotonou
Fig. 11 Workshop on migration and development, Cotonou

Fig. 12 Workshop on migration and development, Parakou

Fig. 13 Project Team - Extended Urbanisation Future Cities Lab

Fig. 14 Poster encouraging residents to partake in the national census in 2013

Fig. 15 Researching mobility on the move

Fig. 16 Nigerian transfer services in the neighbourhood of Missébo

Fig. 17 Aymar Esse directing the soap opera Kotonu in the Missébo neighbourhood

Fig. 18 A street corner in PK10 - a Nigerian neighbourhood in the outskirts of Cotonou

Fig. 19 The team from the maquis at the toll booth

4. THE BEND: EXTENSIONS OF THE URBAN FABRIC IN SOUTH BENIN

This chapter is the first in a series of four knots. We start with a simple knot, the bend, a knot that connects one length of rope to another. As such, it is the most appropriate knot from which to introduce the extension of the urban fabric along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. The questions we ask here are: How has migration tied this urban territory together? How are new arrivals tying into the urban fabric? And how are these knots creating migrant centralities both in the outskirts and the city centre? The bend is a knot that accounts for growth in the urban fabric, as new arrivals attach themselves to the pre-existing urban fabric and pull out lines to reach into new territories. By using the bend, people can stretch urban resources to cover an even wider surface. In this sense, the bend is a knot that sits most closely to Lefebvre's discussion of the urban fabric as an ever-increasing surface.

As a first knot, the aim of this chapter is to provide contextual elements on migration and urbanisation in South Benin. This is done both from a historical perspective and by analysing current trends, focusing on mobility patterns, and then on urban growth. Whilst providing elements of context, it also portrays the territory by presenting two specific locations along the corridor that both function as knots and provide anchorage for people on the move. The chapter opens with a portrait of a toll booth situated in the middle of the corridor, and closes with an analysis of Missébo, a textiles market run by migrants in the centre of Cotonou. As such, this chapter moves along the corridor, navigating between sites of extended and concentrated urbanisation.

The chapter provides a review of the current literature on migration and urbanisation in South Benin and draws on participant observation at the toll booth and in Missébo, as well as analysis of the national census material from 2002 and 2013. The first section opens with the toll booth, in an attempt to capture the micro-socialites of urban life outside of the city centres. Section two presents an overview of mobility patterns in South Benin. How have historical waves of migration and forced displacement shaped the urban fabric? What are collective urban representations of migration? And what are the dynamics of current day mobility? Section three then questions the trajectories of urban growth in South Benin. How has the urban network evolved from palace cities to corridor urbanisation? What role is road-side urbanisation playing? And how are new arrivals using the bend knot to tie into networks of urban amenities? Having started at the toll booth, the chapter finishes by presenting an in-depth account of another key knot in the urban fabric: a central migrant market specialising in the sale of textiles. Here we demonstrate that the urban fabric, like knots, is more than just a metaphor, or an image, it is a reflection of the materiality of the corridor, where fabric is a key element of urban sociability.

4.1 The Toll Booth: A Knot in the Middle of the Corridor

4.1.1 A Road-Side Food Stand

Five days a week Nina wakes at 3:30am to cook for her food stall on the Lagos-Abidjan highway. Synonymous of road-side urbanism in West Africa, these cheap and cheerful restaurants are known as *Maquis* in Benin, *Mama's Puts*, *Food is Ready* or Bukkas in Nigeria, and *Chop Bars* in Ghana. After prepping food and packing it into two plastic thermal containers, Nina, her middle-aged sister, a child maid, an infant or two, and all their stock pile onto two moto-taxis; coolers expertly balanced, a block of ice carefully wrapped up to protect it from the sun.

Out on the highway the empty frame of the *maquis* awaits them, a few hundred metres from the toll booth, it is the perfect spot to feed a hungry trucker. To the east the road continues straight to Cotonou, Porto Novo and Lagos. Head west for Lomé, Accra and several hundred kilometres further on to Abidjan. The open structure is made from bamboo, wooden panels, corrugated iron sheets and a rapidly deteriorating cement floor and is slightly set back from the road. Upon arrival they set up: the floor is swept, tarpaulins folded away, a child sent to pump water. They fetch the wooden table, cover it in a plastic flowery cloth and sprinkle it with kerosene to keep the flies away, rope a piece of nylon lace over a window, unpack the toothpicks and bottle openers, the palm wine and plastic jugs. Nina stashes away the portions of mashed yam and corn dough, smoked fish, boiled spicy eggs and fulani cheese, all prepped and hidden under several layers of cotton sheets to protect from the dust, flies and sun. Her sister lays out her goods: toothbrushes, sweets, pills and medicine, soft drinks and plastic pouches of whisky. She breaks up the ice to cool the plastic bags of '*Pure Water*' that she will be selling all day to thirsty passengers; standing on her toes, she extends a handful of bags up to the trucks, taxis and bus windows.

All around vendors are setting up for the day, seeking to carve out a living from those passing through. There are the ladies selling fruit: watermelons, mangos, limes neatly piled. The pastoralists are primed with buckets of fresh Fulani cheese that they will press up against the tinted windows of the passing 4x4s. A few teenage boys are cycling back from the 'Fan Milk' ice-cream depot in the periphery of Cotonou; selling on commission they can be spotted from a mile off in their blue jackets, with ice-boxes mounted on the front of their bikes, blowing their shrill bicycle horns. In-between the lanes of the toll booth, young girls are selling bread, madeleines and peanuts, while the women prepare glasses of crushed ice and concentrated milk and men pitch their racks of pirated CDs.

Here at the toll booth, like many locations along the corridor, all sorts of people are rushing and loitering around, passing by and bumping into each other. For Nina and her colleagues, there is no knowing who the road will bring today. A bus of school children on an outing? A pastor with his flock of followers? A delegation of civil servants attending a donor-funded training seminar? Ghanaian traders en route to

Lagos with cash to spare? Most likely familiar faces will stop in for a chat and gossip — and strangers will order food in pidgin English. Here, people and their goods slow down to take a break, get some sleep and have something to eat. As such, it is a privileged site from which to observe everyday mobility along the corridor and how it produces urban spaces in its wake. Urbanity unfolds here daily, bringing opportunity; everyone knows that anything could, and something probably will happen along the corridor. The toll booth, like a bend knot, is a point of connection. It connects to stretches of the highway, and it allows inhabitants from the surrounding villages and towns to come and tie into the opportunities it offers.

The toll booth is one of the many knots along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. Tucked into the interstices between the large cities along the corridor, it generates all sorts of insights into the processes of urbanisation at play along the corridor. It is situated in Benin between Lomé and Cotonou, not quite in the periphery, and far away from the bustling districts of Lagos or Abidjan. Our analysis of this corridor starts here, positioning ourselves in this in-between space that is neither city nor village. It is a good place to start as it does not contain any premature definitions or aspirations of what the corridor could be, should be or will be, nor is it a final destination. Instead, it is one of the places along the corridor where people can come and tie into the urban fabric that is taking hold along the coastal highway. Like a bend knot, the toll booth connects various threads of activity, pulling them together to add an extra piece to the urban fabric.

The urban corridor stretches across five nations which provides all kinds of opportunity for trading and smuggling along the coast, enabling people to draw on the comparative advantages of multiple localities. The experience of the corridor as an extended space of urbanisation is substantiated as people, goods and ideas move up and down it, passing through the capitals, market towns and villages along the coast. Riding on cheap Chinese motorbike taxis, in run-down mini-buses, or air-conditioned imported jeeps, passengers carry and trade goods. There is rarely a clear distinction between mobility for business, leisure or trade, or between wholesale or retail and formal or informal practices. With few formal employment opportunities along the coast, and weak industrial and manufacturing sectors, many livelihoods along the Guinea Gulf rely on trans-local trade. Corridor residents acutely tuned into these differences, sharing information and knowledge. Indeed, the residents use any shifts in the market to their advantage and cross borders with ease to smuggle petrol into Benin, traffic illicit Thai rice into Nigeria, or buy avocados in Togo, because they are riper on the other side of the border.

4.1.2 Lagos Eclipsed

Starting at the toll booth is also an attempt to decentre our gaze - both to look outside of the megacities along the corridor, but also to look outside of the classic canon of urban studies that has mainly been constructed with European or North American cities in mind. As such, the conceptual decentering is an attempt to understand the

Lagos-Abidjan corridor beyond the urbanisation categories of the American East Coast, and instead carve out space for multiple emerging forms of urbanity in the West African context. This comes in response to the Southern turn in urban scholarship, and the rise of post-colonial studies (Robinson, 2013; Robinson and Roy, 2016; Simone, 2004; 2010) that has sought to "de-westernise urban studies" (Choplin, 2012) and account for urban forms outside of the paradigms and categories of Western cities. Indeed, this call has led to increased interest in the urban development of cities along the corridor, and the development of new vocabularies to capture the specific dynamics of African urbanism (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2004; Parnell & Pieterse, 2014).

On the other hand, the geographical decentering adopted here seeks to eclipse the city centres and look outside of the urban cores, without being blinded or drawn in by the bright lights of the city. The focus on larger cities along the coast has overshadowed research on the corridor. Today towns sprawl out to touch each other, boundaries get blurred along the corridor among the industrial zones, gated communities, borders, ports, plantations, peripheries and villages. Along the corridor it is increasingly tricky to define bounded urban units. Nonetheless, urban research still privileges the national capitals or historical cities. The study of Lagos for example is flourishing, emerging as a dynamic sub-field of its own (Acey, 2018; Agbiboa, 2016;Lawanson & Agunbiade, 2018; Mendelsohn, 2018; Sawyer, 2016). Meanwhile significant urban research is being undertaken in Accra (Gough and Yawkson, 2000; Grant, 2009; Hart, 2016; Paller, 2019; Pellow, 2008;Quayson, 2014). Less can be said of Lomé (Gervais-Lambony and Niassogbo, 2005; Spire, 2011) and Cotonou (Ciavolella and Choplin, 2018; N'Bessa, 1998) and the spaces in between the major cities. Indeed, little attention has been paid to what is happening in less crowded sites in-between the capital cities.

As the urban anthropologist Hilgers (2012) has argued, urban growth in Africa is increasingly concentrated in secondary cities, yet academics have focused their attention on larger city centres as centres of flux. These large cities have been read as hubs of "movement, mobility, planetary culture, as a space of intersection, a knot of globalisation, a hub of social innovation" (para.16).[1] In contrast, he argues, secondary cities are studied through more local issues, when in fact they are also embedded in global and regional dynamics. What we seek to do here is to consider how this movement and mobility is not just in flux, but gets tied down in specific localities along the corridor, how it becomes locally relevant not just for the megacities but within other urban sites such as the toll booth. This work seeks to eclipse the larger cities of Lagos and Abidjan to pay more attention to what is happening between them. Developed by Topalovic in her study of the Singaporean hinterland, the eclipse purposefully blots out dominant urban hubs to allow the processes occurring around it to come to the forefront (Topalovic, 2016). Applying this in Singapore enabled a

1 Own translation, "La ville est perçue sous l'angle du mouvement, de la mobilité, de la culture planétaire, elle est conçue comme un lieu d'intersection, un nœud de la globalisation, un foyer d'innovation sociale."

sharper focus on the commodity trades, seascapes, and mobility of migrant workers that underpin the city-state (2016). In West Africa, an urban eclipse also enables mobility, movement and breakages to emerge as key components of the urban corridor. As a methodology, eclipsing the larger cities along the corridor creates room to consider both the small (Bertrand, 1993; Bertrand and Dubresson, 1997) and the ordinary (Robinson, 2013), skirting around the larger urban centres to adopt a "view from off the map" (Robinson, 2002).

To observe how urban processes play out along the corridor not only provides a clearer picture of how this larger scale of urbanisation is emerging, it also has the potential to better inform research on the cities themselves and their trans-local relevance. Within these configurations, people draw on both the strong nodes of concentrated agglomerations and extended threads of thinner extended urbanisation. Along the corridor the capitals and megacities play a significant role, as key nodes and sites of concentrated urbanisation bring together services, markets and infrastructure. However, the urban dynamics of these cities are not contained within their specific locations, they seep outside of their borders, and resonate along the corridor, connected to other locations through various mobilities. Lagos, and its twenty-million inhabitants is transforming all kinds of places along the corridor well outside of its boundaries. In neighbouring Benin, the arrival of Nigerian university students has created entire new areas with accompanying shops, restaurants, barbers' salons and evangelical churches. As the wealth generated in Lagos fluctuates along the corridor, small tweaks in Nigeria's economic climate, import regulations or currency produce shockwaves and shift trajectories of urban development all along the coast — making new business grow or well-established sectors crash.

4.2 Mobility Patterns in South Benin

4.2.1 Mobility Patterns in South Benin

The bend, as a knot, encourages us to think about how various sections of this corridor are connected through mobility as people travel along it, tying into various locations. We suggest that it is not the movement as such, but the attachment and releasing from the urban fabric that produces new scales of urbanisation. In this sense, we operationalise the concept of extended urbanisation but also put it into movement and render it mobile. For Lebfevre (2001), movement, notably commuting, is one of the core elements in the production of urban space, as people move over a territory and urbanise both their place of residence and of work. However, movement along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor encompasses a much wider spectrum of mobility than commuting, extending to include for instance trans-border trade, hustling and labour migration.

For Brenner and Schmid, major transportation corridors such as highways and railway lines are contributing to the "blurring and re-articulation of urban territories" and are producing expansive catchments of small and medium sized towns, new "urban galaxies" that stretch beyond any single metropolitan region, and cross over multiple national boundaries (2014, p.12). This description of an interdependent, polynuclear, metropolitan region is a fairly accurate portrait of the urbanisation processes at play along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. But to further mobilise, theories of extended urbanisation attention must be drawn to the ways in which mobility and immobility occur within the corridor, and how this in turn produces specific urban forms.

The mobility turn has called attention to the theoretical possibilities of moving beyond "sedentarist and nomadic conceptualisations of place and movement" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.214). This paradigm emphasizes that all places are tied into networks of connections, "that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an island" (p.209). Writing about African mobilities, Landau (2018) describes how "even the most seemingly materially untouched sites are rapidly becoming parts of continental and global archipelagos" where planetary urbanism will be made real through "micro-level socialites, individual and familial projects" (para. 9). This next section now turns to consider how these mobilities, whether it be regional trading or forced displacement, have historically driven the emergence of an urban network along the coast of Benin.

4.2.2 Historical Departures and Returns

In the case of Benin - the heightened circulation, the coerced migration and the return of persons have been constitutive in the transformation and churning of territory along the corridor. This time line presents a brief overview of the main flows of international migration in Benin.

A Timeline of International Migration in Benin

1670 - 1860	Ouidah exports over a million slaves, making it one of the leading slaving “ports” in sub-Saharan Africa, probably second in importance only to Luanda, in Angola.
1800-1858	The slave trade continues , Slaves continue to leave Benin but many are alo staying in the Palm oil plantations as encouraged by King Ghézo
1894	France deports King Béhanzin to Martinique
1858-1900s	Money from the sale of Palm Oil creates wealth and favors education - Benin becomes known as the "latin quarter" of black francophone Africa - this encourages the return of Afro-Bresilian "Agudas" to Bénin.
1870-1940's	Having retuned to Benin this intellectual elite then serve as civil servants in French West Africa - They become known as "Second wave colons" - Beniniois intellectuals emigrate from Benin to all of French West Africa and further afield to British african colonies. It is the first "Rente des cervaux" - Intellectual remittance
1947-1948	Only 2 Lebaneese tradespeople appear on the foreign worker census
1958-1983	Return of the Beninois who worked as civil servants in French West Africa
1958	Beninese workers are forced out of Ivory Coast
1959	Conflit with Niger over l'ile de lété 16 000 Beninois sent back to Bénin
1960-1970	Dealing with independance. The collapse of FWA causes Beninois white collar workers to return from FWA- however the standard of living in Benin is too low for many returning intellectuals who start emmigrating to France
1967-1970	Around 50 000 Nigerian refugees arrive, mostly Igbos, fleeing the Biafra war
1969	Beninese workers are forced out of Ghana
1970-1972	Instable politics and economics cause a revolution in 1972 - the new marxiste lenniniste regime encourages further emmigration
1973	Benin follows neighboring countries and redirects towards a natural ressources based economy - and seeks foreign investment.
1974	Beninois workers flock to prosperous countries in West Africa and in particular Ghana for the Cacao Boom
1975-1980	The oil boom means many beninois emmigrate to Nigeria
1978	The conflit between Bongo and Kérékou leads to retaliation against the beninois in Gabon and 10 000 are forced out of Gabon
1979	The census counts 55 706 foreign workers in Benin - Most are From Ghana and arrived following the fishing crisis in the 60's - There are also workers from Niger who arrived following the uranium crisis
1980	The signature of by ECOWAS "The Economic Community of West African States" of a free movement treaty encourages more inter-african migration
1980	Toughening of immigration criteria and mass redundancies in France make emmigration to the less desirable and diversify migration strategies to the "North"
1983-1985	Nigeria forces out over 1.5 million foreigners many of them from Benin
1987	Around 3 500 Tchadians arrive fleeing the Habré/Débry troubles - they are joined by other small groups of West Africans
Since 1990	Multiple political and economical crises in Benin at the same time as the regression of neighboring countries economies has toughened the migratory context.
1992	The census counts 77 904 foreign workers in Benin
1993	Between 90 000 and 150 000 Togolese refugees arrive following electoral violence during the Gnassimagbé Eyadéma regime
1994	Refugees arrive from the Great Lakes area (Burundi, Rwanda, Congo Brazzaville,RDC) following conflict and genocide - there are no estimates of how many arrived.
1995	Ogonis arrive from Nigeria as well as small groups of Nigeriens, Burkinabais, Camerounais, Zambians, Ugandans, Tunisians, Algerians, Cubans and Syrians
1998	Official counts estimate at 2903 the number of refugees in Benin
2002	The census counts 176 842 foreign workers in Benin - 34.8% from Niger - 22.1% from Togo - 20.5% from Nigeria - 80% of immigrants are from neighbor countries. Immigration from the North is negligable - most are returning Beninois
2003	Nigeria remians the most popular destination for Beninois Migrants in Africa 69% followed by Ivory Coast 20% - Senegal 6.9% - Niger 1.6% - Gabon - 1%
2005	A Togolese crisis causes 25 000 togolese refugees to arrive in Benin
2005	Official counts estimate at 30 294 the number of refugees in Benin
2009	Official counts estimate at 7 205 the number of refugees in Benin - of the offical count 82.2% are from Togo, 5.6% are from DRC, 3.7% are from Congo, 3% are from Tchad, 2% from Rwanda and 1.1% from Nigeria

2012	The World Bank estimates that remittances provide 2.1% of Beninois GDP 179 million dollars
Since 2012	Bénin faces a continued brain drain - "There are more benionois doctors in France than in the whole of Benin.
2013	The census counts 139'774 foreign workers in Benin - 14.8% from Niger - 24.8% from Togo - 35.9% from Nigeria - 80% of immigrants are from neighbor countries. Immigration from the North is negligable - most are returning Beninois
2019	August 2019 - until time of publication. Nigeria closes the border with Benin to goods in order to limit the importation of smuggled goods, impacting also the circulation of people in the region.
2020	The Covid-9 Pandemic sees all neighbouring countries impose full border closures and a sanitary cordon is imposed around the urbanised areas in in the South-East. Bus and mini-bus lines are closed as well as air travel.

Chart 2 Compiled Sources: Quintard 2015; Lombard, Law 2008; INSAE 2018

In seeking to apprehend the role of mobility and migration in shaping the small towns along the corridor, we position three such "aller-retours"[2] that have structured the urban fabric along the coast, establishing a dense network of both formal and informal trans-border relationships at the heart of the corridor economy (Igué and Soule, 1992).

Ancient Lagoons

While the scale and intensity of urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor are new, the connections and movement along the coast are well established. Historically, traders and travellers have navigated the water ways linking a network of coastal lagoons along the Guinea Gulf. Dating back to the fifteenth century, this extensive system of lagoon networks enabled people to move along the gulf whilst avoiding the rough Atlantic coastline (Chouin and Lasisi, 2019). Described by the historian Law as an "important medium of lateral communication" (1989, p.222), these networks once connected the Volta River in modern-day Ghana to the Niger Delta, allowing caravels and canoes to circulate rapidly, trading slaves, sugar and gold. This chapter echoes the call of researchers working on fifteenth century lagoon waterscapes, for whom the compartmentalisation of historical and archaeological research in the Guinea Gulf overlooked regional perspectives and interconnectedness, choosing instead to focus on bounded cultural areas along the coast.

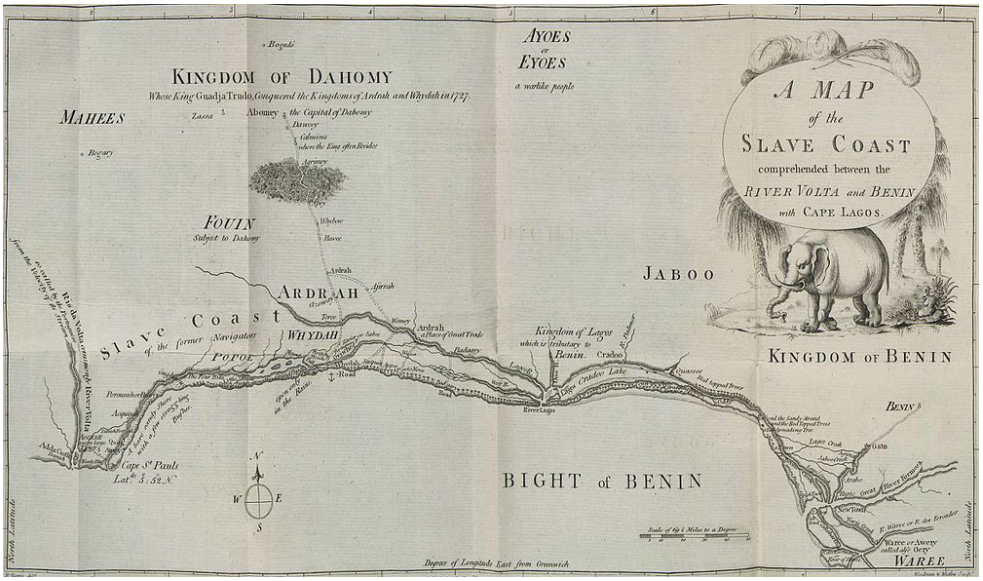
While lagoons permitted mobility along the coast, in Benin, a historical North-South road network connected Abomey, the inland capital of the Kingdom of Danhomey,[3] to the slave port of Ouidah. Slaves were driven south along the road, through the various customs before being sold to Europeans and then shipped to the Americas. What remains today of this road is at times an overgrown path, oral recollections and place names that remind us of its past. Today, the Lagos-Abidjan corridor runs perpendicular to the old slave road, in between the coast and the lagoons. The lagoon trade and the slave road resulted in a series of urban settlements along the coast, including markets, trading posts, and ports.

The Port of No Return

Extending power beyond the Plateau of Abomey, the Kingdom of Dahomey, gained

2 We use "aller-retour" here to refer to the pendular movement of these historical migration movements.

3 The Kingdom of Dahomey, (not to be confused with the Benin Empire), became a French protectorate in 1894. In 1904 it became part of the French colony, under the name of French Dahomey. In 1958 it gained the status of a self-governing colony known as the Republic of Dahomey, and then gained full independence in 1960. In 1975 it was renamed the Peoples Republic of Benin, and in 1991 Benin Republic. In this thesis it will be referred to as Benin.



Map 11 A Map of the Slave Coast Comprehended between the River Volta and Benin with Cape Lagos, 1789, Robert Norris

Map 12 Map of Dahomey 1892. Source: Le Petit Journal Supplément Illustré, 3/10/1892, No.93

regional importance in the 18th century in conquered cities along the littoral, and dominated trade with European slavers by exchanging prisoners captured during raids on neighbouring territories. The forced displacement of slaves triggered the emergence of a coastal economy - and the establishment of English, Portuguese, Dutch and French commercial counters (see map 11.). In 1700, traders were shipping up to 30'000 slaves a year out of Ouidah, and what is today a small coastal town was at the time a key hub in the global economy, tightly connected to the ports of Liverpool, Marseille and Hamburg, and the Americas (Cornevin, 1981). As such, early urbanisation of the littoral resulted from strategic occupation by the Kingdom of Dahomey, trans-national connections with Europe and the Americas, and the circulation of slaves.

Upon abolition in 1848, the return of enfranchised slaves, shaped the formation of an urban armature along the coast. Enfranchised Afro-Brazilian returnees, referred to as the Agudas, settled in Porto-Novo, a former Portuguese slave trading port founded in the 16th century. Equipped with trans-border networks and both social and economic capital, many went into trade and commerce, affiliating themselves with the urban Yoruba civilisation, developing strong ties with current day Nigeria and embedding themselves in trade networks dating back to pre-colonial times (Igué and Soule, 1992). They formed a prominent community and became instrumental to the prominent position of a city that reflected their Afro-Brazilian origins. The Agudas transferred urban knowledge, urban practices, and modes of construction from Brazil to Benin, constituting what could be termed as "landscape remittances" (Lopez, 2015).

The slave trade and the subsequent return of the Agudas, wove the small towns of the Beninese coast into global and regional networks. As nodes in the slave trade, the prominence of these cities resulted not from the rising demographics of settlers, but from persons that passed through and departed from them. Displacement and return were at this moment, a key factor of urban transformation along the corridor.

The Latin Quarter

In 1894, a year after abolition, Dahomey became a French protectorate (see map. 12) and a new wave of displacement was orchestrated under colonial power. Dahomeans were dispatched as translators, clerks and interpreters to administer the French West African Empire. This policy built on its reputation as "The Latin Quarter of Africa" with a lettered elite, and relatively high levels of secondary school attendance.[4] Through this policy, Dahomeans created both formal and informal networks within the French West African Empire, extending relations well beyond the country's borders, and establishing transnational professional and family connections throughout French colonial territories of Niger, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville (Quintard, 2015). The coerced migration resulted in remittances from the let-

4 This is turn due to the influence of affluent Afro-Brazilian Agudas who enroll their offspring and promote schooling (N'Bessa, 1998 p.131).

tered diaspora flowing back to Dahomey, a transfer termed “rente des cerveaux” by Quintard and “traite des cerveaux” by Igué (Igué and Soule, 1992; Quintard, 2015).

It is not surprising that these lettered Africans were often perceived as secondary colons and disdained by local populations (Quintard, 2015), and once the colonies gained independence from France, their presence was no longer welcomed (Challenor, 1979). Another wave of returnees ensued, settling along the coast – rather than returning home inland. This reinforced the demographic growth of Cotonou – which at the time was growing at an annual rate of 8%. Many repatriates invested in construction back home, spurring urbanisation and founding neighbourhoods such as Abidjancodji in recognition of their time spent abroad (N’Bessa, 1998, p.131).

Corridor Refugees

The last aller-retour (round trip) concerning migration into Benin reinforced links between coastal towns and neighbouring territories in both Togo and Nigeria. Since independence both countries have experienced political violence, unlike Benin which has peacefully navigated both a regime change as well as coups. As such, Benin hosted refugees, many of whom had fled to its coastal regions. These groups built on and maintained strong links, often of a kinship or ethnic nature between places of origin and destination.

From 1967 onwards, Igbos, fleeing the Biafra War in Nigeria settled in and around Porto Novo and Cotonou. They rapidly formed business networks, providing goods to a Nigerian economy weakened by the war. By the time of the petrol crisis in 1973, the diaspora was structured into associations and trade networks and developed a series of commercial activities orientated towards the booming Nigerian economy (Igué and Soule, 1992, p.53.) As such Cotonou became an annex for a thriving Lagos economy in the 1990s. Many Igbo remain present today, trading notably in second-hand clothes and car pieces. As Chabi (2013) writes, Cotonou is for the Igbo diaspora, what Hong Kong is for the overseas Chinese (p.19).

In 1993, under the rule of Gnassingbe Eyadema, electoral violence in Togo, led populations to flee to Benin. The refugees settled mostly in the coastal departments of the Littoral, Atlantique and Mono. Many refugees had strong kinship links with the Beninese; they returned when the situation stabilised in Togo, maintaining networks and contacts with their Beninese counterparts (Quintard, 2015). The coerced displacement of both Togolese and Nigerian refugees reinforced trans-border trade that remains central to the urban economies along the coast and a structural part of livelihood strategies along the road.

The current Lagos-Abidjan corridor is more than the incremental continuation of this urban growth - it does more than just thicken the pre-existing network of ancient lagoons. It cuts across post-colonial nations, offering an alternative direction to the extractive nature of the North-South routes that truck natural resources into the ports and consumer goods into the hinterland. While some sections of the lagoon are still used today for smuggling and everyday

transportation, most transits occur on the road, as people continue to hustle and trade.

4.2.3 Collective Representations of Urban Migration

Along the corridor tales of mobility, forced displacement and migration underpin the urban narratives that are told about these places. From the founding mythologies and place names to contemporary fiction and soap operas, migration features heavily in vernacular accounts of urbanisation. These narratives mark the significance of mobility, not just in the built environment, but also in the urban imaginaries and collective representations that inhabit the corridor. From the historical founding of cities and neighbourhoods, to contemporary accounts of urban diversity, the ways in which migrants have tied into the urban fabric continues to resonate many generations after their arrival. These knots remain within the collective memory of how a place came to be and inform shared imaginaries of how it is today.

The founding story of Porto Novo, capital of Benin, is a tale of host and guest communities. As Kiki[5] (1997) recounts, the city was established by three hunters from the Ahori Kingdom in current day Nigeria. Venturing out to hunt far from home, they came across a giant termite house, out of which a nine-headed monster emerged. Learning that the monster was a divinity, they settled there and prospered, building a temple for him, and making offerings from their hunt. By 1688, the locality, situated on the edge of a lagoon, was flourishing under the rule of one of the hunter's descendants, King Accron.[6] Meanwhile, following a leadership conflict, Té-Agbanlin, son of the King of Allada, had set out with his five children and a significant entourage to head south. They spent fifty-one days on the road, and were refused settlement in Abomey Calavi, Ganvié, and Louo. Tired by their journey, they settled nearby King Accron who then granted them permission to establish themselves in the Sokomey neighbourhood. Té-Agbanlin built a large house, renaming the locality Hogbonou,[7] and the two kingdoms lived independently side-by-side, until Té-Agbanlin overruled the old king Accron. The founding story of Porto Novo is one of migrant groups looking for refuge and the ensuing negotiations between host and guest communities.

The persecution, displacement, and arrival of communities also resonates at the level of neighbourhoods, whose names in Fon reveal stories of migration. Ciavolella and Choplin (2018) describe how in Cotonou the colonial administration superimposed names and numbers on top of this vernacular geography. They suggest that these local terms with their vivid imagery point towards the nature and signification of these spaces in town (idem, p.122). In Cotonou for example, the names of many neighbourhoods reveal a sense of relief and optimism upon the establishment of new

5 Henri Kiki was at the time of publication responsible for the Historical Museum of the Royal Collectivity of the Three Hunters of Porto Novo.

6 The King's full name was King Accron Atawé-Ahounawa

7 Portuguese arrived in 1752 and renamed Hogbonou Porto Novo after the city of Porto.

localities. This toponymy[8] points towards a history of refuge and sanctuary. A few quotes echo the latter, including Aidjedo 'peace has returned and we are safe', Gbedjewin 'we are now free to live', Ayidoté 'we remain on our guard', Ahounlèko 'here war turned back', Fifadji 'remain in peace', Hwehùn, 'there is hope', Agbodjedo 'now we can breathe', Finagnon 'we will be okay here' and Ségbéya 'destiny has brought an end to our suffering.' These localities mark in local terms the aspirations of populations moving to the coast.

Contemporary Beninese urban narratives continue to reflect on the role of migration.[9] This is captured by the Beninese poet Dave Wilson; writing from his home in the north of France, he reflects Cotonou with nostalgia as he notes the ordinary, unremarkable presence of strangers in the urban landscape. "Between roads, alleys, bumps and unfinished construction sites / Between people from here, from elsewhere and other nationalities / The cosmopolitan cosmopolite welcomes them all / People from nearby and all the citizens from elsewhere / Cotonou welcomes them in without speaking of immigration / Of resident's permits, of turning back at the border / In Cotonou, strangers don't get trapped in the baggage hold"[10]. Personifying the city, the verse embeds strangers within the endless construction sites of Cotonou, contrasting the informality of movement in the region with the lengths to which Africans must go to enter Europe.

The everyday presence of migrants in the urban fabric also features heavily in the 2018 soap opera Kotonu, produced by Canal+ and directed by Aymar Esse. The soap opera, produced in collaboration with the SDC Global Programme for Migration and Development portrays the many ways in which migration is shaping the city, from migrant food stalls, to remittances, the returning diaspora, or informal labour. As Esse explains, whilst journalism often features stories of young people wanting to cross the Mediterranean, he decided instead to address people who come to Cotonou to "work, survive and send money back." He recounts how throughout the series they "addressed this theme while remaining at home in Cotonou, to talk about the markets, the Nigerians, the Lebanese, the Diallos - and their small shops and the Togolese bar maids." Whilst many West African soap operas are set in luxury villas and hotel lobbies, the series Kotonu ventures out into the streets, depicting urban diversity in an African city.

A founding tale, the name of a neighbourhood, the verses of a poem, or a soap opera all tell stories about how migration has shaped the urban fabric along the corridor. Drawing on these vernacular forms, they underline the significance of migration, how past displacements are remembered, and current forms enacted. We now turn to discuss two emblematic figures of current mobility patterns in South Benin, the corridor hustlers and zemidjan drivers.

8 toponymie

9 It is also worth noting here the work of the Beninese dramaturge Giovanni Houansou - whose play on cross-Mediterranean migration 'Les Inamovibles' won the 2018 theatre prize of the Radio France International and was presented in Avignon in 2019.

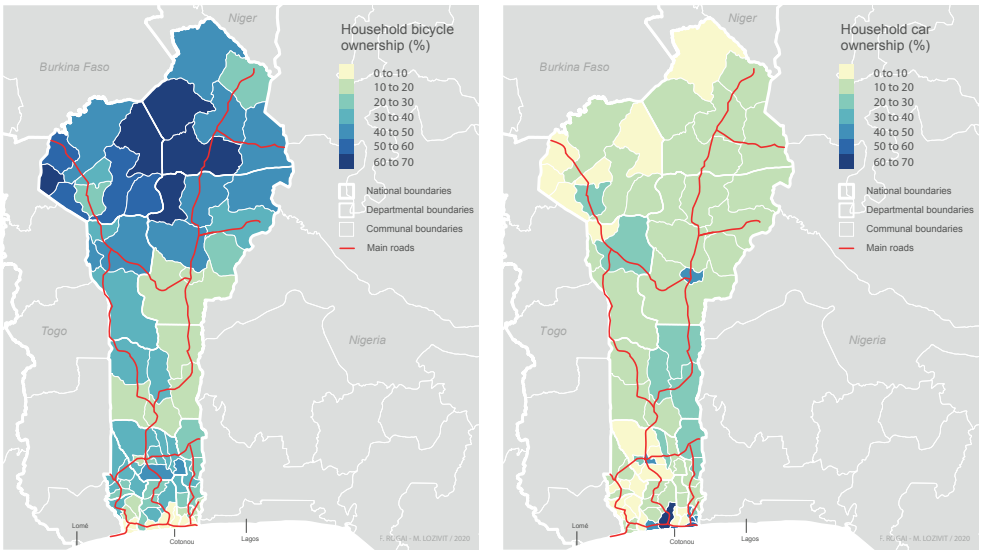
10 Author's translation

4.2.4 Current Day Mobility: Corridor Hustlers and Zem Drivers

Today the corridor, or more precisely, the movements occurring along this corridor are producing a trans-national conurbation, and trans-border relationships are at the heart of the economic fabric of the corridor (Igué and Soule, 1992; Igue and Zinsou-Klassou, 2010; Sougue, 2016). With few formal employment opportunities along the coast, and weak industrial and manufacturing sectors, many livelihoods along the Guinea Gulf rely on trans-local trade. Corridor hustlers move back and forth, crossing national borders and drawing on the comparative advantages and varying price of consumer goods across multiple localities. Like Ben, a friend living in Cotonou who left me a voice message one morning: "What are you doing today? Let's go to Lomé to buy jeans - there's a cheap load that have just come in from the port.", those who reside along the corridor are acutely tuned into the differences and opportunities that the borders create, using shifts in the market to their advantage.

Corridor hustlers are not isolated agents, and are often embedded into trading diasporas, and structured corporations that develop commercial activities along the corridor. This mobility is accentuated by the cycles of boom and crash in the corridor economies that send groups on the move, looking for work. Beninese plasterers and building tradesmen for instance are currently highly employable in the construction boom in the Ivory Coast, where their handiwork is well remunerated. The Nigerian Igbo diaspora continue to trade along the corridor, using it as an annex for the thriving Lagos economy and developed a monopoly in the market for second-hand clothes and car pieces. During the same period in Ghana, the structural adjustment programmes left many civil servants unemployed - they travelled along the corridor seeking out petty work hustling in the streets as cobblers. Referred to locally in Benin as shewmakas (shoemakers), they can still be heard walking up and down the streets beating their wooden boxes to advertise their services. The urban soundscape is afloat with the distinctive trade-call of the many corridor hustlers that blow horns, tap glass or cling metal to mark their presence in the streets. Tuning into theses sounds, an auditive cartography of urban migration emerges, one that links sounds to trades, and trades to origins.

Consumers, traders, and service providers travel up and down the road. Certain professions, deemed undesirable, are considered best practiced abroad either out of pride or to avoid disapproval from the home community. This is the case for the Togolese women who work as waitresses in the maquis in Benin, but also in other service jobs such as household help including maids and nannies. Togolese waitresses in bars face a set of engendered vulnerabilities as they move down the corridor - and risk becoming subject to abuse and exploitation, earning between 16 $ to 40 $ a month for 17-hour days (Coovi, 2016). Moving along the corridor, workers reconsider their employment opportunities and accept menial tasks and unskilled jobs they would be unwilling to perform in their own community. While it is easy for workers to travel the road that links Togo to Benin, it is often harder for them to disentangle themselves from the vulnerable livelihoods that await them upon arrival.



Map 13 Bicycle and car ownership in Benin, Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020

Whilst some travel along the corridor to make a living, others move to the corridor to provide transport services. Another key figure of mobility along the corridor are moto-taxi drivers known as Zémidjans, who are predominant along the corridor. This translates in Fon as "pick me up and take me quick" and is shortened to 'zem' and has also produced the neologism 'zemmer'. Zems provide affordable inter-urban transport; the taxi-drivers riding imported Chinese motorbikes run on smuggled counterfeit 'kpayo' petrol from Nigeria. For Alohou (2008), the zems are the reason people are able to live in close proximity in the cities of Lomé and Cotonou, for they allow people to escape this proximity on the back of a motorbike.

This predominately male profession emerged in the 1970s, and in 2010 in Cotonou alone, there were over 140 000 reported (Rodriguez & Nouwligbèto, 2010). The number of zems grew when a group of civil servants, laid off by the government following the structural adjustment programmes, turned to motorbikes to generate a revenue. This happened in conjuncture with severe cuts to public transport companies which created a transport deficit (Marchais, 2009). The first generation of zems were over-qualified and underemployed and were later joined by young male internal migrants from rural areas who are held accountable for many of the problems along the corridor such as violence, pollution and theft.

Drawing on Simone (2004), Doherty (2017) has argued that the moto-taxis drivers in Kampala are "disposable people as infrastructure" given the dangers of the road and the risks they run. Doherty writes of the ambivalence of the road, as both violent and generative, in which vulnerable categories, like the zems, are exposed to constant insecurity (2017, p.194). It was estimated in 2009 that the life expectancy of zems in Benin was 40 years old, compared to the average of 54 years old (Marchais, 2009). Fieldwork observations revealed an emerging opioid crisis among young drivers, who consume counterfeit Indian drugs sold on the streets to help them make it through

their sixteen-hour shifts. It is hard, precarious work transporting people around the corridor, weaving in and out of traffic jams and balancing heavy loads.

The Zémidjans' role in producing the urban corridor is substantial. They are central to the collective imaginary and their presence is a visible marker of established boundaries along the corridor. The zems are structured into corporations and unions and wear different coloured vests depending on the section of the corridor they operate in. The boundaries of these colours mark distinctive urban zones within the Beninese corridor: blue to the East, yellow in the middle, pink to the West. They also contribute, through their fee-structuring, to a collective appreciation of distance. Indeed, corridor dwellers refer to distances with the cost of the zem trip to get there, rather than number of kilometres or travel time.

The arrival of a zem station in a peripheral neighbourhood marks its integration into the fabric of the corridor. Zems can navigate all types of roads, from sand tracks to flooded passages, which link up various territories of the corridor. They can drive off track, leaving the main roads to penetrate more remote neighbourhoods. By providing an affordable mode of transport, zems have contributed to urban sprawl by making areas reachable and commutes possible. For Marchais, the zem's low transport costs have "redrawn the urban landscape, enabling a less concentrated growth within towns" (2009, p.61).

Zems are an emblematic figure of the vulnerabilities and opportunities provided by the road. They tie the corridor together, opening new spaces to urbanisation. Scooting around the city, they are also key to shaping urban politics given their numbers and the clout of their unions. At the zem parks, drivers share news, politics, gossip and stories, with their passengers and act as key points of articulation within the corridor's networks of information (Marchais, 2009; Doherty, 2017). As such, Zémidjans participate both in the material expansion of the corridor and in the density of differentiated social encounters that occur on the back of their bikes.

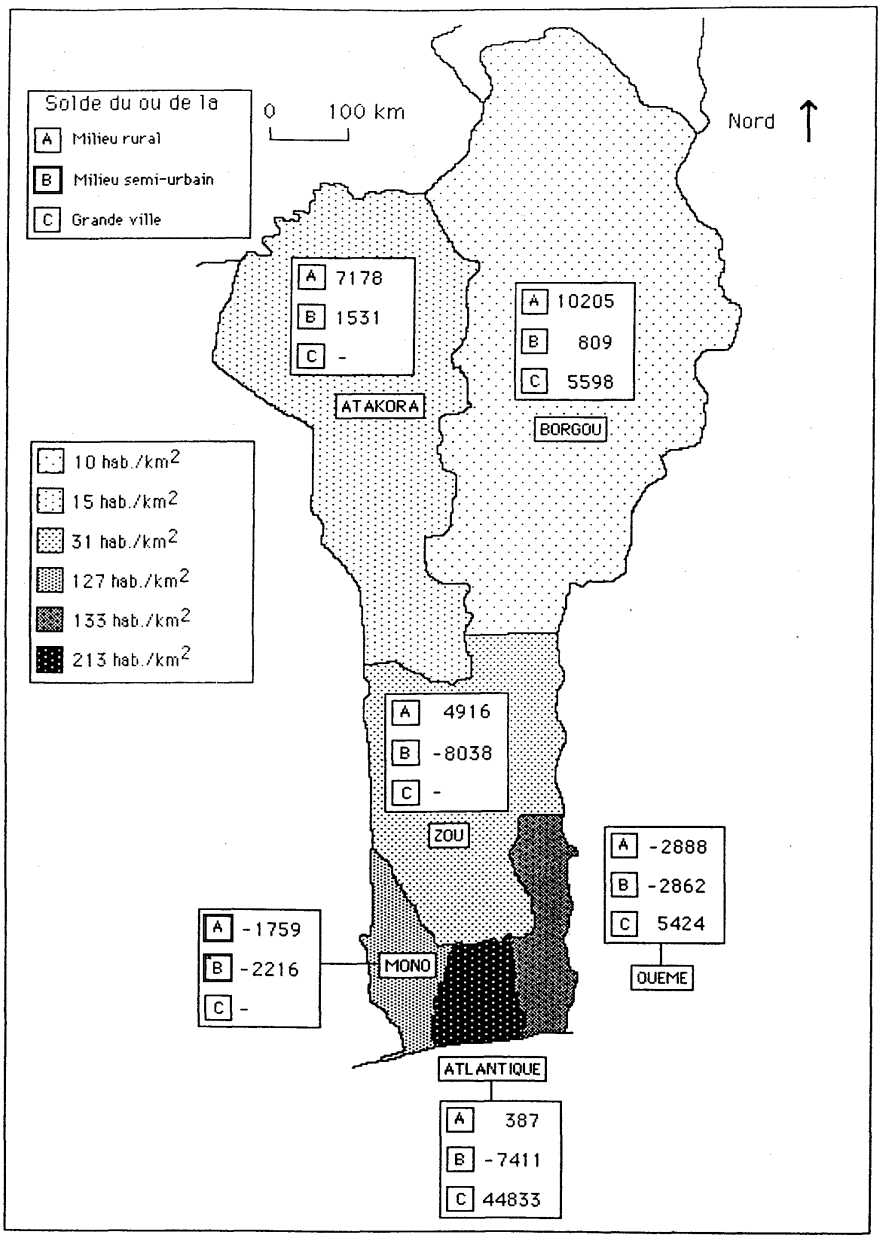
4.2.5 Urban Migration - from cause for concern to cause for celebration

In 1992, Guingnido Gaye produced a study of "Urban Growth, Migration and Population in Benin" published by the French Centre for Population and Development and the Union for the Study of the African Population.[11] Addressing the topic of urban migration from a demographic perspective, it provides an overview of the role of internal migration in the urban growth of Benin from independence up until the 1990s, focusing particularly on the growth of Cotonou.

Building on data from the national census, Guingnido Gaye argues that migration was a clear factor in urban growth in the late seventies, notably for the two largest

11 CEPED - Centre Français sur la Population et le Développement and UEPA Union pour l'Etude de la Population Africaine

cities in Benin: Parakou and Cotonou. He notes a clear difference between patterns of migration in the North, where rural populations are more likely to move into semi-rural settings, and patterns in the South, where rural populations head to the cities of Cotonou and Porto-Novo (Guingnido Gaye, 1992, p.59).



Map 14 Net migration rates by department for the period 1961-1979 Source: Guingnido Gaye 1992, p.62

The report presents a highly differentiated account of urban migration along the corridor. During the study period from 1975-1979, migration accounted for 14% of the overall growth of Cotonou, whilst Porto Novo had a net migration rate of almost zero (idem., p.61; p.72). Rates of urbanisation along the corridor also varied greatly. To the west of the corridor only 11.2% of the population residing in the Mono de-

partment were considered urban, compared to 51% of the population in the Atlantic department (idem.). However, both the Mono department to the west of the corridor, and the Ouémé department to the east had high rates of exchange with other countries, with respectively 32% and 25% of immigrants being international rather than internal (idem, p.64). This was only surpassed by the Atacora in the north with strong trans-border exchanges with Burkina Faso and Togo, which in this case were rural.

The corridor does not appear explicitly in this study as a feature of urban migration - but the author hints towards more substantial cross-border movements, "there are certain poles of attraction outside of the cites, outside of the national territory (…) most of these migrations are occurring with neighbouring countries and we must ask ourselves if these migrations are not in fact happening within cultural or economic areas that are ignoring up to a certain point the national borders" (idem, p.73).[12]

The study reflects well the preoccupations of time when considering rural-urban migration. It draws attention to rapid population growth in the cities, poor urban quality of life, the weakness of the agricultural sector, poorly managed international aid and growing levels of urban unemployment (Guingnido Gaye, 1992, p.80). It notes that "if, for the last twenty years since independence, political discourses have been stressing the need to develop the rural sector to reduce the rural exode, the facts show that many decisions have been made that in fact encourage the rural exode" (idem.) The author regrets that attempts to increase productivity in rural areas and teach literacy skills have been unable to "fix peasants in their terroir" in order to create the basis for "the industrialisation of the country" (idem. p.101). This perspective, embedded within a sedentary bias, frames urban migration as a double failure, a failure to maintain a rural population on the land and a failure to carefully plan and manage the towns they move to.

As Tacoli et al. point out, for low-income nationals especially, rural-urban migration is seen as contributing to the shortcomings of urban settings (2014, p.4). This can lead to policies that seek to inhibit rural-urban migration, despite the economic advantages of urbanisation, indeed "efforts to curb rural-urban migration have generally not been successful at controlling the process, but have nevertheless created serious hardship and inequalities that often persist long after concerns about controlling urbanisation have past" (idem, p.14).

Thirty years on, many policy makers in Benin share the belief that rural populations should stay put and continue farming the land. However, two shifts have taken place since Guingnido Gaye's study, the first is that migration is now occurring more in peripheral zones rather than large cities. The second is the shift towards a migration agenda that also considers the positive effects migration can achieve in places of origin and destination.[13]

12 Author's translation

13 For a critical discussion of the migration development agenda see: Glick Schiller, Nina, and Thomas Faist, eds. 2010. *Migration, Development and Transnationalization: A Critical Stance.* New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.

A recent review of the 2013 census data shows that the number of internal and international migrants diminished between 2012 and 2013, dropping by 2% for recent migrants, and 9.3% for decennial migration (INSAE, 2018, p.1). Despite this drop, immigration still accounts for between 13% and 21% of the population of old urban centres of the current departments (INSAE, 2018, p.104). People continue to move steadily out of agricultural areas, towards areas where they are more likely to be employed in the informal sector. Migration was 1.2 times more likely to occur into areas with more than 75% non-agricultural informal jobs, than into areas with less than 25% non-agricultural informal jobs.

Internal migration dynamics in Benin

Duration	Last 12 months			Last 5 years			Last 10 years		
Place de residence	Migration status			Migration status			Migration status		
	Non-migrant	Internal migration	International migration	Non-migrant	Internal migration	International migration	Non-migrant	Internal migration	International migration
RGPH4 (2013)									
Alibori	99,4	0,2	0,3	98,3	0,6	1,1	97,6	0,9	1,5
Atacora	99,1	0,5	0,4	97,7	1,3	1,0	96,9	1,7	1,4
Atlantique	95,8	3,8	0,4	86,2	12,6	1,2	80,3	18,0	1,7
Borgou	98,9	0,8	0,3	96,1	2,9	1,0	94,3	4,4	1,4
Collines	98,3	1,2	0,5	94,3	4,0	1,7	91,5	5,9	2,6
Couffo	99,3	0,4	0,3	98,1	1,1	0,8	97,4	1,6	1,1
Donga	98,6	0,7	0,7	95,7	2,2	2,2	94,0	3,0	3,0
Littoral	96,9	2,0	1,1	89,8	6,7	3,5	84,7	10,0	5,2
Mono	98,0	1,2	0,8	93,7	3,6	2,6	91,0	5,1	4,0
Ouémé	97,0	2,6	0,4	90,3	8,6	1,1	86,1	12,4	1,5
Plateau	99,2	0,6	0,2	97,5	1,8	0,7	96,5	2,6	0,9
Zou	98,7	1,1	0,2	95,8	3,4	0,7	93,9	4,9	1,1
Abomey	97,7	2,1	0,2	92,0	7,4	0,5	88,3	10,9	0,8
Lokossa	97,8	1,9	0,3	92,4	6,6	0,9	88,1	9,7	2,2
Natitingou	97,0	2,2	0,9	90,7	6,9	2,4	87,3	9,5	3,2
Parakou	96,4	3,1	0,5	86,9	11,3	1,8	80,6	16,7	2,7
Porto-Novo	97,4	2,0	0,6	91,2	6,9	1,9	86,9	10,2	2,8
Total	98,0	1,5	0,5	93,6	5,0	1,4	90,7	7,3	2,0
RGPH3 (2002)									
Alibori	96,1	1,3	2,7	96,1	1,3	2,7	94,4	1,7	3,9
Atacora	95,6	2,4	2,0	95,6	2,4	2,0	93,9	3,2	2,9
Atlantique	85,1	13,2	1,7	85,1	13,2	1,7	79,4	18,3	2,3
Borgou	94,2	4,0	1,8	94,2	4,0	1,8	91,2	6,3	2,6
Collines	91,6	5,8	2,6	91,6	5,8	2,6	86,6	9,0	4,4
Couffo	97,8	1,3	0,9	97,8	1,3	0,9	96,9	1,7	1,4
Donga	94,5	2,7	2,8	94,5	2,7	2,8	92,1	3,8	4,1
Littoral	82,0	11,6	6,5	82,0	11,6	6,5	73,4	17,5	9,1
Mono	93,6	3,3	3,2	93,6	3,3	3,2	90,6	4,6	4,8
Ouémé	92,3	6,3	1,3	92,3	6,3	1,3	89,2	8,9	1,9
Plateau	96,6	2,2	1,2	96,6	2,2	1,2	94,9	3,3	1,7
Zou	95,3	3,9	0,9	95,3	3,9	0,9	93,1	5,6	1,3
Abomey	87,8	11,2	0,9	87,8	11,2	0,9	82,5	16,0	1,5
Lokossa	89,8	8,4	1,8	89,8	8,4	1,8	85,1	12,2	2,7
Natitingou	90,3	8,2	1,5	90,3	8,2	1,5	86,4	11,5	2,1
Parakou	84,0	13,2	2,8	84,0	13,2	2,8	76,7	19,3	4,0
Porto-Novo	89,4	7,4	3,2	89,4	7,4	3,2	85,4	10,1	4,5
Total	91,8	5,9	2,3	91,8	5,9	2,3	88,1	8,5	3,4

Chart 3 Source, RGPH4 2002 & 2013 (Report INSAE 2018)

Recent analysis shows a shift in the trends of where migrants are moving to along the corridor. The coastal departments continue to have the highest proportion of internal migrants, for example in Atlantique, internal migration accounted for 34.4% of the overall population, and 21.5% in Ouémé, compared to the national average of 13.8% (INSAE, 2018, p.18). However, unlike thirty years ago, people are not migrating into the big cities. The Atlantique and Ouémé departments, where the most peripheral urban growth is occurring, registered the most incoming migrants between 2002 and 2013. In turn people are also leaving cities, especially Cotonou, with 108 074 departures and Porto Novo with 40 823 departures (INSAE, 2018, p.18). In fact, Cotonou had no positive effect as a destination on the likelihood to migrate. Instead of heading for the cities, people are migrating into the wider metropolitan zone along the corridor. This in turn has contributed to the rapid growth of peri-urban communes along the corridor such as Abomey Calavi and Sèmè Podji.

Net Migration in Beninese Departments. Quinquennial migration by place of residence

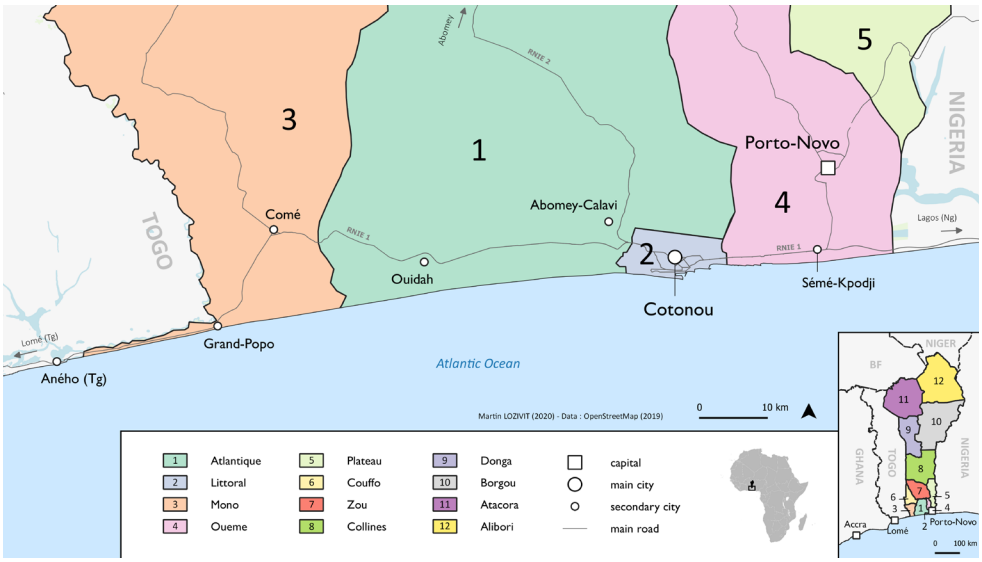
Current Place of Residence	Immigrant	Emigrant	Net Migration
Alibori	5 371	11 601	-6230
Atacora	8 619	20 143	-11 524
Atlantique	176 208	27 181	149 027
Borgou	28 180	14 556	13 624
Collines	28 718	28 247	471
Couffo	8 261	23 797	-15 536
Donga	11 699	17 142	-5443
Littoral	45 167	185 349	-140 182
Mono	14 197	15 258	-1061
Ouémé	71 611	15 319	56 292
Plateau	11 252	13 226	-1 974
Zou	25 879	26 950	-1 071
Abomey	6 861	20 029	-13 168
Lokossa	6 958	9 012	-2 054
Natitingou	7 160	7 083	77
Parakou	28 825	21 540	7 285
Porto-Novo	18 245	46 778	-28 533
Total	503 211	503 211	0

Chart 4 Source : INSAE, RGPH4, 2013.

The second significant shift in recent analysis of census data in Benin is the focus on the positive impact migration can have. This is notably analysed through remittance data. Here again, the corridor plays a significant role compared to the rest of the country. The Littoral and Ouémé department received the most remittances and the Littoral is also the department that sends the most remittances. It is also interesting to consider how much remittances represent within the average household budget - in the departments along the corridor this is significantly higher than the national average of 2.5%. On average remittances represent almost twice the national rate in household budgets along the corridor. For example, 2,9% in the Mono, 5.1% in Ouémé and 4.1% in the Littoral (INSAE, 2018, p.105). This appears to point to the

fact that migration is playing a more significant role in underpinning urban livelihoods along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor than elsewhere in the country.

Far from lamenting the mobility of migrants, the recent report form INSAE suggests that "migration manifestly contributes to the global economy and the national economy under different forms: financial transfers, transfers of know-how, investments, the circulation of skills and diaspora networks" (INSAE, 2018, p.109). Comparing these two reports on migration in the 1990s, and thirty years later, there has been a swing from seeing migration as a negative, to a positive contribution to urbanisation. This marks a shift in discourse to underline the contributions migration can make to development. However, precautions must be taken that this move does not overshadow the ongoing urban poverty and challenges facing urbanisation along the Lagos Abidjan corridor.



Map 15 Administrative departments of Benin, 2020, Source: OSM 2019, Produced by M. Lozivit 2020

4.3 Urban Growth in South Benin

4.3.1 From Palace Cities to Corridor Urbanisation

The second section of this chapter now turns to discuss the urban fabric along the Beninese stretch of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. As people travel up and down the corridor, what exactly are they tying into? Here we present an overview of the Beninese section of the corridor, drawing on the few scholars who have so far engaged with this topic. We then discuss a very concrete example of the bend knot and demonstrate how inhabitants are currently using it to tie into the urban fabric in the case of urban amenities.

Mondjannagni distinguishes three generations of Beninese cities that can be found along the corridor: palace cities such as Porto Novo, slave trading cities such as Ouidah, and the colonial city of Cotonou (1977, p.296). Royal cities, or 'palace cities', were centres of important pre-colonial kingdoms, for example the fortified cities of Abomey or Allada. They are the product of regional migrations and exchanges. The second generation of cities are strong holds along the coast, driven towards economic exportation, both by slaves from the 17th and 18th century, and through the exportation of palm oil in the 19th century after the abolition of slavery. The last generation, which sees the appearance of the city of Cotonou, is marked by administrative measures determined by colonial forces.

The hierarchy of urban centres in Benin has shifted considerably over the last three centuries with the centre of power relocating from the Royal Cities on the Abomey plateau to a series of trading posts along the coast. No one town has maintained primacy in recent history, with power and status fluctuating across several localities dependent on political and economic conjuncture. Since 1900 the status of capital has been officially conferred to Porto Novo, but is held de facto by Cotonou and as commonly is the case, yesterday's capitals are today's secondary cities.

Along the Beninese coast the urban fabric is dense in the east and thins out to the west. This differentiation was already a marker of pre-colonial cities in Benin (Mondjannagni, 1977) and has led Beninese urban research to focus on the south-east and the merging agglomeration of Cotonou and Porto Novo (Dorier-Apprill & Domingo, 2004; N'Bessa, 1998). However, whilst the territory to the east is clearly more urbanised, the west is also representative of the sparser forms of urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

The disequilibrium between a heavily urbanised coast line to the east and a more dispersed urbanisation to the west dates back to the precolonial period, when the urban structure of the South of Benin was already well-established (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1993; Mondjannagni, 1977; Simoneau, 2015). The stronger urbanisation in the east is a result of the wider urban geography of the region and migration flows into current day Benin. The precolonial urban centres in Benin were founded by groups migrating

from the city Ifé Ifè in current day Nigeria who established Kétou, Itakon, Ifanhim, Itakété and Pobè and other migration streams from the city of Tado in current day Togo who established Savi, Allada, Cana, Abomey and Hogbonou[14] (Mondjannagni, 1977, p.296). Whilst urban networks remained strong with the urbanised Yoruba cultures to the east in current-day Nigeria, this was not the case with Tado in Togo with a quasi-absence of urban networks to the West (Mondjannagni, 1977, p.306).

The dense urban fabric to the East was amplified by the growth of Cotonou during the colonial period. Once a territory belonging to the Kingdom of Joaquin, it became a slave port under the King Ghezo in 1830, a French concession in 1868 and was conquered by the French following a military occupation in 1890. The construction of a wharf which was finalised in 1891, contributed to Cotonou becoming the commercial centre of the French protectorate (Ciavolella & Choplin, 2018; Mondjannagni, 1977; Triaca, 1997). Cotonou emerged as the economic capital, and along with the political capital Porto Novo, grew in the 1960s to form an 'urban doublet' (N'Bessa, 1998). The settlements situated along the road of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor became increasingly integrated into the urban fabric, stretching the city of Cotonou along the road between Ouidah and Porto Novo (Ciavolella & Choplin, 2018; N'Bessa, 1998). Indeed, urbanisation rates nationwide accelerated after independence in 1960, passing from a rate of approximately 10% in 1960 to 30% in 1980, and was estimated at around 42% in 2010 (Simmoneau, 2015, p.31).

Urbanisation in South Benin has not of yet been studied as an integrated part of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. However, attention has been paid to new scales of urbanisation between the cities of Cotonou and Porto Novo. Analysing the merging of this new urban territory, Dorier-Apprill and Domingo (2004) portray a vast ensemble of circulation and exchange, both densely populated and strategically situated. Inhabitants, they suggest, are living trans-local lives of inhabitants, as they cross between Cotonou and Porto Novo and draw on both rural and urban locations. They point to an integrated economy of the 'métropolisation littorale', suggesting that "even the localities that on the surface look like they are conserving a traditional mode of life (camps and lake villages with fishermen), participate in the urban economy and the social-cultural changes" (idem, p.4).

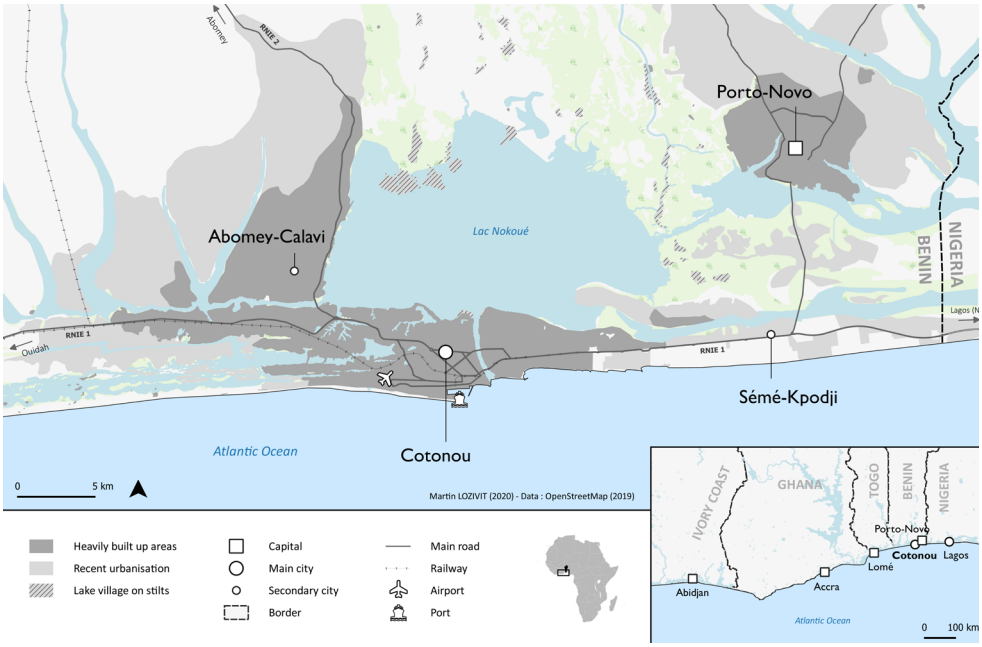
The analysis of the Cotonou - Porto Novo doublet presents a fractional image of what is occurring on a larger scale along the corridor. Pockets of seemingly rural spaces, integrated into wider urban economies, recompose the relationship between country and town. On the larger scale of the corridor, the more sparsely population territories to the west of the Beninese coast are still being shaped through circulations occurring the length of the corridor. Choplin (2019), in her analysis of these territories, describes cement, 'grey gold', as the material manifestation of this corridor,[15] epitomising the metropolitan condition of this large urban metropolis. Cement

14 current day Porto Novo

15 Here defined as Accra-Lagos, and not Abidjan-Lagos

is both omnipresent along the corridor and a key indicator of economic growth as well as being a "valuable symbol of urban production and accumulation" (idem, p.4). Driving along the Lagos-Abidjan highway, stretches of newly-built homes line the roadsides, as urbanisation stretches well beyond the prescribed borders of municipalities or states. As is presented in the series of maps from map 14 – map 19, the space along the corridor in South Benin is characterised by a larger share of residents born outside of the commune, a higher diversification of employment opportunities, along with lower rates of employment in agriculture. We also observe that households along the corridor live in houses built out of sturdier more conventional materials, and have improved access to urban amenities such as water and electricity.

While the urban conurbation continues to grow and merge spaces, territorial planning focuses instead on individual bounded units along the coastline. City centrism has not facilitated the study of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. A focus on individual cities rather than continuous space of the corridor has also shaped decisions made by policy makers, investors, and international agencies who maintain a focus on cities as the panacea of urban development (Castriota and Siquiera, 2019; Pike, 2018). Practitioners, investors, and spatial planners along the Guinea Gulf often contain their strategies within city limits or national borders rather than considering the trans-national urbanisation processes cutting across the corridor. Territorial strategies developed in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana overlook the corridor's relevance and its potential for their growth and development. And like much research, such planning exercises are often trapped within the limits of methodological nationalism, failing to draw on regional and trans-national dynamics at play.

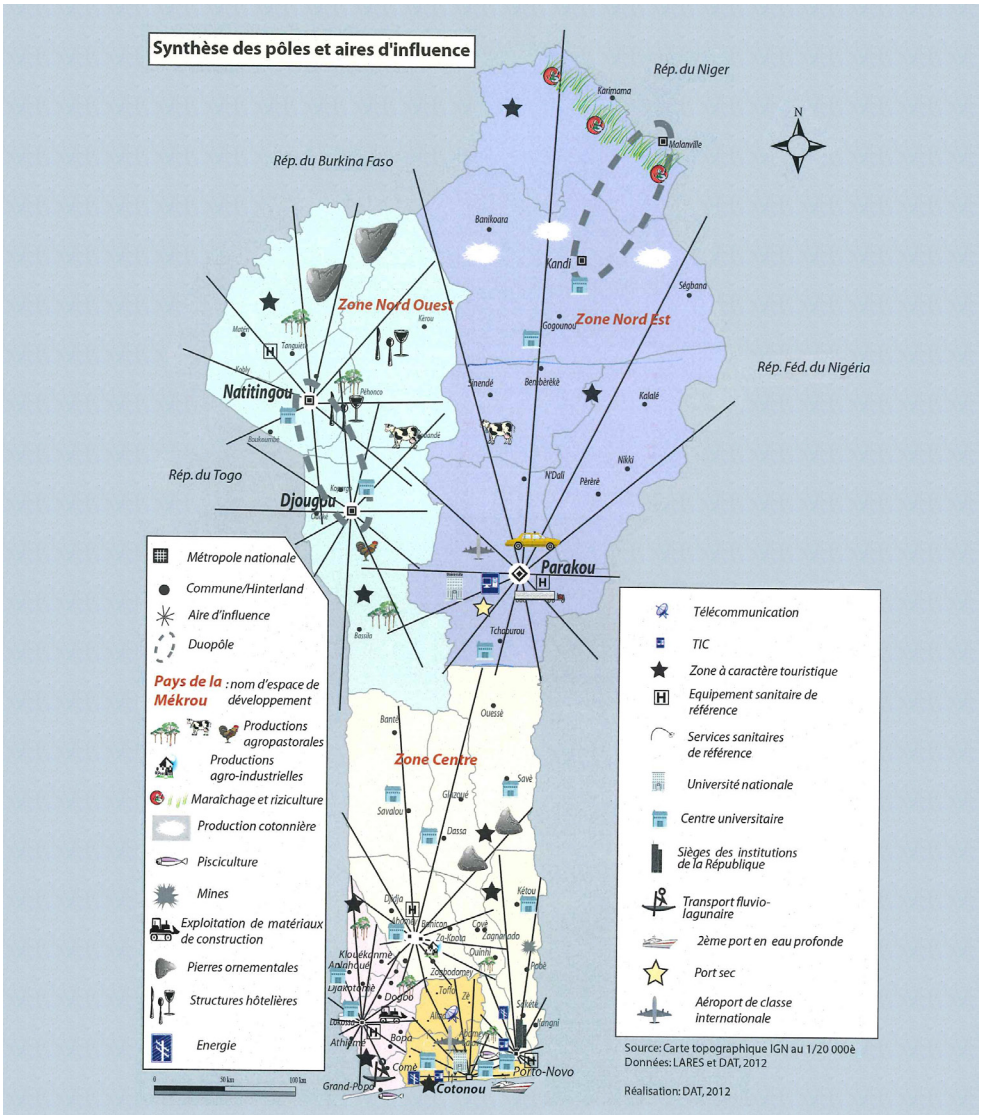


Map 16 Urbanisation in the outskirts of Cotonou and Porto Novo, Source: OSM 2019, Produced by M. Lozivit 2020

4.3.2 Territorial Development Planning

One such example is the Beninese national territorial development plan, launched in 2016 (see map. 17). It presents a development scenario, structured around regional poles, radiating out from secondary cities throughout the country, "structuring each pole around one or more towns as driving forces, with specific potentiality and vocations" (Ministère de la Décentralisation, de la Gouvernance Locale, de l'Administration et de l'Aménagement du Territoire, 2016). The Beninese territorial plan appropriates the notion of the pole from French urban planning that formalised the notion of clusters, or 'pôles de compétitivité' as a legal instrument for urban planning in 2002. Due to the circulation of dominant urban planning models, the document overlooks the significance of the urban continuity along the coast and its relevance within a larger urban territory. Consequently, the Beninese coastline which spans just 120 km, is divided into the South-East Pole, South Pole and South-West Pole, with each centred on a city and attributed various roles. In the document's accompanying cartography, the neighbouring nations are left as one grey expanse — leaving no opportunity to account for the territorial role of Togo or Nigeria despite the importance of trans-border exchanges. The absence of trans-border spatial planning is systematic of the national planning documents in the region that often choose to overlook urban growth along the corridor, and dependencies on trade and circulation along with it. Slicing the corridor into distinctive functional units connected to their respective national hinterlands disarms planning authorities from anticipating how the corridor will thicken and grow as it expands further north and as new constructions fill in the gaps in the urban fabric. Furthermore, it prevents national authorities from developing strategies that draw on territorial synergies along the corridor.

The mobility of people along the corridor raises fundamental questions over the constitution of politics in this emerging urban configuration which extends over borders. The latter causes the blurring of lines of municipal borders, ethnic groups and linguistic zones, and in doing so muddies the associations between political power and defined spatial areas. People on the move along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor move in and out of different political territories, at times showing a yellow vaccine certificate, and bribing a border guard to cross between constituencies. As such, extended urbanisation transcends the unities of political action - and this is even more prevalent in this case study because of the number of nation states and the multiplicity of ethnic groups established along the corridor.

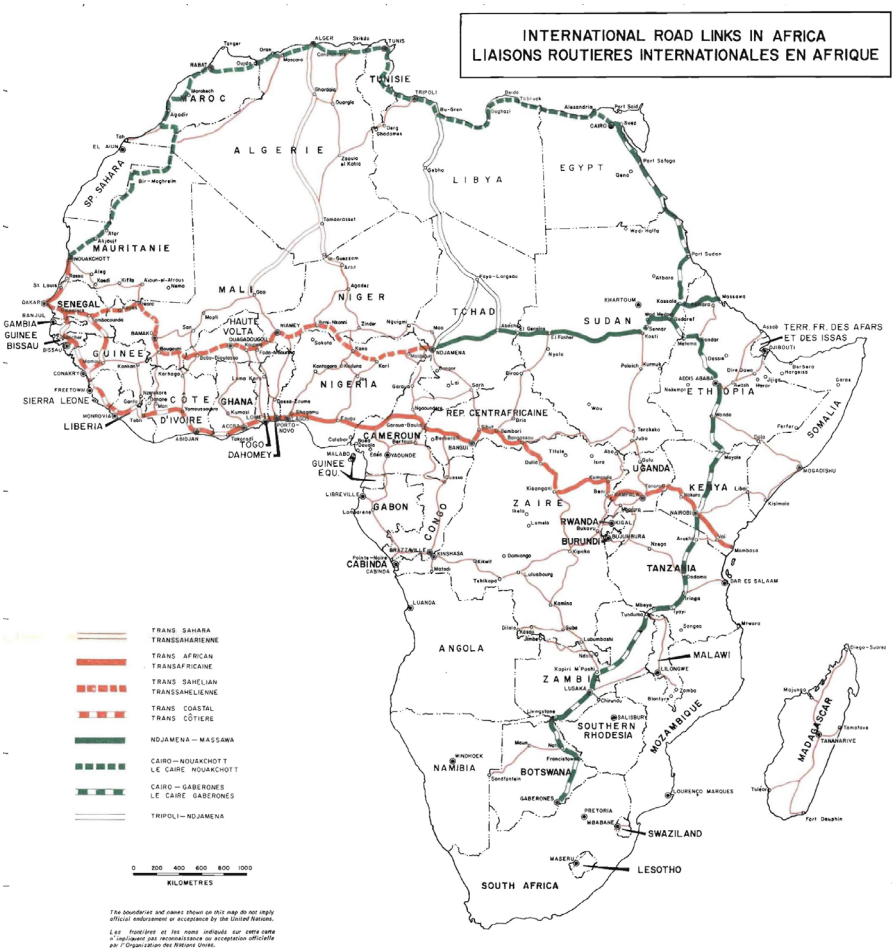


Map 17 The Beninese Spatial Agenda, National Territorial Planning Document, Produced by SNAT 2016

4.3.3 Roadside Urbanism along the RNIE 1

The Lagos-Abidjan road, otherwise known as the RNIE 1 is integrated into a continental highway system and is highly symbolic of the development aspirations of post-colonial governments (see map. 18). The road itself knots around the major cities, and is marked by significant infrastructure, such as the first interchange in Cotonou, opened in 2011 and financed by Chinese capital. It passes through border infrastructures and weigh-bridges, toll booths, over bridges and through city centres. The road takes us outside the core of capital cities, enabling us to pay heed to what else is happening along the corridor. It cuts through defined urban field-sites and decentres our gaze, pulling attention away from the megacities and their renowned aura. Only then, with the megacities eclipsed, do a series of ordinary places emerge along the coast, places whose development is intrinsically linked to (im)mobilities and circulations along the corridor, rather

than the concentrated urbanisation within specific capital cities. By thinking infrastructurally and starting from the roadside, the mobility turn can be embedded within current theorisations of extended urbanisation. Here the road, with its bumps and uneven surfaces becomes the main protagonist of extended urbanisation, both as a physical infrastructure and as a surface upon which everyday life unfolds. The road nudges theories of extended urbanisation to engage with mobility on more epistemological terms, to understand the transformation of urban territories through the lens of movement.



Map 18 LAC within Continental Road Network. Source: UNECA Repository, E/CN.14/ECO/61, 8 June 1973.

This thesis uses the road along the Lagos Abidjan corridor as the backbone of this circulation, a material surface to cling to within an urban form that is "shapeless, formless and apparently boundless, riven with new contradictions and tensions that make it hard to tell where borders reside and what's inside and what's outside" (Merrifield, 2013, p.910). The process of urbanisation along the corridor is of course far wider than a road strip, at times stretching north to encompass commuter towns and lagoon settlements, and bulging when passing through sites of concentrated urbanisation. But the interstate road acts as a backbone, connecting the various localities and channelling movement along the coast. It is a vector for extended urbanisation as people move up and down it at various tempos, sometimes coming to standstill, whether willingly or not.

Sticking to the road is to "think infrastructurally" (Melly, 2016), to consider the physical networks, goods and people who move through the territory. For as Larkin (2013) puts it: "infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter" (p.329), even when that matter is people (Simone, 2004). The road is positioned theoretically as an infrastructure of extended urbanisation, a physical form that controls speed and direction and enables various groups to capitalise on movement. The road privileges, facilitates and legitimises certain forms of movement and their resulting urban forms, whilst limiting other forms.

By adopting an infrastructural perspective, this chapter draws on the anthropology of roads (Harvey & Knox, 2012; 2015), particularly in the African context (Baptista, 2018; Filippello, 2017; Klaeger, 2012; Manji, 2015; Nielsen, 2012; 2013). This scholarship extends agency to include the various material features of the road which include for example holes or asphalt. Roads, as connectors between various urban centralities, are an ideal entry point to understanding how urbanity occurs outside of the city. As an analytical device, roads focus attention on the in-between places and, like extended urbanisation, open the idea of a bounded urban site. Roads as infrastructure are assemblages that bundle together various scales of mobility, the everyday commute to the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage.

The importance of the Lagos-Abidjan highway is linked to those who travel along it, but also to the smoothness of its surface. It is also significant as a continuous goudron in the region. The surface of the road elevates the value of land that runs alongside it. Asphalted road surfaces are few and far between in Benin, and even in Cotonou, only a handful of strategic avenues are asphalted. The nature of the road surface introduces a clear spatial hierarchy. This scale is referred to in the local Fon term as ali which translates to: "closer to path". At the bottom is la piste (earth tracks), followed by le von, the French colonial acronym for Voie d'Orientation Nord (North-Orientated Road), le pavé (paved road) and at the top, le goudron (asphalt). The defining feature of this last category of road is the materiality of its surface.

Proximity to the goudron, remains a key indicator of desirability along the corridor. Advertisements for property specify how many kilometres a plot of land is from the goudron and this directly impacts real estate prices. Research by Glele in the area of Zinvié in the periphery of Cotonou noted that between 1990 and 2010, while prices for a standard plot of land far away from a road rose from 100'000 cfa to 500'000 cfa, those plots closer to the main road rose from 300'000 cfa to 1 500'000 cfa (2015, p.461). Access to a main road triples the price of land, and up and down the corridor land on each side of the Lagos-Abidan highway has been snapped up through speculation.

The resurfacing of a road is often the sign of prestige and political power for those who reside along it. The asphalting of a road does not just depend on its strategic importance for transit but is embedded within practices of everyday urban corruption. This became evident in a local neighbourhood when the Beninese First Lady inaugurated her foundation in an adjacent earth road; rapidly the section of the road

leading from the goudron to the foundation was upgraded to a pavé. Asphalt is a rare, and therefore precious and notable feature when it appears in the urban landscape. On top of structuring land prices, and demonstrating power, the smooth surface of the goudron enables a whole series of practices: roller-blade teams practise, young Lebanese men race their flashy sports cars up and down, housewives lie washing out on the edge along with batches of fish and peppers to sun-dry on the tarmac, and zémidjans await their clients.

In the Beninese stretch of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, territories along the road are urbanising faster than in other areas in South Benin. We compared data from the 2002 and 2013 census, looking at urban markers in the coastal departments. We compared three different territorial categories: cities, communes along the road, and communes in the coastal departments not on the main road. We looked at access to urban amenities, agricultural and employment data.

As to be expected, cities had the highest access to urban amenities in terms of energy, water, waste and sanitation. Road-side communes were also much more likely to have access to urban amenities than communes off the road. Road-side communes also saw the fastest increase between 2002 and 2013 in terms of access to urban resources. For example, during this period, the percentage of households in cities with access to the water grid rose slowly from 28.8% to 30.7%, whilst road-side communes doubled from 4.6% to 8.9% and communes off the road stagnated, moving from 3.4% to 3.93%. This trend was observed with a number of indicators, road-side communes all along the corridor appear to be rapidly gaining access to urban resources, and shifting behaviours towards more urban practices, for example cooking with gas instead of with wood.

Another marker of urbanisation along the road was the rate of agricultural employment; this represented 4.7% of employment in cities, 17.4% in road-side communes and 59.1% for communes away from the road. Compared to coastal communes off the road, those residing out of cities but still on the road were less likely to farm, and more likely to earn a living in food retail (19.5% vs. 10.2%) or general retail (10.6% vs. 3.88%). In roadside communes, the three most frequent jobs were food vendors (7.1%), tailors (7.6%) and hairdressers (5.4%), which all point to urban livelihoods.

The latter suggests an urban corridor alongside the main road that runs from Lagos to Abidjan. Moving east to west, the road runs from the rich Yoruba urban network in Nigeria, into an established urban doublet in Porto Novo and Cotonou, before moving into more sparsely populated territories to the west. Yet even in these territories, roadside livelihoods are shifting, households are acquiring more access to urban amenities and producing an income through trading and trades rather than farming.

4.3.4 When New Arrivals Tie into Urban Amenities

All along the road new arrivals are seeking to tie into the urban fabric. The bend knot is operationalised in a variety of ways along the corridor and it is most visible

in the informal extension of electricity cables, as residents tie new cables into the existing network. One electrical wire is attached to another to provide light, charge mobile phones, and power sewing machines. This results in what is locally referred to as 'spider webs': knots of wires tied up in bundles at strategic spots in the electricity grid, lengthening access to urban infrastructure by tying two ends together. The spider webs cobble together extensions with makeshift materials, adding onto the conventional supply network (Rateau, 2019). The bend is a knot that is used to connect a new patch of land to the existing urban fabric. It is used to extend other urban services, as additional plastic pipes informally stretch the water grid and portions of track are added onto paved roads, which connect in turn the main tarmac road along the corridor. These new lines in the landscape make previously isolated areas accessible and habitable for new urban dwellers. As such, bends in the urban infrastructure are providing solutions for areas that are not yet serviced by municipal authorities, informally tying into the existing road, water, or energy infrastructure.

Bends are often tied by newcomers, who, arriving in a rural location, seek to pull it into the urban fabric by tying a bend. As such, migrants and recent arrivals, unsatisfied with local levels of service delivery try and gain access to the grid, and in doing so, also make it available to others. As Chabi (2013) writes, "many villages have benefited from infrastructure and urban services thanks to the efforts of colons" (p.114). Colons here, does not refer to colonisation, but new arrivals seeking to urbanise peripheral areas.[16] The bend is not just a poor man's knot. As Chabi observes, "politicians, top civil servants, or businessmen sometimes weigh in as much as they can to have certain services arrive at their homes (electricity, water, telephone etc.) and allow their neighbours to benefit as well" (Idem., p.117). The latter was identified, for instance above, with the extension of the road to the foundation of the first lady. Indeed, bends are also markers of political and economic power, as a person of influence extends the official network, through a bend that is itself tied up in connections, corruption, or privilege. An analysis of such bends sheds light on the unequal distribution of the networks, that are still out of reach for most of the population.

Analysing the 2013 national census data, the prevalence of the bend becomes apparent (INSAE, 2013).[17] Data on living conditions reported methods for lighting and for water supply. Within communes defined as urban, on average 54% of households were connected to the official electricity grid and in rural areas this dropped to just under 10%. The main alternative was lighting by petrol (33% in urban areas, 61% in rural areas) followed by low usages of solar, generators, oil and gas. However, a large group of households reported "other" means of attaining light, (10% in urban areas, 2% in rural areas). This points to alternative means to hook into the network and could signify a high rate of electricity poaching which would require a bend knot.
The data provides more clarity when we turn to drinking water provision, notably

16 Chabi (2013, p.114) provides an account of the neighbourhood of Djrègbé, an area situated between Cotonou and Porto Novo, resettled by dwellers from Porto Novo, who set up shops, bars, and even a radio station.

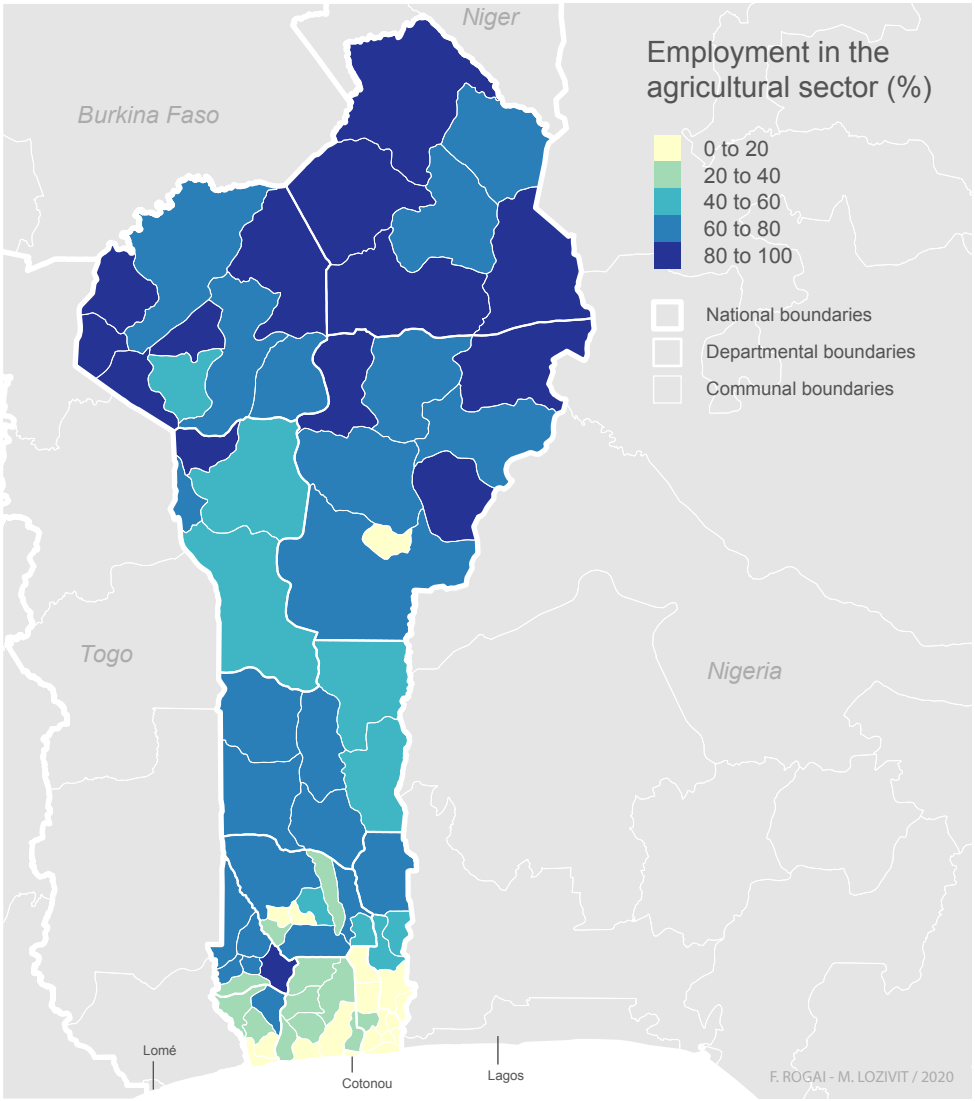
17 For detailed account of data presented and methodology, see introduction

because the census gives a more detailed portrait, asking households if they were on the water network in their home, or if they accessed the water network from somewhere else. Here, whilst 20% of urban households had access in their homes, 28% accessed the grid from another place. This dropped respectively to 1% and 6% of rural households with the rest of the population accessing drinking water from rivers, fountains, pumps, cisterns, or wells. With the possibility of reporting piped water access sourced from outside of the home, the category "other" dropped to 0.5% on a national level. So nationwide, only 30% of households are directly linked to the electricity grid, and 10% on the water grid. Looking at these figures together, it becomes apparent that many households are only able to access the grid, be that water or electricity by tying a 'bend' knot or getting access outside of their homes.

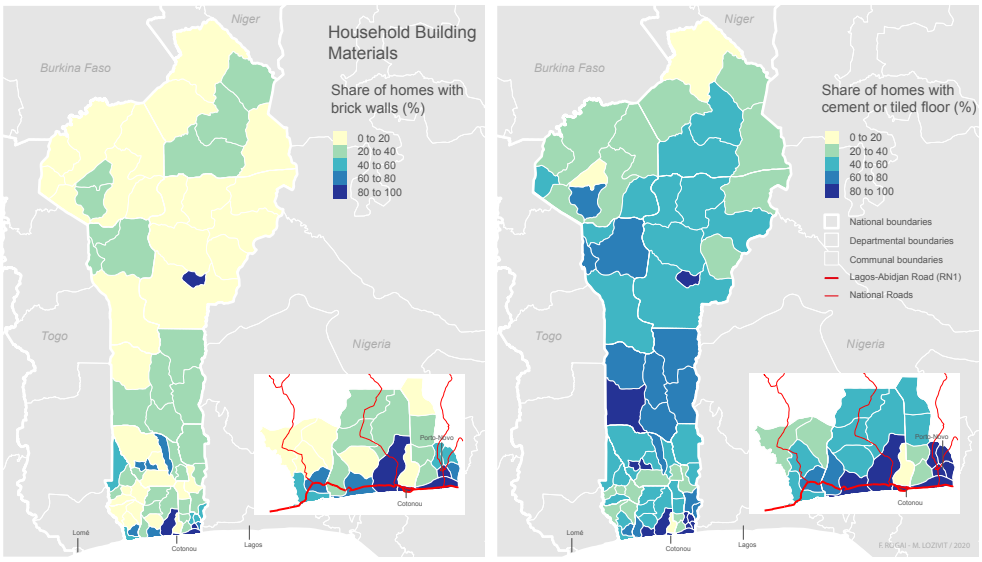
As Jaglin notes, in the cities of the Global South, services are not delivered by centrally managed, monopoly-based public utility companies within the framework of a uniform and integrated system (2014, p.434). What happens on the ground, is what de Sardan (2010) refers to as the "delivery configuration" that brings together a range of collective initiatives and diverse actors. This, Jaglin writes, can be a combination of "a network with individual connections and meters, take-off points downstream from the meters (an informal system for semi-wholesale subscribers), take-off points on the grid (electricity poaching), off-grid systems (mini networks fed by solar panels or wind farms; individual solar thermal and photovoltaic installations) and functions accessible to off-grid households: battery rental services, phone charging points, communal TV centres…" (Jaglin, 2014, p.438). Just like there are multiple knot typologies and ways of tying into the grid, there are also many ways of tying into the urban fabric to access power.

The proposal to consider the coexistence between various delivery methods, is one that recognises the bend, not just as a way to cheat the grid, or an informal private initiative, but as a valid alternative in a country where full infrastructure coverage appears to be an unlikely future. This is even more the case in rural areas that are rapidly urbanising and have very low levels of networked infrastructure. The bend, in this sense, responds to Jaglin's call for the creation of "function that allow some of the benefit of the network to be extended beyond the limited scope of the infrastructure" (2014, p.441). For the bend to be optimised, the knot still needs to be tied in a way that is safer, and fairer for communities living off the grid.

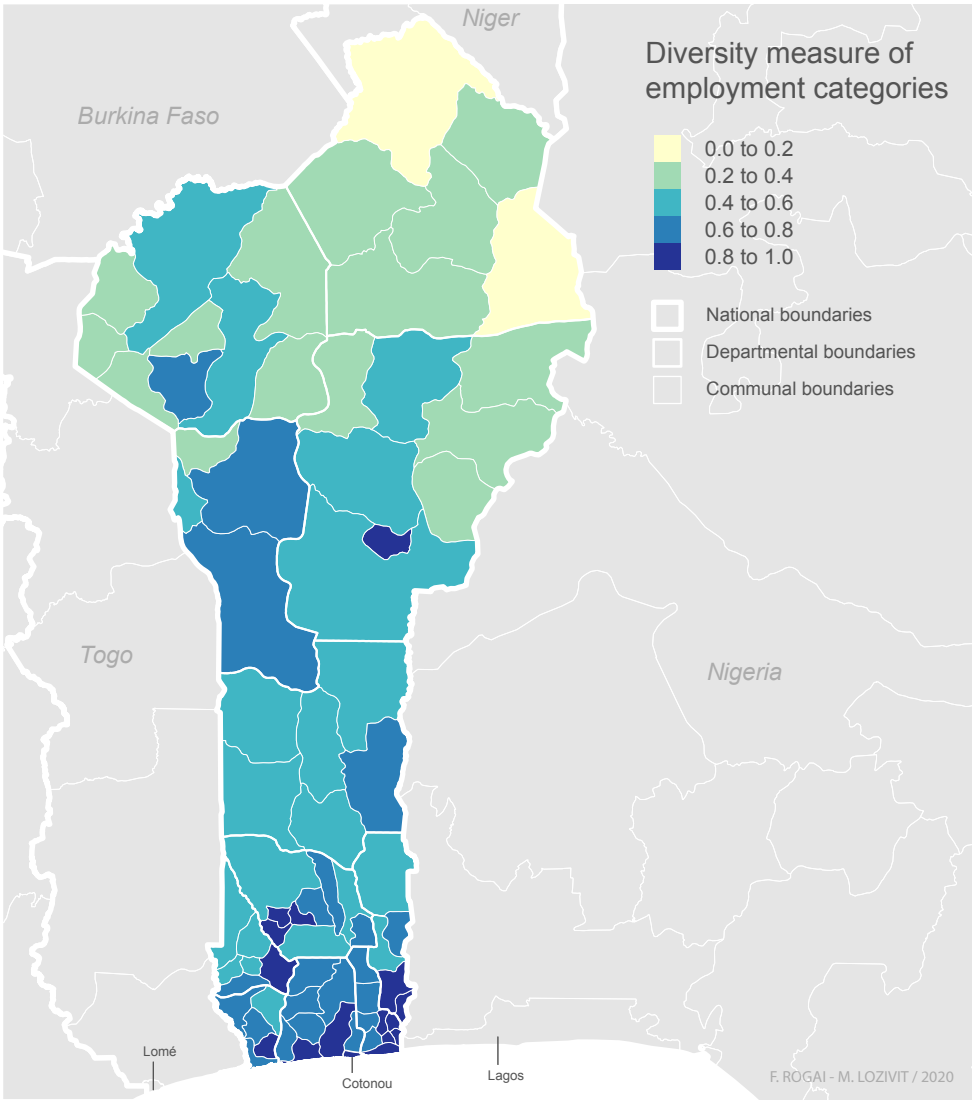
Here we have sought to ground the notion of knots in a very concrete example, the practice of tying into electricity networks. We will now try and do the same for the concept of the 'urban fabric'. This chapter, having started on the outskirts finishes in a city centre, in one of the central knots of migrant activity - the sale of clothes and cloth. Here we demonstrate the relevance of fabric in the urban landscape and suggest that migrants play a central role in its distribution. Indeed, the trade in fabric is one of many activities that ties the corridor together.



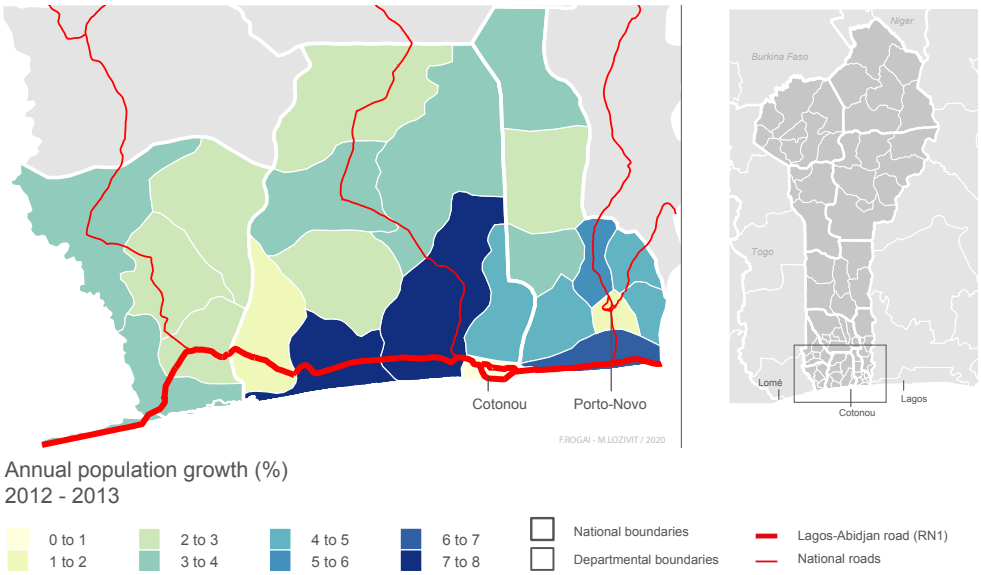
Map 19 Share of Employment in Agriculture in Benin by Commune. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



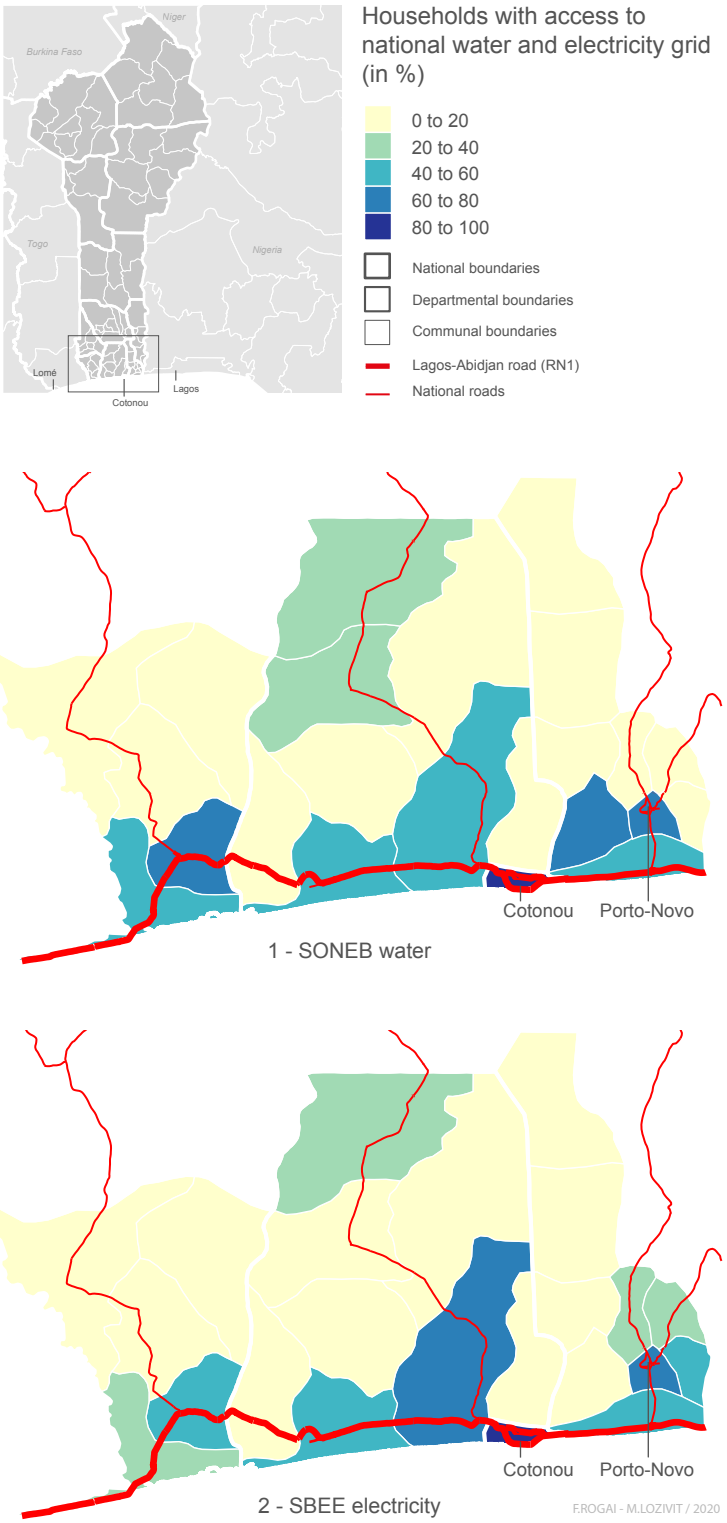
Map 20 Household Building Materials in Benin. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



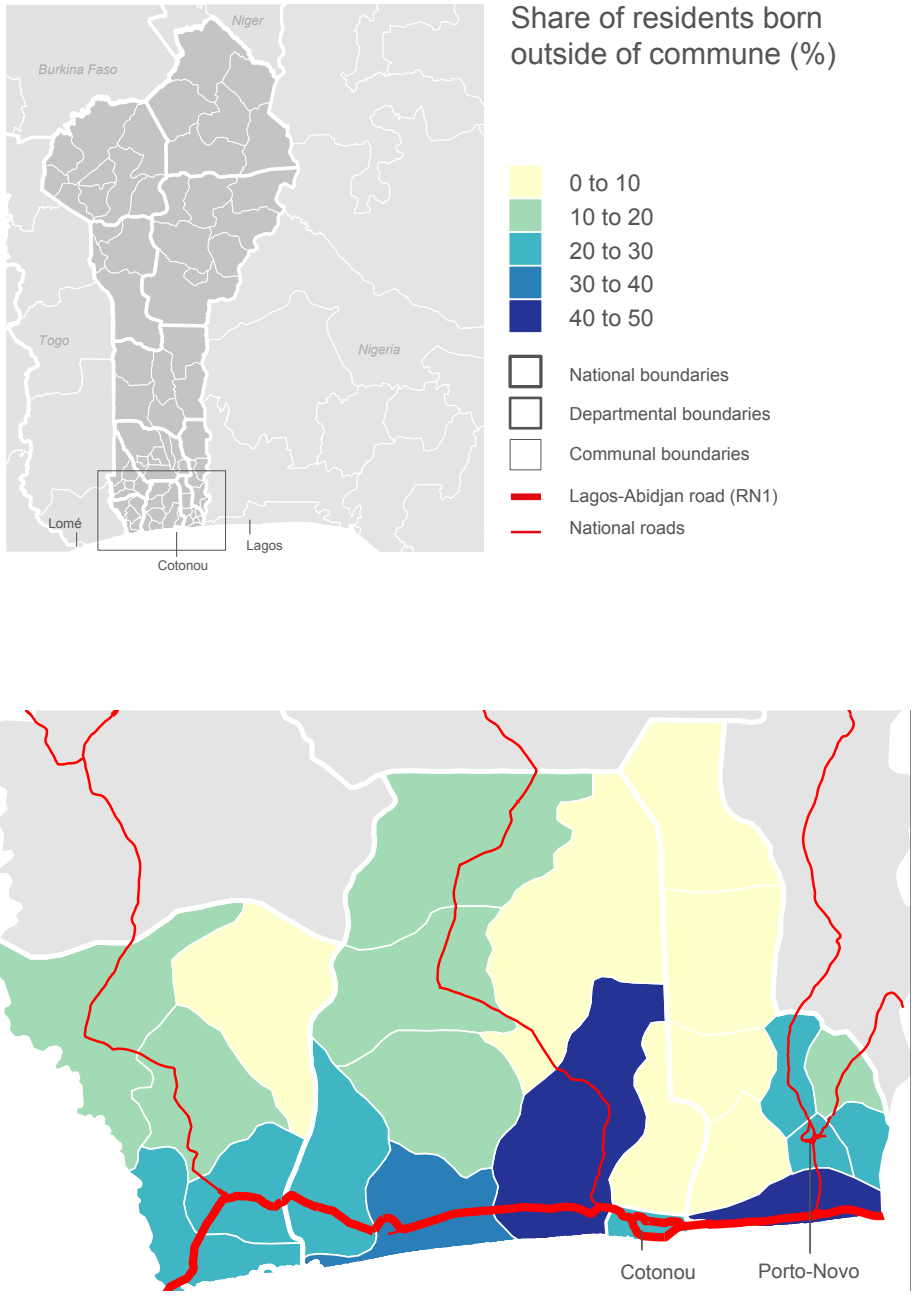
Map 21 Diversity measure of employment categories by commune. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



Map 22 Annual Population Growth in the Costal Departments of Benin, Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



Map 23 Share of households with access to water and electrictiy grid by commune in the costal departments. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020



Map 24 Share of residents born outside of commune. Source RGHP 2013, Produced by F.Rogai & M. Lozivit 2020

4.4 Missébo Market: A Central Knot in the Urban Fabric

4.4.1 The Trading of Second-Hand Cloth

Missébo, a central neighbourhood in Cotonou, plays a pivotal role in the articulation of the urban fabric. Adjacent to the canal in Cotonou and the main Dantokpa market, it has become synonymous with the sale of second-hand clothing. Rosenfeld (2019, pp.187-215) has written about the market within the context of the global circulation of used commodities, in which Missébo comes to represent Benin's strategy as an "Etat Entrepôt",[18] a warehouse state, enabling importation and smuggling within the region. The market also features in the work of Choplin and Pliez (2018, pp. 99-104) as an example of globalisation from below, presented as an unexpected, discrete location of globalisation situated among the poor, whilst Borgne (2017) has investigated the impact of recent evictions on the trading community. Building on this work, this section seeks to position the Missébo market and its trading diasporas as a central component of the urban fabric (see map.25).

Map 25 Fabric traders in Missébo. Source: A.Hertzog & OSM 2019, Produced by M. Lozivit 2020

18 See chapter one for a further discussion of Igué's concept of the Etat Entrepôt (Igué & Soule, 1994)

The recent history of Missébo is one of refugees and displacement. During the Biafra War (1967-1970), Igbos, whose independence movement was supported by the French, crossed over the border into francophone Benin. A retired construction worker who was neighbourhood chief at the time recollects hosting Okptochi, the first Igbo refugee: "that evening I showed him around the town, he had been looking for me everywhere, he could not get hold of me, and through an intermediary found my house. When he arrived, he was looking for a shop to hire, and I hosted him". Okptochi started out trading food and drink in-front of the chief's house and was quickly joined by other Igbo refugees who started importing and selling second-hand clothes. Today it is estimated that over 6000 vendors work in this second-hand clothes market, along with teams of importers, transporters, negotiators, and guards (Rosenfeld, 2019, p.201). What started off as a refugee market is now a well-established trading hub, with its own union.[19]

Missébo[20] in Fon means "come together, gather together"[21] and, as one young woman who had grown up in the neighbourhood explained, "it is the area that stays solid when other young people are fighting - it is the neighbourhood in the middle of various clans that helps the weakest (…) when you say I'm from Missébo, even if they were planning on hitting you they let you pass, because it is a neighbourhood of bosses; Missébo folk are respected." It is noteworthy that in the original interview, conducted in French, she uses the English term "boss" when describing the neighbourhood: "c'est un quartier de boss" (it is a boss neighbourhood). The Igbos in Missébo inspire both admiration and fear from the local Beninese due to their strong trading skills, well-established trade networks, quick-fire English, and ability to successfully hustle. Rumours abound about their special powers, their ability to snatch children's' organs or make one's sexual genitalia disappear.[22] As the retired neighbourhood chief warned, "even by just greeting you, they can make your organs disappear or make you vanish (…) at the time you feel nothing, but it is afterwards that you notice, it is like they hypnotise people before acting". Missébo is perceived as an exceptional territory within the city, one that is both enticing and dangerous, the security threat is real, with high levels of petty crime, that have led to a ban from the prefecture on motorbikes entering the neighbourhood.

Still, many are ready to run the risk in order to rummage for second-hand clothes in Missébo, hoping to find a gem, an original designer handbag, or a nice dress that have been overlooked by the re-sellers and mistakenly made it onto the cheaper pile. A pair of jeans will sell for around five dollars, and as one student put it, "they are nice clothes, beautiful clothes, all you need to do is wash and iron!". Well-positioned civil servants and development consultants go to Missébo to look for European work-

19 AREFIM - Association des Revendeurs de Friperie de Missébo

20 The neighbourhood also goes by the name of Gbogbanou

21 Missébo is also used as an order to gather closer together to make more room for others, for example in a queue.

22 For more on the recurrent urban rumour of sex thieves in African markets, see Bonhomme, 2016 - *The Sex Thieves: the Anthropology of a Rumor* in which he demonstrates how this rumour of penis-snatching arises from the ambiguities and dangers of anonymity that occur in everyday social interaction.

clothes, whilst the wealthy shop for warm gloves and thermal jackets for their upcoming trips to Canada. Young men attempt to align with global fashion trends by picking out skinny cuffed trousers, flannel shirts and cardigans to replicate hipster trends. Vintage looks work best, as they break the direction of evolving fashion, enabling the wearer to be of the moment, whilst wearing hand-me-downs.

Like the other second-hand clothes markets along the corridor, Marcory in Abidjan, Makola in Accra, or Hédzranawoé in Lomé (Choplin & Pliez, 2018, p.100), Missébo is tied into a global chain of commodities and the wasteful rhythms of fast-fashion. Three times a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, gigantic bales of used clothes, at times weighing up to 750kg are shipped in from London, Paris, or China. Some stay in the port, as teams of 40 Igbo men go through 40 ft containers, spending over two days sorting through the various items (Rosenfeld, 2019, p.195). Other shipments are transferred to the warehouses in Missébo, where re-sellers open the bales, picking out the best pieces among the used bras, baby clothes, winter coats and men's shirts. There is a whole chain of re-sellers who deal in goods of varying quality, from first pick to the leftovers sold on the ground.

This trade is a classic example of Benin's role as an entrepot-state in the region, as presented in chapter one. Second-hand clothes are a particularly lucrative market in Missébo due to Nigeria's protectionist economic policies that have placed an importation ban on second-hand clothes. The ban has created a market for smuggled goods, in which the Igbo diaspora is well placed to import the used goods through the port in Cotonou. Upon arrival, importers sort the goods in Missébo and smuggle a large part of them over the border to be traded in Nigeria. For Rosenfeld, Cotonou has become a "point of rupture in the commercial chain that allows second-hand clothes to enter the Nigerian market" (Rosenfeld, 2019, p.188).

Whilst Missébo is a central neighbourhood in the middle of the de-facto capital, it also reaches far out into the urban fabric through its network of informal vendors. Young men come to buy pieces of clothing for resale along the main roads and in the outskirts of Cotonou. Their appearance on the sidewalks coincides with three weekly port deliveries, noticeable as they carry heavy blue plastic bags with them as they walk around the city, trying to shift their stock. Other male hawkers stand stationary on the roadside after the 'Toyota' roundabout - holding up a second-hand pair of jeans or a shirt against their bodies for passers-by, more mannequin than hustler. A third category of female vendors purchase goods in Missébo but avoid the roadsides and trade instead in other central markets, including the central Dantokpa market. They balance round tin trays on their heads, off which they hang clothes hangers - creating a carousel of freshly laundered H&M blouses, Zara skirts and Topshop dresses. And whilst the high-end traders smuggle their used goods into Nigeria, these vendors distribute second-hand clothes throughout the metropolitan area.

Missébo resonates well beyond the central district, as over the years a series of attempted relocations have sought to displace the market from its central location. As

Rosenfeld (2019) notes, regular evictions of vendors have occurred, in 2010, 2012, 2014 and most recently in 2017 (p.201). Political power and private interest have both sought to clear the central neighbourhood to make way for a long-standing and recurrent project: to erect the city's first mall where the market currently stands with the backing of a Lebanese businessman. This has led to the creation of two additional second-hand clothes markets further out of the city centre. One is in PK3 (which stands for point kilométrique trois in French, signifying its distance of three kilometres from the central bridge) where 90 000 m2 have been allocated to the vendors behind the national post office buildings. The second is a plot 25 kilometres outside of the city in the municipality of Semé, along the main corridor roadside, not far from the Nigerian border which specialises in shoes and used handbags. Here traders, organised through the Nigerian Traders Welfare Union have sought to replicate the main features of Missébo and have employed marketing strategies to signal the presence of the Igbo commercial trading network. One example of noting their presence was through the symbolic naming of the "Biafra Market". Both additional sites have had limited take up, failing to create a dense clustering of traders to attract sufficient clients. Nonetheless, they have, along with the network of informal vendors contributed to the extension of the second-hand clothes trade into various new sites along the corridor. This points in turn to the role of migrant diasporas in the production of urban spaces, not just in the traditional central migrant neighbourhoods, such as the zongos,[23] but also outside of the city centre, in the peripheral zones along the corridor.

4.4.2 Bartering for New Wax Prints

Both second-hand clothes and new wax prints come together in Missébo. The neighbourhood is structured along a crossing of two main avenues; as the Av. Van Vollenhoven leads to the second-hand market, it crosses Ave. Delorme, which specialises in the sale of new cloth prints by the yard. Pret-à-porter for sale is scarce in Cotonou and now clients have the choice from both ends of the spectrum, to select either unstandardized second-hand clothes, or made-to-measure pieces confectioned by local tailors.

The wax cloth worn in Benin is itself tied up into a cycle of global trade networks. Historically, the cloth originates from commercial ties between the Netherlands and present-day Indonesia. In the late 19th century, Europeans sought to reproduce imitations of the batik designs for Indonesian markets. However, due to printing defects caused by the mechanisation of the process, they failed to sell on the Indonesian markets and instead were redirected to West Africa (Edoh, 2016, p.20). The colourful prints were initially designed and printed in Europe, in the Netherlands, but also France, England, Switzerland and even Japan (idem.) Today, the leading fashion house in wax fabrics remains the Dutch company Vlisco, whose iconic classic designs have been in print for almost a century.

23 For a further discussion of the role of Zongos - the West African arrival neighbourhood, see the introduction and the work of Cohen, 1969; Agier,1983; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1993, Pellow; 2002; 2008 and Spire, 2011

However, while the upmarket Vlisco shop in Cotonou is situated in the old colonial part of town, in Missébo, the cheap Chinese counterfeits of their designs can be purchased for a fraction of the price. In Missébo, cloth is a migrant affair, as migrants from Niger sell yards of material for suits and Indian shop keepers from Rajasthan run the wax shops. This is in stark contrast to the original female wax traders, known as the Nana Benz, who based themselves outside of Lomé, and became renowned for being both as wide as a Mercedes Benz, and having the riches to purchase one (Toulabor, 2012).

The rituals that punctuate everyday life along the corridor are marked with new cloth. For collective events, such as funerals, graduations or corporate celebrations, participants are often required to purchase the same print. This is then tailored to individual styles to be worn together to mark the occasion. Cloth in this sense marks a coming together of people and the gathering of a group. In an urban setting, where multiple affiliations overlap, wax marks the belonging to an ethnic group, a neighbourhood, a church, friendship group, or profession. In these moments, "sharing and wearing the same print symbolises the wearers' bond" (Bickford, 1994, in Edoh, 2016, p.21). When the occasions are over, the garments are hung in peoples' wardrobes compiling memories of events: a skirt or a pair of trousers can recall various affiliations. For Sylvanus, wax cloth produces a visual, material and semiotic density (2016, p.5), she writes that the "cloth's different qualities and agencies - both human and nonhuman - mobilise people and things on the one hand, and consequently shape political, economic, and gender relations on the other". (Idem, p.6) It maintains, embodies, and memorialises relationships, as the same prints are re-edited generation after generation, whilst women in West Africa have historically banked cloth as an emergency fund (Edoh, 2016, p.20).

Cloth in this context is used as a boundary object that speaks of kinship, politics and affiliations and articulates various claims to belonging. The popular wax prints contain coded messages about fertility, wealth and jealousy that speak to the crowd. Chickens surrounded by eggs, hint to starting a family, whilst a print featuring a chain known as wologuèdé symbolises people are linked together and that they are all in this together. One print of sugar cubes called souclé kpé meaning 'gifted', signifies that the relationship is sweet and could progress into something more significant. Fabrics featuring messages about jealousy and social status are known as assougninsi kpo'm dje, a classic print, translating to: 'I am so beautiful in this cloth that my co-wife burns from jealousy', or assé ma gni ajdjaka: 'the cat is not on the same footing as the mouse' (Lalinon Gbado & al., 2017). Wax also depict consumer goods such as record discs, ventilators, or aspirations of mobility in the form of airplanes, suitcases, or cars. The production chain is quick to respond to current affairs, and specific events call for custom prints, for example for electoral campaigns or public announcements. It is of little surprise that within a week of the Covid-19 epidemic arriving in West Africa, a Corona-inspired wax print was already being sold over various social networks.

Cloth is a starting point from which to capture both the concerns of the moment and the long-standing patterns of urban life along the corridor. The trade in cloth is a key activity for migrant populations along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, and one that ties together various localities, not just along the corridor, but also within wider global networks. As such, when we mobilise the term 'urban fabric' when discussing how migration is driving urbanisation, it is not just an abstract concept, but is also grounded in the materiality of the everyday life of urban migrants. The trade in cloth is one of the central knots in migrant networks along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, and through trading, tailoring and wearing cloth, people tie into the economic and social fabric of this territory. The last section of this chapter considers the traces migration leaves in the urban fabric, as once the movement has ceased and urbanisation is established, how do dwellers recall the ways in which migrants have tied into the urban fabric in order to produce new settlements?

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the first knot, the bend, and in doing so, presented an overview of migration and urbanisation patterns in South Benin. It has demonstrated how various historical waves of migration, including slavery, forced displacement or the arrival of refugees, have contributed to the urban fabric of South Benin. We have argued that historical migration trends continue to inform collective representations of urban spaces, featuring in both foundation stories and contemporary narratives about urban diversity. Today mobility underpins urban development along the corridor, and is the basis of many livelihoods, be it traders who travel along it, or zemidjan drivers who ferry travellers along it. This chapter has also sought to provide an overview of the dynamics of urban growth in South Benin, reflecting on how the urban network has shifted from a series of palace cities to a mode of corridor urbanisation. Here we have demonstrated the various dynamics of roadside urbanism and argued that the bend is an important knot for understanding how new arrivals tie into the urban fabric and seek to gain access to urban amenities. As such, the bend is one of the key mechanisms that allows us to understand how the urban fabric is stretching and growing along the corridor. Finally, this chapter has provided the opportunity to introduce two knots in the urban fabric that are central to migrant mobilities, the first, a knot on the outskirts by a toll booth, and then concluding with a central knot in migrant trade, in a textile market in Cotonou. What we have sought to show with this last example is that the urban fabric is good to think with, not just theoretically, but also as a concrete commodity of current urbanisation patterns between Lagos and Abidjan.

It would be misplaced to analyse the Lagos-Abidjan corridor as the sum of the cities along it or as a trans-national West African Bosh-Wash. Instead, this chapter sets out to decentre studies of urbanity in West Africa, eclipsing the major capitals, and skirting around predominant city-centrism and western frameworks of urban analysis. It

is a study of African mobility that moves outside of the city centres into other urban spaces, to examine how movement produces urban form in its interstices. Shaped by boom and bust, the corridor is never in place, constantly re-enacted as people travel up and down — weaving their trans-local lives into the urban fabric. And while people move, so too does the physical territory. Coastal erosion edges away neighbourhoods, due in part to the trade in sand for construction along the beaches, and other plots appear as residents pour cement into the bogland around the lagoons to reclaim landing and get a footing on the corridor. Tying into the corridor can be hard work as it literary shifts away under one's feet.

Mobilising theories of extended urbanisation open the political implications of the current processes of urban development. It enables the theory to be operationalised, shedding light on, and informing decision-making. Fractioned colonial legacies combined with methodological nationalism and a Eurocentric framing of movement and territory along the corridor impeach practitioners and planners from considering the full extension of the corridor in terms of its development. Through grounded fieldwork and empirical observations, contradictions emerge between the regulation of these urban territories and the processes at play along the corridor as everyday life seeks to produce and hang onto urbanity. The various state and regional instruments put in place to govern the corridor overlook the force of movement in reconfiguring extended urbanisation. This movement cannot always be channelled or totally determined; indeed, the roadside is a space where the authority of the state is both reconstituted and challenged.

With this in mind, we return one last time to the toll booth. Whereas before travellers previously sped through here, now they slow down to be taxed and inspected, have a drink and buy some fruit. For many along the corridor, it is the slowing down of traffic that allows them to bargain a deal, share some news, maybe get something they did not have before. And as people wind down windows, and reach out of them to give a little, take a little, hand over a bribe, shake a hand, or hand over a sleeping baby, the urbanisation extends itself, stretches out along the road sides, reaching into all sorts of places outside of the city and its settlements. No one really lives here, there are no houses, no settlements. Most things get bundled up and packed away after sun set, but during the day, as people move through it, and get tied down for lunch or for a chat, and then set off again, differentiated encounters occur and the urban fabric is stretched out a little further.

Whilst the bend, as a simple connecting knot has allowed us to present both how migration and urbanisation processes have shaped this territory, the following knots are slightly more complex. The next knot is the hitch, a knot that is used to tie things down and keep them from moving. Using the hitch as an analytical guide, the upcoming chapter will look at how those residing along the corridor seek to tie down people and resources as they travel past, and the impact this is having on corridor urbanisation.

Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 1-3

Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 4-6

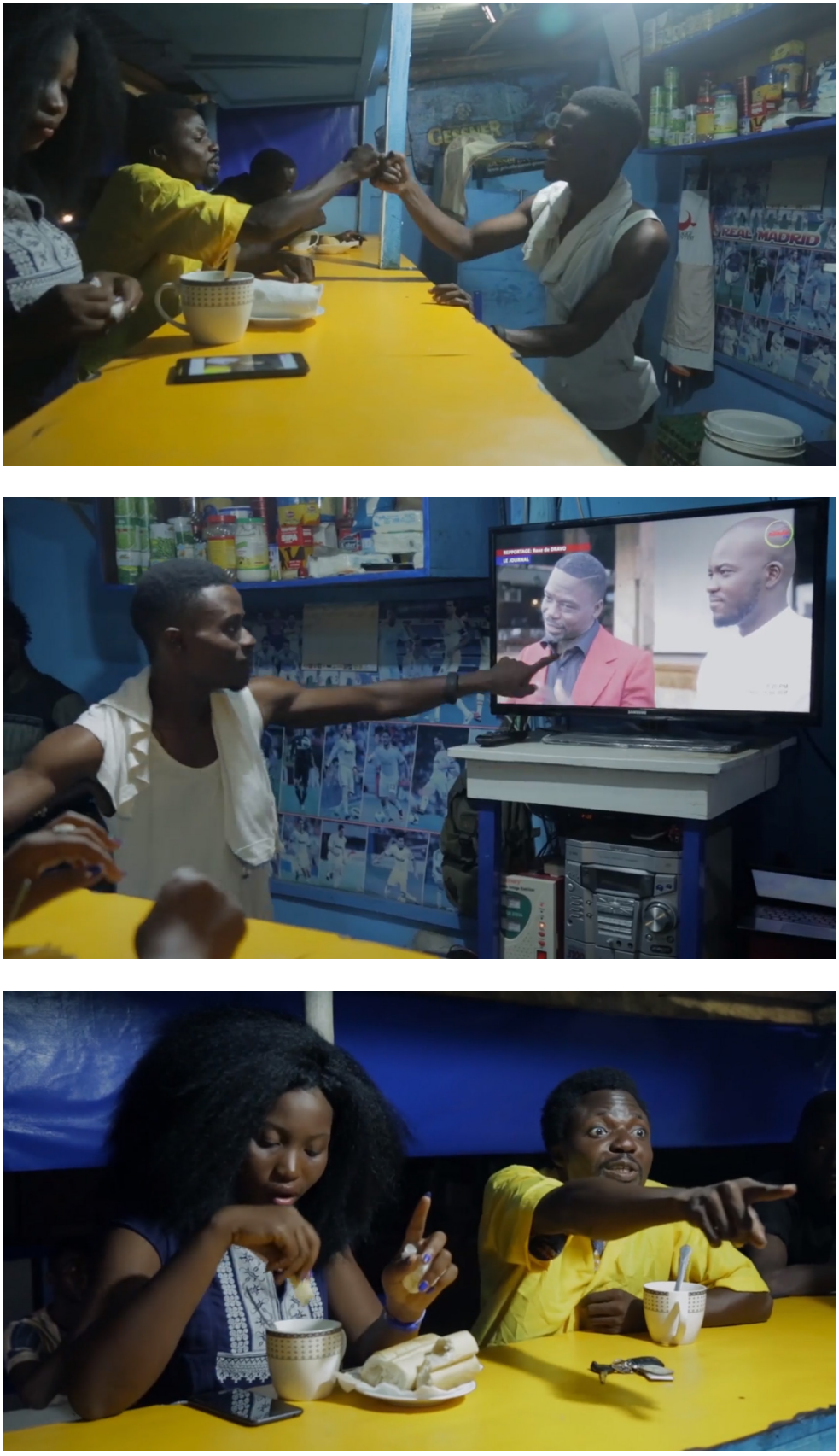


Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 7-9

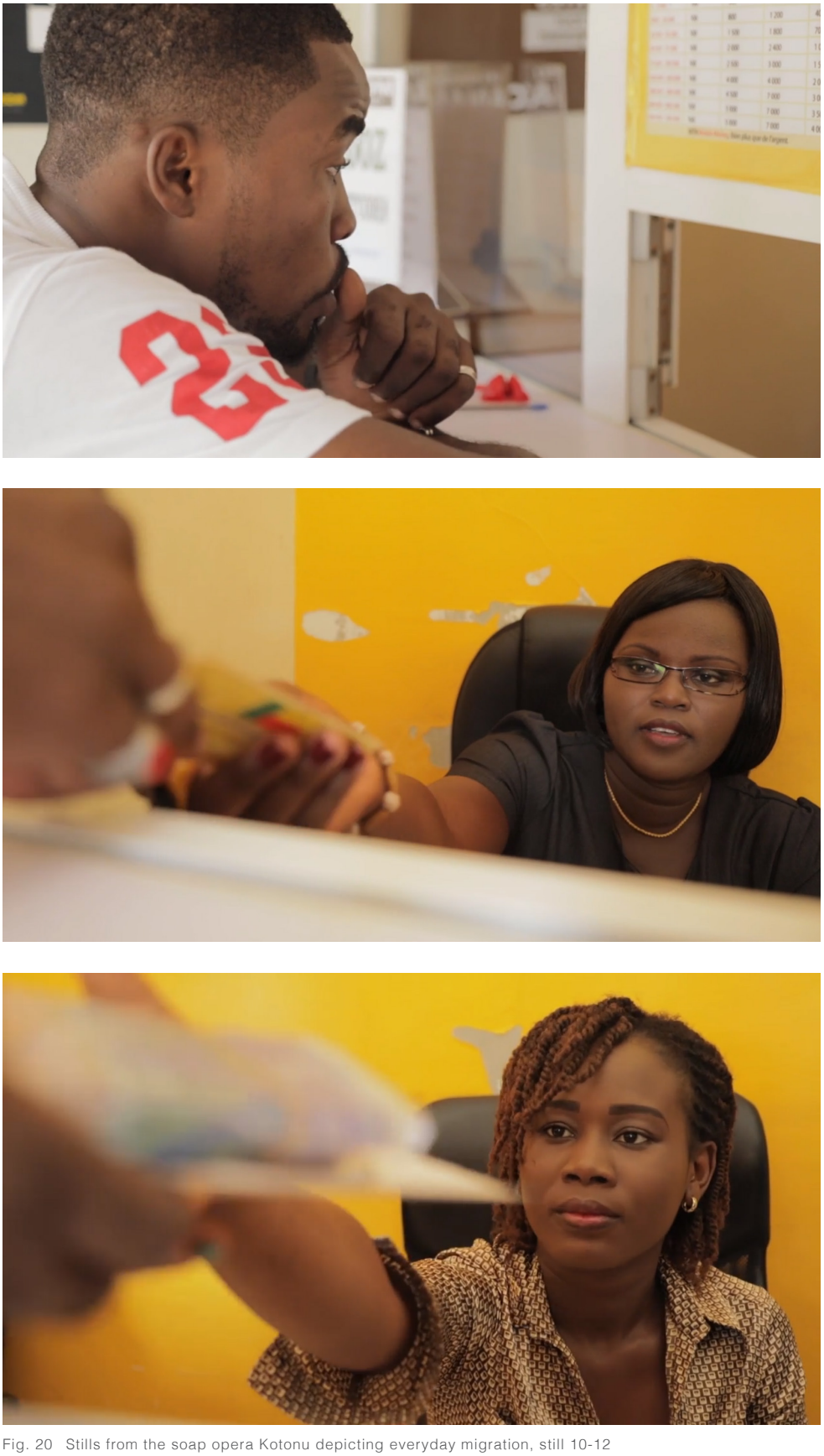


Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 10-12

Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 13-15

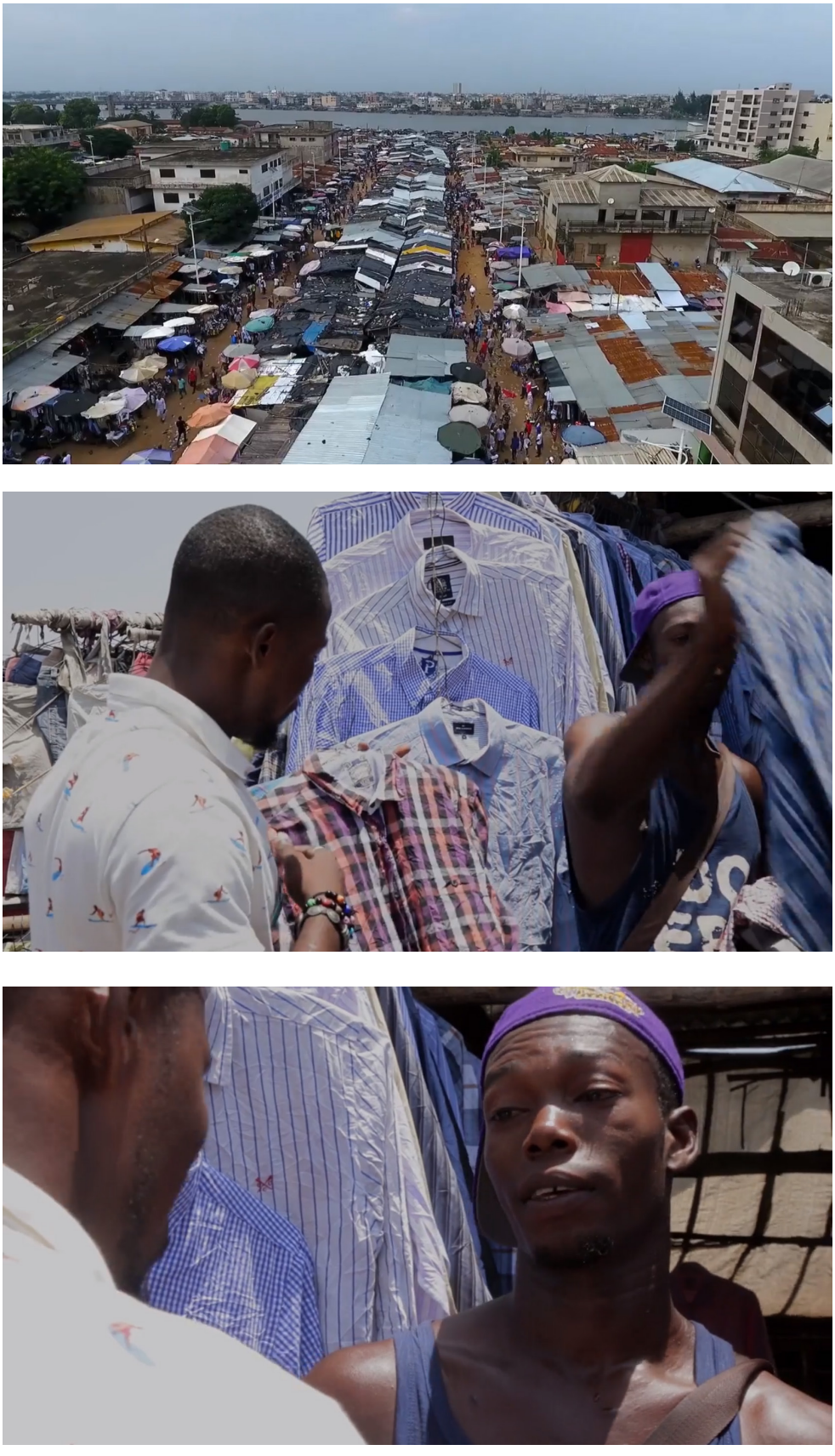


Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 16-18

Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 19-21

Fig. 20 Stills from the soap opera Kotonu depicting everyday migration, still 22-24

Description stills 1-24
1-3: A young sophisticated women from the diaspora flies into Cotonou to be greeted by her father. The diaspora is returning to Cotonou with degrees in hand and projects on the horizon. These afropolitans, young and qualified are creators, entrepreneurs, urbanists or environmentalists who are keen to invest in the future of their country. (Hertzog, 2016)

4-6: Young men go out drinking at a local maquis, and get into an argument when a drunk friend tries to harrass a migrant waitress. Togolese and Ghanaian migrants often find work as waitresses in bars. They don't get a contract nor any kind of legal rights. They are often victims of sexual harassment and exploitation (Coovi, 2016)

7-9: A zémidjan driver stops for a bite to eat at a local food stand. These cafe- bars "Chez Diallo" are owned by Guineans. They sell cheap fast food and they have cable television. These places are visited by Zemidjans, who grab a quick bite to eat there. (Spire 2011)

10-12: A young man queues up to make a money transfer by Western Union. Money transfers play an important role in reducing poverty in Benin, and given the low rates of people with a bank account, people rely on transfer companies and mobile phones to send and receive money. In 2015, immigrants sent around 249 million USD to Benin. (Ratha 2016)

13-15: A music group practices their new song about migration. One character explains "Some want to leave, some want to stay. They have a conscience but between staying or crossing the sea there's a grey area and I think that as an artist we need to address these issues." The migration crisis in the Mediterranean is broadcast widely in the media. However migrations in Africa are often internal and regional; the majority of migrants move within their continent for a better life (Duam & Issai, 2009)

16-18: A character goes clothes shopping in the Missébo market. Missébo is an informal clothes market, mainly run by the Igbos from Nigeria. Having arrived as refugees during the Biafra war, today they make up an important part of the trading diaspora. (Choplin & Pliez, 2018)

19-21: A local news team interview a migrant from Niger selling goods on the Place de Bulgarie. Nigeriens migrate between the coast and the Sahel. The media plays a role in raising the perception of these populations at the risk of perpetuating negative clichés that undermine them.

22-24: A character heads out to the sales plots in the outskirts of Cotnou to buy a car for his mistress. The Lebanese diaspora are very active in the sector of car sales. Re-exportation is one of the first economic activities in Benin however today is in decline due to the fall in value of the Naira. (Rosendfeld, 2013)

Fig. 21 Dantokpa known as West Africa's biggest open market in Cotonou
Fig. 22 Igbo traders in central Cotonou
Fig. 23 Construction of new road along the coast in the district of Fidjrossè, Cotonou

Fig. 24 A petrol smuggler takes a break at the toll booth

Fig. 25 Cover of the national newspaper "Le Matinal" 30th March 2018 - Featuring progress on the "Asphalt" project

Fig. 26 The construction of a new coastal road "La Route des Plages", in Cotonou

Fig. 27 Road sweepers heading back to their villages after having swept down the road

Fig. 28 Road-dwellers sell bags of sand swept from the corridor for local construction sites

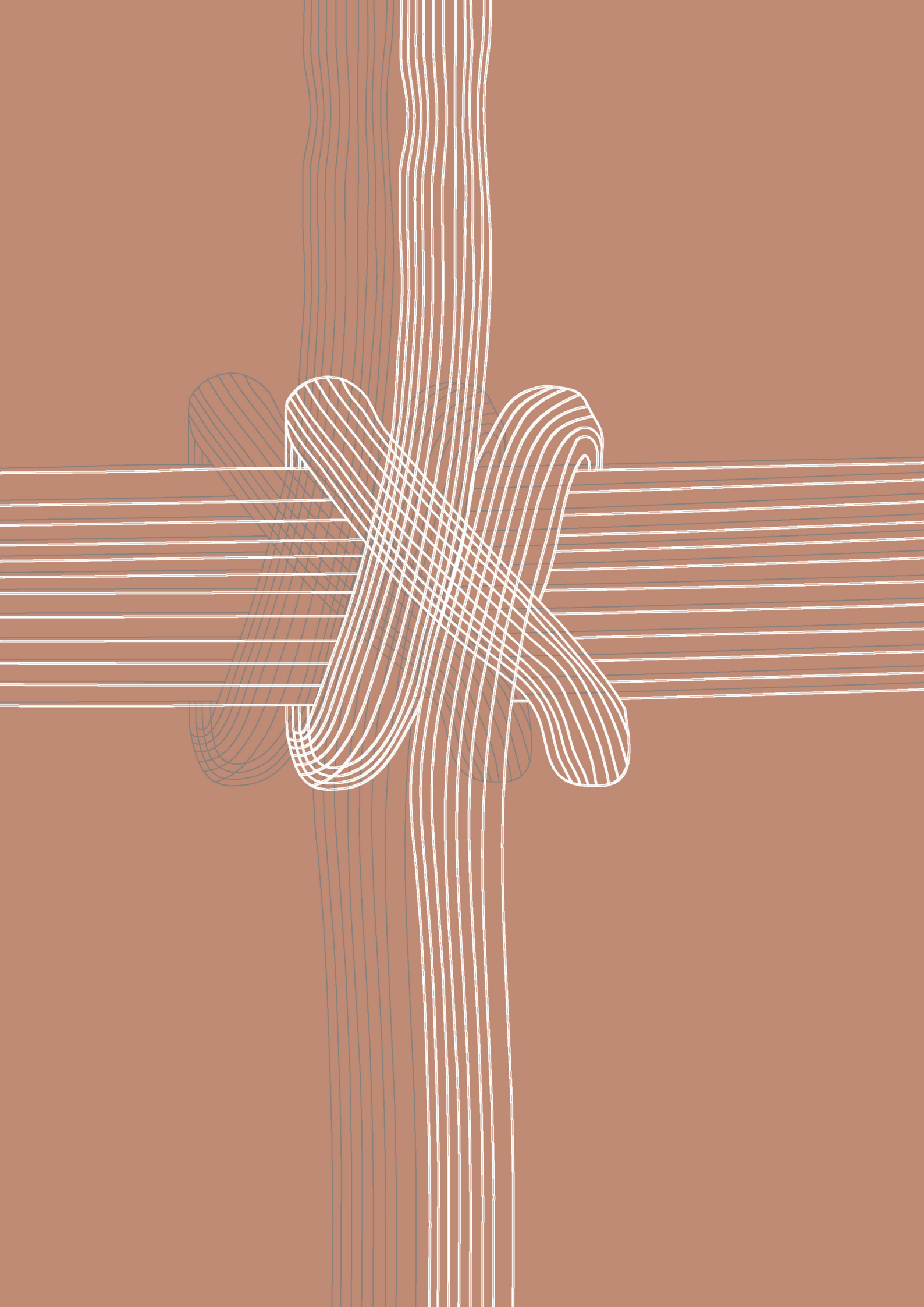
Fig. 29 Currency traders at the Nigerian border

Fig. 30 Tying into the electricity network, photo by Stefane Brabant

Fig. 31 Storage of Second Hand Clothes in Missébo Market, photo by Stefane Brabant

Fig. 32 Sale of Second Hand Shoes in Missébo Market, photo by Stefane Brabant

Fig. 33 Fabric Saleswoman in the Dantokpa Market, photo by Stefane Brabant



5. THE HITCH: TYING DOWN PEOPLE AND THINGS, FROM CIRCULATION TO IMMOBILITY

The focus of this chapter shifts now from considering circulation to immobility. It does so by introducing a second knot, the hitch. The hitch ties a rope down to another object to keep it in place. This knot keeps people stuck in space, stopping them from moving along the corridor. We use this knot to think about how the mobility of people along the Lagos-Abidjan is impeded, and the impact this might have on the urban fabric. The hitch knot is a strategy whereby the hole in the road, or the toll both seek to slow down the circulation of people and goods, and tie them down for a moment in order to extract both economic and social capital.

As such, this chapter, as discussed in chapter two, responds to the call for migration studies to pay greater heed to forms of immobility. Building on the work of Carling (2002), Bertrand (2011) and Jónsson (2011), we underline here that an analysis of mobility and migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor also requires paying attention to moments where people stay put. We propose the hitch as a tool that encompasses the various ways in which people get tied down in the African city, either at the bottleneck (Melly; 2016), checkpoint (Das & Poole; 2004) or chokepoint (Carse & al 2018). These notions all refer to moments in the territory where flows and circulations are constricted, and mobility is impeded.

As such, this chapter considers how the circulation of people and goods but also the breakages and stoppages that slow them down along the road are contributing to the formation of a trans-national conurbation reaching from Lagos to Abidjan. What role do these immobilities play in driving urbanisation along the corridor? To answer these questions this chapter focuses above all on the communities dwelling along the corridor who are seeking to tie people and goods down. The chapter draws on a range of data, from observations in the peripheral neighbourhood of PK10 and along the road, to the census material, policy documents, and interviews. It also draws on press reports and their coverage of recent events.

The chapter is structured in three section. The first distinguishes the specific strategy of the hitch in relation to other elements that can create immobility, for example entanglement of simply running out of steam and loosing friction. It then provides an example of how migrant populations get tied down in the rental market in South Benin. The second section focuses again more directly on the highway road, asking how roadside dwellers generate revenue through disrupting flows of circulation. The final section explores the tensions that lie here between various policies and current everyday practices along the road - notably in the field of regional integration and migration management. Here we also take the opportunity to discuss the impact of two recent events, the closures of the Nigerian border and the Covid-19 pandemic on migration-driven urbanisation along the corridor.

5.1 Impeded Mobility

5.1.1 Immobility Considered Through Entanglement and Friction

In African cities people not only get stuck in traffic, but their projects, aspirations and futures are also halted. Writing about Cotonou, Choplin and Ciavolella speak of a city where all the roads are jammed, geographically at the bridges, roundabouts and crossroads, but also socially, as people try to get into school or break into the job market (2018, p.6). Along the corridor nothing flows freely as people and things get caught up, stuck in traffic, or break down. Key here to the theory of stagnation as a marker of contemporary urbanisation is Melly's work on Dakar (2016). She argues that the bottleneck, or the *embouteillage* have been a defining feature of life and policy in Dakar. In her terms, the bottleneck is the sign of an era in which "urban and global mobilities are both intensely valorised and increasingly regulated, restricted and deferred" (2016, p.10). She describes the bottleneck as an unpredictable, widely generative "critical urban force that often exceeds management, planning and intervention." (2016, p.10). Here we use the notion of the hitch knot to consider the various configurations under which things and people get tied down along the corridor and how these forms of immobility are contributing to extended urbanisation. Before presenting an empirical example of how people get tied down through rental contracts, we briefly discuss the idea of entanglement and friction that are key to understanding these moments of immobility.

As people move along the corridor, they get entangled in relationships, projects and localities, their entanglement can at times produce immobility (without a hitch knot) which reflects the urban diversity that is produced though migration along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. Entanglement for the art historian Anderson (2016) is a notion that allows us to begin to theorise and articulate both the complexity and the heterogeneity of current global conditions. It differs, she suggests, from notions of hybridity and syncretism, because it recognises that various threads and lines can remain distinct, whilst also, at specific moments become enmeshed or interwoven. Entanglement therefore allows a continued reading of difference, whilst recognising how through growth and movement, interwoven lines articulate with one another.

However, these entanglements rely on a certain amount of friction to be held in place. This friction is generated through an encounter of difference, that introduces tension into the urban fabric. Knots in their basic form, employ the contrary forces of tension and friction, pulling tight against themselves in order to generate new forms (Ashley 1960). A knot brings two lines together, extending them into new urban spaces, pulling out connections between two locations, and combining them, looping them around each other. For whilst knots can provide strength and security, they also break under long-term stress or sudden jerks, and whilst a secure knot often breaks, a strong knot will instead slip (Ashely 1960, p.16). Whether a knot manages to hold tight within the tumultuous setting of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor depends on the material, the lay and the twist. However, most essential is the friction, for it is

friction that prevents slipping, and this friction must be generated by pressure of some sort at the nip of the knot (Ashely 1960, p.17).

In her ethnography of global connections, Tsing (2011, p.5) refers to friction as the "grip of the encounter", that are both heterogenous and unequal encounters resulting in new arrangements of culture and power. For a wheel, she reminds us, spins in the air without friction, it is not just about slowing things down, but also keeps things in movement. When considering the production of the urban fabric in West Africa, introducing knots enables us to leverage this friction as a generative force, that enables movement and propulses the extension of the urban fabric. So whilst people can be immobilized because they have become entangled in local networks, they can also get stuck in place because of a lack of friction, that is to say, a lack of diversity in the encounters within their everyday lives.

5.1.2 A Hitch in the Rent Contract

For many of the youth along the corridor, immobility is not a choice but a constraint. Being tied up, and not being able to move forward in life constitutes many of the frustrated urban experiences of those unable to leverage the opportunities mobility would allow. As Melly writes, "narratives of being stuck, stranded, bored or immobile offer crucial insights into contemporary experiences of temporality, belonging and social transformation" (2016 p.18).[1] She points out how for authors such as Hage (2009), strandedness is immanent to mobility, rather than being its opposite (Idem, note 14). Along the corridor, many people find themselves stuck due to mechanisms in the housing market, whereby renters must provide substantial guarantees upfront.

This was expressed by a young seamstress in Lomé, who like many on the rental market, was forced to put down a year's rent up-front for the one room workshop that she lives in. This has restricted her ability to move as her landlady has hitched her in, tying her down to guarantee an income from the workshop. For the seamstress this became increasingly problematic in 2018, as political crisis and state violence played out across the country in Togo. Given the uncertainty, nobody was ordering new clothes and she had no savings in place. Ideally, she would have liked to move in with her older sister, working as a waitress in Porto Novo in Benin. At least she would be able to save in rent, and maybe find some yoruba clients. She complained that "*Le sur-place c'est dur*" (living on-site is hard), explaining that being tied to one spot was tough. This expression likened her situation to that of having to tread water. To remain tied into one location on the corridor required more energy at times than moving along it. She was acutely aware of how much this immobility is costing her, delaying income, her ability to save towards setting up a home with her fiancé and starting a family.

Renters along the corridor get caught in the hitch, as they are tied down for long

1 See also Masquelier (2013) on boredom, disappointment, and the waiting of young men living in Niger

periods. There is a general disdain for renting as opposed to house ownership, and those who rent for long periods of time are presented in local discourse as frivolous and irresponsible. Renting is especially associated with foreigners, who as one estate agent explained, are good tenants and more reliable payers in comparison with local Beninese. Analysis of the 2013 census showed that along the Beninese section of the corridor, migrant households were much more likely to rent. Whereas as under half of the Beninese families lived in rented accommodation, nearly all foreigners did,, (Nigerians (93%), Nigeriens (86%) or Togolese (72%)). However, the arrival of foreigners with a higher disposable income has pushed rents ups. In Cotonou for instance, foreigners reported paying a much higher median rent than locals - for example Nigerians paid 20 000 cfa and Nigeriens 15 000 cfa, compared to the median rent of 12 000 cfa.[2] On top of inflating rents, the presence of migrants has also encouraged new leasing practices that tie the renter down for longer periods of time.

One agent who managed properties in the PK10 neighbourhood rented out to Nigerian students explained: "when they come to rent and you tell them the price, those others (Nigerians) do not want you coming to collect the rent every month, so they pay one, or two years ahead. We would charge them 50 000 cfa, 12 months in advance, then a guarantee for water and for electricity, for emptying out the septic tank, then 1500 a household for the rubbish collection, and all that is paid one year upfront . The sum of 50 000 cfa guarantees the water, and 50 000 for the electricity, twelve months upfront, then two months extra guarantee, so that's 14 months, then a month on top for the agent, so that's 15 months". Whilst local Beninese would be unlikely to agree to pay so much up front, landlords still regularly ask for six to nine months' rent up front, a practice that makes it difficult for newcomers to establish a household in the city, as it requires having a considerable sum of money put to one side in an economic context where saving is a luxury. High up-front costs on renting effectively tie renters into their property, preventing them from moving on to new locations.

The Beninese government has legislated to try and loosen the hitch on renters - and adopted in April 2018 a law to limit the power of landlords.[3] The new law states that the annual rent of a property cannot exceed 8% of its estimated value, and limits deposits to the equivalent of three months' rent. It also foresees the creation of a national commission in charge of fixing prices for buildings in relation to the context of each area. Whilst good in theory, this law has yet to be put into practice, especially when it comes to estimating the value of properties. The hitch provides insight into how, in a context of heightened mobility, some people get tied down. Like other forms of knots, it is an entry point to understand how forms of (im)mobility are involved in the production of the urban fabric, and how policies attempt at times to

2 Monthly rents equivalent of 33$ for Nigerians, 24$ for Nigeriens compared to national median of 19$

3 Law passed on the 24th April, 2018, article 58 « le prix maximum du loyer annuel est fixé au maximum à 8% de la valeur réelle du logement, de l'appartement ou de l'immeuble. En cas de location au mois, le montant du loyer mensuel ne peut en aucun cas dépasser le douzième du loyer annuel. Le montant du cautionnement à titre de garantie ne peut excéder une somme correspondant à trois (03) mois de loyer ».

loosen various knots along the corridor in order to reform the urban fabric. In the next section, we turn to look at how communities residing along the corridor attempt to hold up traffic and tie down opportunities as people move along the corridor.

5.2 Holding up Traffic and Tying Down Opportunity

5.2.1 Speed Control as a Local Development Strategy

Movement in and of itself structures opportunity within this territory of extended urbanisation. Various groups look to capitalise from this movement along the corridor, either through speeding it up, for example in the case of the zémidjans furrowing passengers around, or from slowing it down. This section now turns to consider how the slowing down, and production of new immobilities materialises within the urban fabric. Working again from the road, it considers how, in the absence of formal labour markets, people make a living from the road. Opportunity is leveraged by road-side communities when traffic slows along the corridor, either through sudden breakages, or planned pitstops. And whereas regional development strategies are seeking to improve the road infrastructure to enable traffic and goods to flow more freely, local leaders and traders are encouraging traffic to slow down, enabling them to generate revenue. As the traffic comes to a halt, it also generates a multitude of encounters and contacts, between immobile dwellers along the corridor and people travelling across borders, with their varying currencies, cultures and languages. This is key to the production of density and diversity within extended urbanisation.

The corridor spans 970 km yet kilometric distance is a weak indicator for those circulating along when faced with breakdowns, border checks and traffic. The cost of travel is a far more appropriate marker, for fifty US dollars, a wealthy urbanite can travel on an air-conditioned bus from Abidjan to Cotonou. Along the corridor speed varies greatly depending on spending power — diplomatic vehicles whizz past checkpoints and over potholes with new, imported shock absorbers whilst traders slow down as they cross the border into Ghana by foot to board another collective, the *Tro-Tro* minibus. And while those with the means to fly can travel from Lagos to Abidjan in a few hours, along the road an early riser in Lagos can be in Accra by sundown. However to take the road, is to risk getting held up at the many border posts along the corridor, where goods and people can get tied down at the checkpoint and kept from moving until a bribe, a yellow fever vaccination card, or an official stamp unravels the knot.

Travel distances and times along the LAC

	Abidjan - Accra	Accra – Lomé	Lomé – Cotonou	Cotonou – Lagos
Distance	525 km	190 km	150 km	125 km
Cost of Coach Ticket	24 USD	11 USD	8 USD	12 USD
Official transit time by coach	10 hours	5 hours	3 hours	4 hours
Estimated time for a vehicle crossing border with goods	21 hours	16 hours	22 hours	14 hours

Chart 5 Sources: UTBCI & Cross Country Transport Companies & Unpublished report: Organisation du Corridor Abidjan-Lagos. 2017. "Projet de Facilitation Du Commerce et Du Transport Sur Le Corridor Abidjan-Lagos." DON IDA N. H787-CI. Groupe de la Banque Mondiale & ECOWAS.

These various temporalities cohabit the corridor and its tarmac, honking their horns at each other, sometimes overtaking or colliding into each other. For those residing along the corridor, the speed of traffic poses a conundrum. If it is too quick, then they have little opportunity to trade with the people moving along the corridor. Yet if everything comes to halt, as we have seen recently with travel restrictions in relation to Covid-19, then opportunities to trade also vanish. Roadside communities require both a regular flow of people and commodities along the corridor and a certain pace and speed that enable encounters between people on the move and people in place. Here the hitch knot can be employed to tie people down as they travel along the corridor.

Communities along the corridor have added speedbumps and pedestrian crossings to facilitate crossing over and to try and navigate the fracture it creates when it cuts through localities. The highway does not bypass villages and towns, but runs straight through them, and in turn, urban life comes right up to the edge of the road, and then over it, as school children skip over the highway and vendors hustle through the traffic. "Power" writes Simone, "rests in the corridor (2016, para.1). In other words, it takes a break, and sometimes slams on the brakes to note strange amalgams of bodies that unexpectedly run into each other unannounced" (2016, para.1). It is precisely because bodies are travelling along the corridor, carrying various volumes at different speeds, that these collisions occur. Unlike formalised motorways, there are no identified exits, crash barriers, constant speed limits or lay-bys; at any moment drivers can pull into the cities, towns and villages that line the road.

As traffic slows down along the corridor, the road provides a site along which to barter and trade goods, as roadside dwellers display their goods, hoping to entice clients to stop by and purchase them. This trade translates into road-side urbanisation, from shacks to sturdy constructions - be it a simple basket, to a wooden stall, or a makeshift metal shed, these structures are indicators of extended urbanisation up and down the corridor. As the centres of concentrated urbanisation near, the ephemeral roadside stalls become individual shops set back from the highway, turning into long rows of one-story store fronts. These road-side vitrines announce the aspirations and urban futures at play along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. The various goods on sale

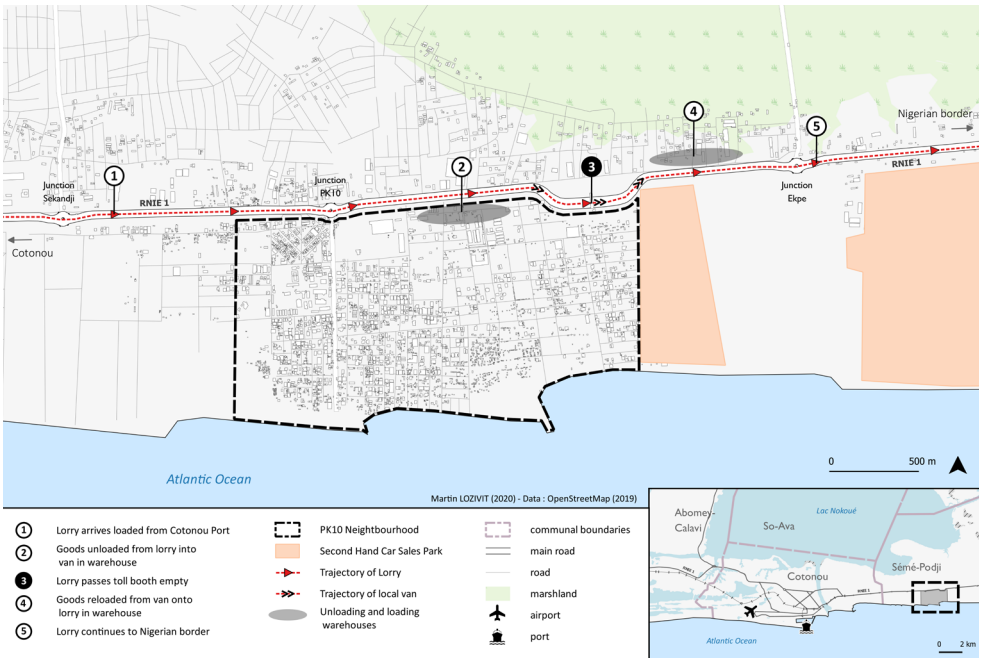
speak of consumer trends as fabric vendors display yards of bold wax fabric to be cut and tailored. Bright yellow facades indicate *Mobile Money* shops for immediate cash transfers and phone data. Hardware stores announce the price of cement, plastic piping, and Chinese solar panels. Furniture makers line up wooden beds and three-piece sofa suites; facing the road, their price scribbled in chalk on the fake leather. These material goods respond to the growing market of urban household goods along the corridor, seeking to furnish their new homes.

When traffic gets caught up in jams, even more opportunities for petty trade appear. Shop fronts are overlaid with another series of vitrines, as vendors move in and out of cars, expertly carrying glass display cabinets. Vendors, making the most of cars and buses standing still at roundabouts and traffic lights, pitch gadgets, books, political pamphlets, maps, car accessories, mouse traps or the latest CD of Lagos dance tunes. They weave in and out of the vehicles and often target the minibuses' open side-doors, which become shop-windows, a facade used to display goods. Items are passed into vehicles to be considered and prices are bartered, sometimes just to pass the time, as passengers window-shop in a drive-in bazaar of imported goods.

5.2.2 Disrupting Flows along the Corridor

For the geographer John Igué, Benin functions as an "état-entrepot" a warehouse state that relies on goods and resources that circulate within its borders as opposed to internal production (Igué and Soule, 1992). This strategy relies on generating income through customs taxes as opposed to industrialisation. However, the central state is not the only one collecting customs taxes along the road. All along the corridor local leaders use the location of their constituencies to generate revenue from the corridor. Far from point-to-point logistics with economies of scale, such practices hook onto opportunity as it passes by. From the perspective of these locations the corridor is not just connecting hubs and crossing borders, it is also distributing resources along its borders by disposing residues, people, things and money.

One such place is PK10, named so because it is 10 km outside of Cotonou (*Point Kilométrique 10*). A mix of high-end residential units, informal settlements and university campus and industrial warehouses, PK10 is situated on the corridor between the port of Cotonou and the Nigerian border. It too is located by a toll booth, this time a different one. Spending time with the neighbourhood chief, the following scheme for raising funds from the corridor becomes apparent: the toll booth charges high fees for lorries once their weight is over a certain threshold. Local officials have devised a scheme to make money for everyone involved. Over-loaded lorries could pull into warehouses in PK10, where, for a small fee, young men off-load the goods onto several small pickups that cross the toll requiring only a nominal fee (see map.26). Once on the other-side, goods are then reloaded onto the lorry. This arrangement sets aside the logistics of economies of scale and time. In this warehouse state, speed and fluidity are no longer a priority, as money can be made by slowing down the circulation of goods.



Map 26 Logistic transfers in PK10. Source: A.Hertzog & OSM 2019, Produced by M. Lozivit 2020

One morning the PK10 chief was summoned to the district chief's office. He had noticed the revenue from the warehouse operation decreasing and had sent out his men to investigate. An assistant had diligently noted down every lorry coming in and out and there were clear discrepancies with the sums he had been receiving from the PK10 chief. "It is not rigorous", admonished the chief, "my men on the ground carefully checked". He went on to read from a schoolbook the number plates of the vehicles that had not been declared properly. "Things need to straighten up around here." The PK10 chief apologised profusely, nodding in agreement. The arrangement in place makes money for the truckers themselves, the constituency directly on the road-side and the wider district; some of which is reinvested in local services to cover neighbourhood costs, all the while, reducing the money collected at the toll booth intended to fund road maintenance. In a context with local formal employment, and therefore a reduced tax base, local authorities are turning to the corridor to generate a revenue. It is both a case of budgetary imagination, and the everyday corruption at play in West Africa.

The surface quality of the roads in the region is far from permanent and can quickly deteriorate owing to bad weather, potholes, accidents, poor engineering, or embezzled maintenance funds. The quality of road surfaces is a key concern to people on the move, and the constant topic of conversation and press articles, understandably so given that the deterioration of a road surface can lead to everyday life being completely re-routed as people try to fit their schedules around the ensuing traffic jams. The obstacle, be it the traffic lights, speed bump, customs check-point, crashed lorry or toll-both, all enable urban bystanders to collect the dividends of immobility as people alongside the road find ways to seek out a living, and make a little money from

their location on the Lagos-Abidjan interstate. As those on the move get stuck, because of a hole in the road or a slow border post, there are people waiting ready to barter services, to wash and repair cars, sell petrol from large glass demijohns, plastic bags of fried manioc snacks, tomatoes, hot peppers, salt, dried fish or haircuts. Holes in the road are a common occurrence along the interstate and play a prominent role in the collective imaginary. Cotonou is referred to by locals as 'Coto-trou', *le trou* meaning both hole, and place of little significance - outside the glare of the megacities. For De Boeck, the hole becomes a meta-concept of African urbanism, one that reflects material ruination, sites of erosion, and social decay in the city (De Boeck & Baloji, 2016).

The holes in the road are nonetheless productive, generating activity along the road, and at times are even dug out by youths, who set up ad-hoc checkpoints and ask for contributions to 'repair' the road. As traffic slows down around the hole, all types of activities emerge. This is captured by Kapuscinski, describing a road hole in Nigeria, he writes "the edges of the hole have become a centre of attraction, generating curiosity and encouraging initiative. Thanks to this godforsaken hole, this place, this sleepy deadly suburban ruin, (…) transforms spontaneously, into a dynamic neighbourhood, full of life and noise. Social life gets colourful, the edges of the abyss becomes a place of encounters, of discussion, a children's playground" (2000, pp. 306-307). Along the corridor holes, breakdowns and pitstops all become opportunity and potential encounters, that generate urbanity en-route from Lagos to Abidjan.

One day at the toll booth, a loaded bus hurtling down the corridor en-route to Lagos broke down. The vehicle was a wreck and it took several days for the driver to find the right replacement piece and fix the engine. Many of the passengers, unwilling to pay for another ticket, got stuck for several days, which kept all the vendors at the toll booth in pocket for several weeks. At the *maquis* Nina sold out completely, jumping on a motorbike at midday to restock from home. The shack was so full of Nigerians streaming sitcoms on their mobile phones that Nina's sister had to shoo them out, setting up a bench for them under the mango tree so she could sweep the floor. Much like the hole, the breakdown created a moment of ephemeral urbanisation.

Dwellers along the highway have something to gain when traffic along the corridor is held-up. With cars, lorries and zémidjans at a standstill, they can safely cross the road, sell their goods, or levy a fee. In the terms of classic development economics, a good road is a road that flows, but for roadside communities there can also be a vested interest in slowing down and creating breakages in the transit. Working from the road can help identify these moments of slowing down which in turn create a certain form of urbanity. This density may be fleeting, disappearing once again as soon as the engines start up. Whereas it might not be in the best interest for road maintenance, everyday corruption along the corridor does maintain local communities, who have identified and sought to capture revenue as the trucks roll past. These are all moments of extended urbanisation, where various strategies of stalling materialise infrastructurally as a vitrine, a warehouse or a hole, and in turn sustain ex-

tended urbanisation. All these moments can be thought of as manifestations of the hitch knot, whereby local communities seek to tie passers-by into the urban fabric and keep them from moving on too quickly.

5.3. Regional Integration and Migration Management

5.3.1 Regional Integration

The empirical observations of both the materiality of this road and everyday practices along it can shed light on the current contradictions within existing political initiatives to control both territories and movement along the corridor. We move from the various elements along the road to consider the political implications of thinking infrastructurally. Here we suggest that the tactics of movement and breakages along the road create deviations from the official roadmaps and challenge current regulations.

On a regional level development projects seek to increase the fluidity of traffic along the corridor; it is at times the slowing of traffic and stagnation that creates possibilities for side-of-the road and border towns. There is a friction here between interregional intentions to increase fluidity and local tactics to make a living out of the road by using the hitch knot. There are concerted inter-governmental efforts to maintain good road surfaces and increase the fluidity of persons and goods along the corridor to boost the West African economy. Governance bodies are very aware that on a regional level, 75% of the economic activities occur along the corridor (BAD, 2017). One such body is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that promotes the free circulation of people and goods within its fifteen member countries. The maintenance and development of the road is one of the largest infrastructure projects in ECOWAS and part of a wider trend of promoting regional integration in West Africa. The World Bank, African Development Bank, German Development Agency and Japanese Development Agency are all funding improvements to accelerate the integration and growth of regional exchanges, reduce obstacles and barriers in the ports, rationalise the borders, and lower the cost of trade by reducing the cost of transport. The aim here is that goods flow quickly and unhampered out of the ports and from point to point. While in theory ECOWAS promotes the free circulation of people and goods along the corridor, it is in practice disjointed by national borders, customs officers, police and traffic checkpoints.

The Organisation of the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor was founded with US funds from the Millennium Challenge, and its original mandate was to prevent the aids epidemic from spreading via truckers and sex-workers along the corridor. This is very much in line with the Millennium Development Goals of only mentioning migration in relation to the spread of disease and epidemics (Bakewell, 2008). Since, the organisation has broadened in scope and today seeks to improve transport dynamics within the corridor and facilitate intra-regional trade and competitive industries. One such measure, is the monitoring of roadblocks along the corridor that seek to put pressure

on states to reduce the number of obstacles for those moving up and down the corridor. They also monitor the condition of the road, and the amount of time it takes truckers to cross the various borders with their goods.

There is at times tension between this attempt to produce a fluid transit space and local interests on the ground. This is exemplified at one fieldwork site along the corridor: Kraké, the coastal border post between Nigeria and Benin. The European Union has funded the construction of a large border infrastructure that would combine the customs processes for both countries, speeding up and regularising transit. However, much like another large border infrastructure in Malainville with Niger, the border post has yet to be inaugurated. Everyday transit and customs controls continue to take place in a series of shacks, along a dirt track. There is an unspoken reticence from local actors to open the new post, that would effectively bring a stop to many of the informal practices by local officers, but also local community leaders and elders that levy additional costs on those passing through. For some travellers and traders, it is also convenient to be able to bribe local officers to cross the border without paperwork, or with undeclared goods, and they have little to gain from the opening of the formalised border post. As borders, and various other obstacles along the road allow the traffic to slow down, people jump on board vehicles, and devise tactics to extract cash from the truckers, drivers, and the goods circulating. For the in-between places along the corridor, the road is a purveyor of economic opportunity, notably in the form of trade and petty vending. Therefore, counter to regional development strategies, opportunity is leveraged by road-side communities when traffic slows along the corridor.

5.3.2 Migration Management

A second contradiction presented here concerns migration: while most migration is made up of inter-regional mobility, the political focus remains on departures to Europe. The presence of strangers along the corridor is part of the everyday urbanity, creating encounters as people seek out opportunities along the various sites on the corridor. ECOWAS has sought to legislate this movement; in 1979 it passed the first protocol for free movement and residence for West African citizens, and in 2000 introduced an ECOWAS passport to facilitate the crossing of borders. The passport has had limited uptake, and so far, Benin is the only country along the corridor to have adopted it.

However, given the current preoccupation of Western aid donors with inter-continental African migration, there is a risk that the fluidity of movement is reframed as problematic to align with current regimes of containment. This in turn would overlook the key role mobility plays in enabling urban futures in West Africa. As people move up and down the corridor, multiple forms of belonging are unpacked, from ethnic and linguistic groups, to trade corporations. There is a danger that these forms of mobility are interpreted within the narrow European perspective on international migration, especially given the current securitisation and criminalisation of international African migration.

The mismatch between everyday mobility along the coast and the dominant discourse from international partners was made visible during fieldwork en route from Lagos to Cotonou. Sitting in a '*Tokpa*' mini-bus, I was hurtled down the corridor heading to the Dantokpa market. The sliding door was jammed open, primed for new passengers to scramble on and the ticket-boy, keen on maintaining capacity at 150%, leant out of the bus, shouting the destination out to potential travellers. Sitting in the back on retro-fitted wooden benches, babies got passed over, more bundles of goods squeezed in, and we squabbled over change for the tickets. Coming into Cotonou we slowed down in traffic alongside a billboard plastered with a public awareness campaign. It featured a cartoon image of a flimsy boat overloaded with black people, accompanied by the slogan "*Non à l'Emigration!*" and stamped with the European Union logo. Designed for the illiterate the image drew on tropes that have become omni-present in the media, referencing the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean. Looking out from the mini-bus window, the discrepancy between the everyday experience of mobility in West Africa and the policy messages vehicled by the European Union was salient. Here, travel is more likely to occur in a run-down minibus moving along the corridor, than in a dingy floating across the Mediterranean. During the slave-trade, black bodies left this coast in boats but today only petrol smugglers and fishermen launch their crafts out over the waves. In the Guinea Gulf the coast is largely unmonitored, it is an ordinary coast with unspectacular, un-policed mobility that rarely makes headlines, unlike the images of the North African coastline with barbed wires, coast guards and radars.

Commenting on the poster a government official quickly recognised that it addressed the wrong target group, and if someone were really set on migrating, a poster would do little to dissuade them. But, "Bon! It's the vision of the European Union, we are trying to change it a little, but remember the EU contributes a lot of aid to Benin and is one of our key technical partners." Along with the securitisation of movement and externalisation of migration management, development aid is being tied in with containment strategies, seeking to "keep people in their place" (Bakewell, 2008; Collyer, 2019). Following the 2015 migration 'crisis', official development aid delivered along the corridor is increasingly mandated to improve life opportunities in Africa to prevent migration to Europe. Up until now, migration in many of the corridor countries has not been a salient political issue, with the exception of xenophobic outbreaks, for example in the Ivory Coast. Benin, as of yet, does not have a national migration policy. However, imaginaries, discourses and projects are increasingly informed by the European fear of mobile Africans. Messages, such as those vehiculed by this public awareness campaign circulate the idea that the movement of people is problematic and overlooks the importance of mobility in shaping the localities along the corridor.

In these two instances, the politics of regional integration, territorial planning and migration management are caught up in various tensions between official representations and everyday practices of mobility and immobility along the corridor. These two levels of Lefebvre's production of space are driving in opposite lanes of the corridor, either ignoring each other as they pass or crashing when the inconsistencies no

longer compute. Identifying the contradictions among these instruments enables us to understand, in the first instance, why these politics are failing to deliver. If traffic is sped up along the road without considering the interests of road-dwelling communities, holes will be dug to slow it down. And if migration policy maintains a focus on the fraction of West Africans en- route to Europe, then it will continue to overlook the real challenges, opportunities, and vulnerabilities at play within inter-regional mobility.

It is of little surprise that the European Union, or European countries feature in these contradictions, building unused border posts or covering the corridor with ill-fitting migration campaigns. It reflects a framing of mobility issues and territorial planning that conform to tacit European understandings of how this corridor should be governed, and post-colonial tendencies to replicate various political instruments, for example the notion of competitive clusters. Taking these contradictions on board paves a path to alternative plans of action. One of these could consider the interests of road-dwelling communities, for whom the road flowing through might be their key source of income. Another could consider trans-border exchange in the territorial planning of the corridor. Lastly, one could take into account how the various scales of mobility are enabling livelihoods to be drawn together up and down the road.

5.3.3 Border Closures and a Cordon Sanitaire

Towards the end of this doctoral thesis two sudden shifts occurred along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, both creating high levels of immobility. These two shocks were the closure of the Nigerian-Beninese border in August 2019, and the Covid-19 Pandemic. So far in this chapter we have argued that various forms of immobility can sustain road-side urbanisation, producing revenue for communities dwelling along the corridor. This occurs, we have suggested, when, the traffic slows down, enabling local trade to occur. The hitch in this case functions to create new points of interaction between those moving through the corridor, and those residing along it. This is quite different from the high levels of immobility experienced in the region over the course of these two events. It is not so much that people were tied down whilst travelling, but that mobility was in and of itself drastically reduced.

The border closure with Nigeria occurred overnight on the 20th August 2020 and was implemented without warning to the neighbour states, and in clear violation of regional trade treaties within the ECOWAS region. The decision was aimed to stem the importation of smuggled and counterfeit goods into Nigeria and reinforce protectionist policies, notably in regard to rice (Duhem, 2019). The President Buhari was quoted as saying, “we have saved millions of dollars and realised that we do not need to import rice. We have achieved national food security. We have limited the importation of drugs and the proliferation of firearms that was threatening our country” (Koaci, 2020). The borders were also closed between Nigerian and Cameroun and Niger, but the application was less strict.

The impact of the border closure on the Beninese economy is brutal, especially for the port of Cotonou where 80% of imports are destined for Nigeria. But as the geographer John Igué stated in an interview on a private radio station, "the nice folks who have been reporting on this say that Nigeria contributes 20% to the national budget. That is very nice. But it just does not take into account all of the informal economy. Remember what is happening here, is that Nigeria has closed the border all the way up to the north" (Issiaka, 2019). For the Beninese border town Sèmè-Kraké, the border closure has brought a halt to the many urban livelihoods sustained through the constant flow of passengers. For example, the 250 people who earn a living exchanging currency on the border no longer have any clients. As their secretary Élie Houssougoun reported, "business has fallen, I'm counting on my savings to survive" (RFI, 2020).

As such, the migration that was driving urbanisation along the corridor has come to a standstill and the livelihoods of urban locations that were relying on tying into the circulation of trade and people is under threat. This does not mean however that the border closure has slowed done urbanisation processes completely. Instead, urban growth has relocated to within Nigeria. It is reported that the volume of cargo cleared at the two main Lagos ports has increased, with imports 50% higher in October 2019 than the previous year (Bloomberg, 2020). What we see here, is that as circulation along the corridor decreased, urbanisation was concentrated in Lagos as opposed to being distributed along the corridor. This highlights just how important the Nigerian economy is for urban livelihoods in South Benin. President Buhari and President Talon met, not in West Africa, but in Tokyo in late August 2019, whilst attending a summit to discuss border re-openings, but at the time of writing, there has been no formal reopening of the border. Whilst there were some signs of a reopening in February 2020, these were rapidly shelved in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic, for reasons that are currently not totally understood has not taken hold as dramatically in West Africa as in Europe and North America. The arrival of Covid-19 in Benin fuelled anti-foreigner sentiment, for example a Burkinabé staff member from the French lycée was accused of importing the disease. A conspiracy theory spread that western cruise ships were preparing to dock in West African ports to unload infected tourists. However as the virus was slow to spread, many went on to joke on social media, "the Chinese have sent us the *kpayo* (counterfeit) version of the virus." Whilst old colonial powers were slow to react in delivering sanitary assistance and aid, China was quick to provide support. The Chinese millionaire Jack Ma donated masks, PPE, and testing kits to the Beninese health ministry. As such, it would be interesting in the future to research how this epidemic has contributed to reinforcing Chinese stakes in Africa, and signalling limits of Western intervention in the region.

Nonetheless, despite the Chinese donations, with very limited health care infrastructure, it quickly became apparent that whilst hospitals would be unable to cope with

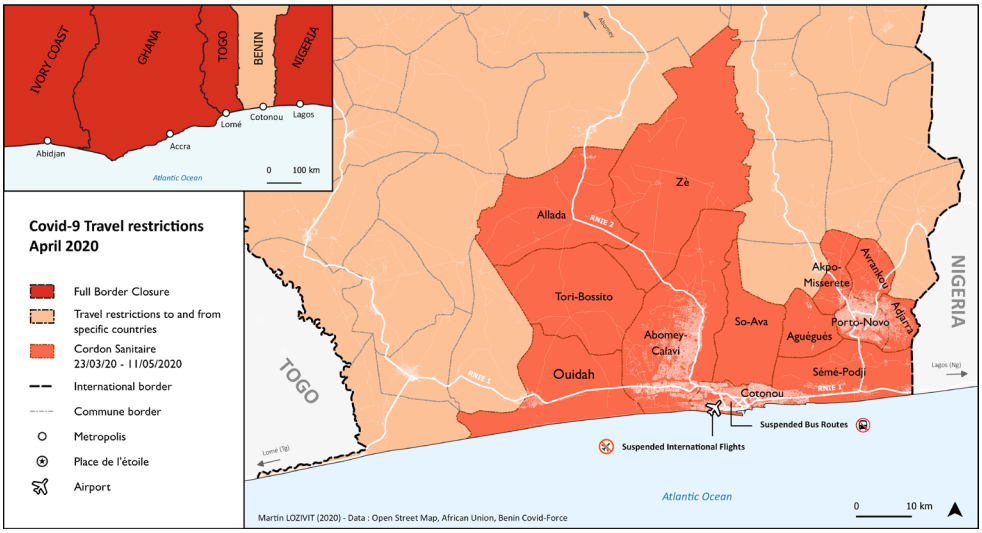
high levels of infection, it would also be unfeasible to impose a general lockdown on the population. As one Indian doctor commented, "Social distancing is a privilege. It means you live in a house large enough to practise it. Hand washing is a privilege too. It means you have access to running water. Hand sanitisers are a privilege. It means you have money to buy them. Lockdowns are a privilege. It means you can afford to be at home. Most of the ways to ward the Corona off are accessible only to the affluent."[4] The pandemic has highlighted that it is politically, economically, socially impossible to impose immobility on the West African population. As people earn their incomes daily and the economic system functions on many intermediary jobs, with tasks and errands being divided and delegated to various people, it is not possible to confine people within their households, especially given accommodation overcrowding.

Officially Benin kept its borders open, and instead imposed a cordon sanitaire around the urban agglomeration in the south east (see map. 27). The government then took the following measures: on the 18th March land border crossings were limited to the strictly necessary, screening was set up at the Cotonou airport, there was a restricted delivery of visas, with a quarantine of 14 days for arrivals from effected countries. Government trips abroad were suspended, along with trips to Mecca. On the 23rd March, a cordon sanitaire was put into place. What this cordon did in theory was to restrict urban-rural linkages - enabling urban residents to circulate within the metropolitan areas, but not travel back and forth. None the less, many urban residents returned to their home villages, concerned that economic downturn and overcrowding in the cities would endanger them. This highlights how important the attachment to the village still is for urban dwellers, seen as a place to retreat to in case of crisis in the towns and cities.

Finally, for the small West African elite, the Covid-19 pandemic was a rare occasion when they experienced the 'hitch' - that is to say, when they were tied down and their international mobility drastically reduced. The high echelons of West African leaders often hold double nationalities, and travel regularly to Europe for health checkups and care. As such, they do not experience or rely on local health systems, creating little incentive for improving them. However, as borders closed rapidly, many elite found themselves unable to travel to Europe, and suddenly reliant on a flawed health system. Whilst this is still unsubstantiated, we measured a number of private flights that departed from West African airports as the borders shutdown. One hypothesis could be that there was a sudden exodus of the very wealthy elite on private and chartered aircraft, along, most probably with repatriated western expats. It would be of interest to further investigate the consequences of this imposed immobility among the West African elite and if this has impacted their concern with local health systems. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic offers a unique opportunity to test the hypothesis of this thesis, that mobility along the corridor is driving urbanisation.

4 Dr Jagadish J Hiremath, chief medical officer at ACE Health Care in Mumbai. This doctor was cited on various media streams - the source used here is:
http://www.hifa.org/dgroups-rss/coronavirus-198-thought-jayshree-shukla-india

Here, in almost experimental conditions, mobility was seriously impeded overnight, this would be a key opportunity to investigate the impact this had on urban processes, be that real estate, markets and transport.



Map 27 Travel Restrictions in Times of Covid-9, Source: Beninese Government and African Union

5.4 Conclusion

If we turn to consider how the urban fabric is produced, it becomes apparent that the locations along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor are not cut from the same cloth evoked in Lefebvre's writing. It is not mechanised, homogenous, with standardised thread counts like the textiles once produced in the heartlands of Europe's manufacturing belts. The space along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor is instead made up of knots and threads that do not always create a smooth space or run in the same direction (Green, 2014). Instead, as people seek out an income in a largely informal economy, their mobility is at times impeded. Threads become entangled, looping, and twisting around each other rather than running from point to point (Ingold, 2010, p.20). Within contexts of urban insecurity, people tie themselves into the fabric, get bound down, cast themselves off or throw out speculative lines, in the hope that certain opportunities materialise.

This chapter has turned to consider how immobility, or more precisely tying down people on the move, is driving various forms of urbanisation along the corridor. Immobility occurs at times, simply because lives get entangled with specific localities along the corridor, but also because at times the friction needed to sustain movement vanishes. Like in the previous chapter we have sought to provide a very concrete example of how people, notably migrants, are getting tied down with the hitch knot - in this case through rental market contracts. The second section of this thesis considered how roadside communities are seeking to gain an advantage from the people

and commodities circulating through them. Here we have argued that the hitch knot serves to tie down customers to sell goods, or to disrupt flows along the corridor in order to provide services, for example in the case of the PK10 neighbourhood. Drawing on these empirical observations, this chapter has also sought to elucidate some of the contradictions between current policies of regional integration and migration management and everyday practices. It has also reflected on the 'tipping point' of immobility through a discussion of current border closures in the region.

The specific case of the West African corridor shines light on how immobility is brokered in spaces of extended urbanisation. It also offers up insights on struggles elsewhere, notably in the North in times of austerity and upcoming recession. In such contexts there is an imperative to be mobile, especially in urban settings, yet more and more people are seeing themselves tied down and faced with both physical and social immobility. This has been accentuated to previously unimaginable points with the Covid-19 pandemic.

A first point of comparison is with roadside protests in France, in the case of the *Gillets Jaunes*, whose mobilisation crossed over traditional political cleavages and was sparked following a tax on fuel. Its base was urban communities living outside of the city centres who relied on cheap car travel. As a movement it positioned itself distinctly against classic forms of protest, and occupied road infrastructures such as toll booths and roundabouts. These moments of infrastructure became key to reclaiming the urban as were the tactics employed along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor to create breakages in the road. The *Gillets Jeunes* by holding up traffic used the tactic of the hitch knot, to tie down passers-by in order to leverage their political protest.

The second point of comparison is with the rise of the gig-economy in European and American cities. Analysis of the West African corridor informs us of how, in the aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programs, people remain on the move, hustling and engaging in informal trade or driving moto-taxis in the absence of formal labour. Talk to young people in the global cities of the north, and they too will speak of their hustle, as they jump from gig to gig, clinging onto passing opportunities and driving Ubers as they struggle to craft out a decent livelihood in the urban centres. Writing on the brink of global recession, places like the West African corridor, point to common urban futures where in the absence of employment urban dwellers are caught between the need to remain mobile and the prospect of getting stuck at home.

This chapter has focused on the hitch and how it produces forms of immobility - the next knot in this series is the slipknot. Whilst the hitch is a knot that ties people down, the slipknot lets them quickly break free. Whilst the previous two chapter have described the corridor in quite broad terms, the following chapter discusses the difficulties in maintaining a hold on the urban fabric in the face of regular evictions, doing so through the lens of one specific case study.

Fig. 34 Bottlenecks in the city of Cotonou as the traffic piles up

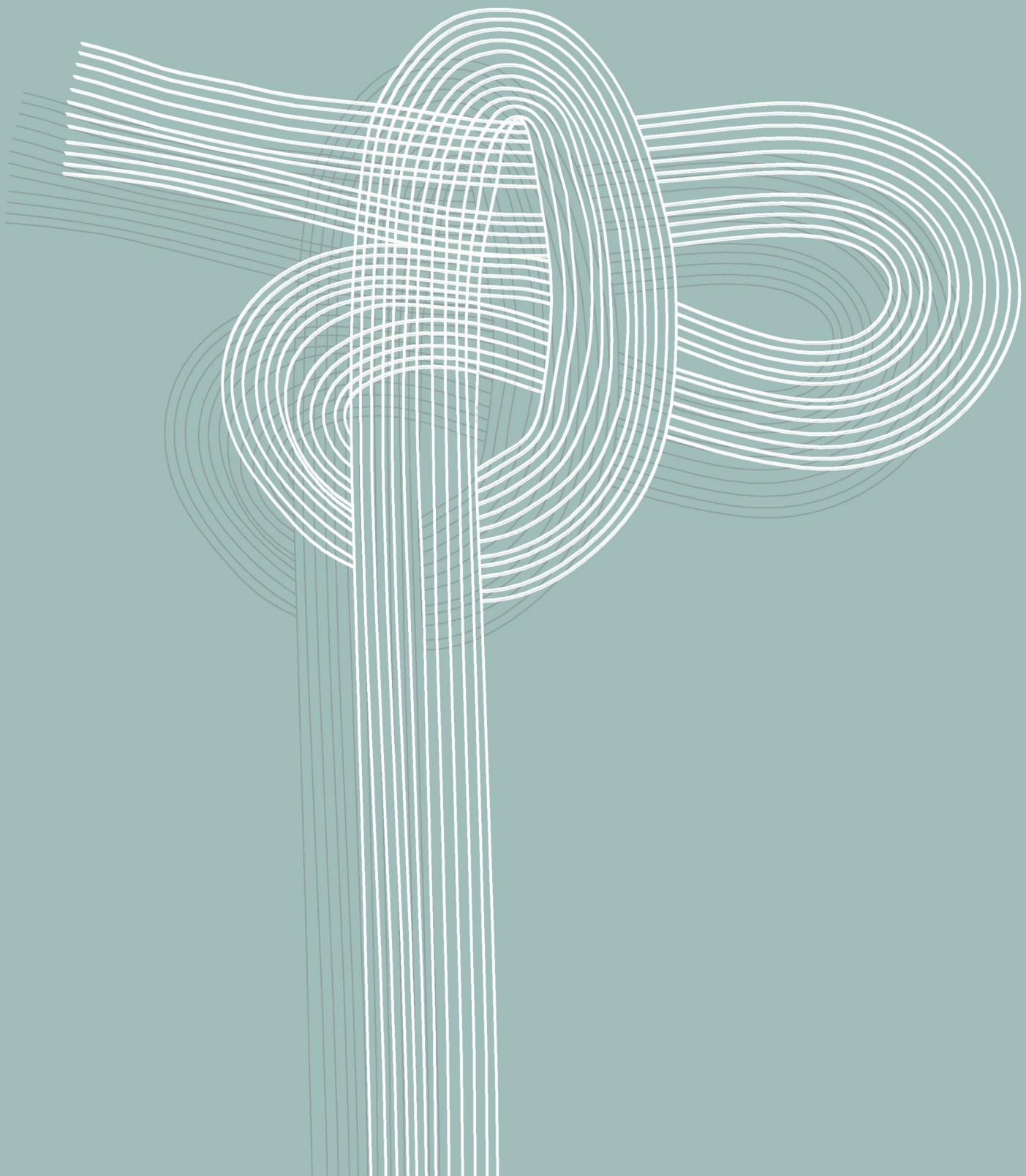
Fig. 35 A tomato stand awaits clients along the corridor

Fig. 36 Minibus travel from Lagos to Cotonou

Fig. 37 As the traffic slows down, vendors rush to sell to clients in their cars

Fig. 38 Cargo stuck in the port of Cotonou, another hitch in the city

Fig. 39 The Sémé Kraké Border between Nigeria and Benin



6. THE SLIPKNOT: CLEARANCE AND COLLAPSIBLE URBANISM, WHEN URBAN CLAIMS UNRAVEL QUICKLY

The third knot presented in this series is the slipknot. The slipknot is designed to allow the knot to undo instantly, all that is required is to pull on the end of the rope, which withdraws the loop immediately. If the hitch knot ties people down, the slip knot releases them quickly, and can be used to cast off whenever the necessity might arise. As such, this is a knot that captures the precariousness of urban life along the corridor, where for many reasons and at any given moment, people are forced to relocate. The slipknot reflects the precariousness and vulnerabilities of dwellers with weak or insufficient claims to the urban fabric. Given the uncertainties of urban life along the corridor, be it urban displacement, political crisis, economic decline, or natural disaster, it is unwise to tie down all of one's assets in the same place. In this context, being able to quickly let go of the urban fabric, and retreat to another location is a marker of resilience.

This chapter was written before we developed the idea of knots as an overarching framework from which to analyse how various forms of migration and mobility are tying into the urban fabric. There is therefore a conspicuous absence of 'knots' within the chapter. Nonetheless, in retrospect, the notion of knots enables us to clarify the urban strategies we observe in this case study and helps us differentiate other strategies that are currently being enacted along the corridor. For knots to work theoretically, they must allow existing knowledge on urbanisation processes and mobility to be structured into the discussion. We will be testing the latter throughout this chapter.

The focus here is on a specific case study and traces the implementation and aftermath of a nation-wide urban clearance project called 'The Liberation of Public Space'. The chapter considers the aftermath of these events, describing what happens when urban dwellers lose their toe-hole in the city, and are forced to move on, or back, to their places of origin. In doing so it provides a counter-narrative to the idea that urban spaces attract migrants, illustrating instead what happens when the city ejects them. The chapter analyses how following such operations, the displaced re-produce the urban fabric - resorting to umbrellas to claim a spot in the shade. It highlights how, in the face of clearance operations, people must quickly release from the urban fabric, detaching themselves and moving to new sites. The slip knot needs to be undone rapidly in order to gather one's resources and move out, as people rapidly dismantle shacks and workshops, seeking to salvage their building materials and move quickly to safer grounds.

6.1 Introduction

In January 2017, the police commissioner of Cotonou signed an order for the 'Liberation of Public Space'. A leaked document detailing the operation quickly circulated on a messaging application and on the first day a crowd of journalists, civil servants, anti-riot units and soldiers gathered in front of his office. Appearing in full military garb and sunglasses and surrounded by bodyguards in black, the police commissioner proceeded to rehearse the operation - marching his entourage around the block, ordering the demolition of various stands, workshops and shacks built on public land. By the end of the day, the city was strewn with rubble; the operation had left buildings along central avenues in ruins destroying thousands of urban livelihoods.
The 'Liberation of Public Space' was a violent but everyday event which has become a mundane occurrence for many urban dwellers. This particular eviction occurred in Benin, but in Africa, as elsewhere in the Global South, bulldozers regularly pull down trees and destroy pavements and road surfaces, ripping through facades and demolishing buildings as governments seek to eradicate poverty and transform the built environment into competitive and 'world-class' cities (Myers, 2015; Pieterse, 2008; Roy, 2003; Watson, 2014). During these operations local authorities, urban elite and foreign investors see their interests converge, as they seek to create the right conditions for competitive urban modernity and position cities as strategic arenas for neoliberal practices and policies (Brenner et al., 2010; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Such aspirations, officially implemented in the name of public interest, often result in evictions, dispossession, and everyday violence against the urban poor.

In Benin, the clearance operation was the first nation-wide policy implemented by the incoming President Talon following his election in April 2016. As one of the country's richest businessmen, with a private fortune estimated at 400 million dollars, he has implemented a profoundly neoliberal regime led by market-orientated decisions. The clearance operation sought to improve the economic viability of the country, using urban beautification to attract capital and investment. The operation, beyond seeking to lure investment, also reinforced the new presidential regime, using well-practised strategies of urban clearance to produce a structured and ordered public realm, and to impose rigor and discipline in the country by controlling the built environment.

This chapter aims to analyse this everyday event as part of a wider process of urban production as well as providing a lens to understand contemporary African city-making. West African cities are growing at unprecedented rates, yet a focus on growth can overshadow the common destruction that occurs regularly in the region. Demolition, clearance, and eviction are clear trends and manifestations of current tendencies within West African urbanisation. It is not sufficient to focus on the towers going up, without due consideration of the neighbourhoods being torn down. Furthermore, when it comes to urban migration, a single event such as the 'Liberation of Public Space' has significant consequences on mobility and migration. Clearance spurs

movement, as individuals lose their place in the city and are forced to move on or move back to their places of origin. This complicates the narrative of urban growth and attracts migrants to the Guinea Gulf underlining how urban policies can in fact move people out of, or at least around cities and towns, unsettling both places of residency and trade.

The chapter presents how the 'Liberation of Public Space' unfolded, and, in addition analyses the discourses, aspirations and reactions underpinning this operation and the concrete effects on space and dwellers in its aftermath. It is based on in-depth research conducted in Benin between 2016 and 2018, including interviews with local policy makers, development workers and practitioners from the field of urban development. It also draws on interviews with traders, clients and city dwellers who were either directly or indirectly affected by the operation. Direct observations in the run-up, implementation, and aftermath of the evictions are complemented by press and social media analysis as well as data from the 2013 national census on trading employment patterns and urban growth.

This chapter first introduces the concept of collapsible urbanism, demonstrating how the state acted to collapse the cities, undermining decentralisation and local governance whilst also weakening the urban economy. The notion of 'collapsible', also applies to the urban models currently under circulation. These models, that serve to justify evictions, are generic solutions that, much like flat-pack furniture, are collapsed, shipped and re-assembled in new contexts - leading to flimsy results and urban projects that are ill-adjusted to local context.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the evictions and demolition that occurred during the clearance operation. It argues that 'collapsible urbanism' is part of a colonial legacy that uses eviction as a means to increase spatial control. The section examines how 'collapsible urbanism' urban subjects and their bodies through various mechanisms. The bulldozer becomes a central instrument in this form of urbanism. In this context, auto-destruction becomes just as important a process as auto-construction in the making of the African city.

The third and final section of the chapter considers the aftermath of the event - and asks what happens once the dust has settled and people move on. It argues that the mechanisms of 'collapsible urbanism' are key to understanding urban mobility, and that evictions trigger mobility, migration and forced displacement. For those who decide to stay put, the flimsy umbrella provides an intermediate solution. Yet it remains a collapsible solution, one that can be quickly folded away in the face of impeding threat. As such the umbrella, as an ordinary and omnipresent object in African Cities, is both the response and product of current trends. It is the direct expression of 'collapsible urbanism' a basic survival mechanism, offering protection for those who exist precariously, leading "improvised lives" (Simone, 2019).

6.2 Things Fall Apart

6.2.1 The Collapse of Systems

As Achebe (1957) chronicles in the Nigerian novel "Things Fall Apart", the arrival of Europeans on the African continent and the introduction of Christianity led to the collapse of local values and traditions. This first section will introduce the term of collapsible urbanism and examine how it underpins the everyday production of urban space. 'Collapse' is the sudden failing of a system that falls apart, gives in, or breaks down. The term is used to describe the failing of large complicated systems such as ecosystems, states, health care systems or stock markets.

In the case of Benin, the introduction of urban development models from afar has produced a form of 'collapsible urbanism'. During the clearance operation, the urban fabric literally fell apart as roofs, front porches and shop facades buckled and were flattened by bulldozers. But the notion of 'collapsible urbanism' signifies more than just the moment of material destruction. It suggests that any part of the city, at any given moment can potentially be collapsed, that the urban fabric is under permanent threat of demolition, independently of whether or not it will actually occur. The workshops, shops, restaurants, mobile banking stalls and hairdressers that line the streets and avenues could potentially be dismantled by state forces. The built environment, no matter how sturdy, therefore remains precarious and temporary. Under regimes of 'collapsible urbanism', claims to the city are momentary and fleeting, often due to weak land rights, and authoritarian governments. However, it is important to note that the power of government here is not all encompassing, their resources and means to implement policy are limited. In this context it is considerably easier to demolish shacks than it is to build new projects. As such, large scale evictions are also a sign of authoritarian but weak government.

The section below first examines the importation of urban models that lead to evictions and demolitions. It questions whether these models are not themselves by nature collapsible, in the sense that they are folded up, repackaged and shipped from one location to another. It then turns to the event in question and examines how the state-led clearance programme produced a collapse of local government and of the urban economy.

6.2.2 Collapse of Municipal Power

In 2016, the Beninese government announced forty-five national flagship projects, around a quarter of which addressed questions of urban planning and design and all of which relied on substantial private funding (Présidence de la République du Benin, 2017). These projects were not developed in consultation with local mayors or even state ministries and were led by newly created agencies run directly under presidential mandate or by personally appointed chief executives. Most of these executives were re-pats educated in the West, and with an international professional

background. The agencies employed were responsible for implementing urban strategies based on innovative, smart, cost-effective, and sustainable models and had little interaction with the municipal powers responsible for the everyday management of Beninese cities. In the case of one project that foresaw the creation of a new smart city, 'Sémé City' near the Nigerian border, the local mayor when interviewed was not even informed nor was he aware of the project. Therefore, even in the early phases of these flagship projects, the legitimacy and power of local mayors was weakened by their lack of involvement in the conception of urban strategies that directly affected their territories.

Over the course of the operation, the ability to shape the city was confiscated from municipal bodies - foretelling the increasing concentration of powers within the executive presidential office. The operation "Liberation of Public Space" was implemented across the whole country and targeted roadsides in all the main and secondary cities in Benin. The conflict between state powers and municipal powers played out clearly in the capital Cotonou. President Talon delegated the operation to the police commissioner, the Prefect Tobula. Replicating the French political system, the prefect is the local hand of executive power responsible for maintaining, in Weberian terms, the monopoly of violence. Prefect Tobula incarnated this role, creating an aura of power around him. The young corpulent man in his military uniform led the clearance operation on the ground, surrounded by his bodyguards. He was filmed by national television scolding unruly citizens and threatening to remove their shacks and was named prominent person of the year by a national newspaper. Following this, a neologism was inspired which circulated on a messaging application - *Tobuler* - which came to signify 'to crush'.

In Cotonou, the Prefect Tobula was clearly pitted by the press and by the government against the city mayor Mayor Soglo, himself the son of a former president and political opponent. The mayor was accused of urban mismanagement and poor leadership for having let the city get out of control and for being too permissive when it came to allowing people to trade on public land. He was then accused of not backing the eviction operation, despite not having spoken out publicly against it. The mayor was ousted shortly after the operation, and replaced by an interim mayor, who was in turn imprisoned in 2019. This was also the case for several opposition mayors throughout the country who were ousted by municipal council votes of no-confidence. This differed significantly in the secondary city of Parakou, where the newly appointed mayor was politically aligned with the president and stood shoulder to shoulder with the local police commissioner as they jointly ordered bulldozers, seized from a Chinese road-building company, to demolish a local transport hub.

During the demolition programme, not only did local municipal governance lose legitimacy, they also lost their fiscal base. Most traders and vendors working on public land were paying tax to the municipal body. Many of the traders interviewed did not consider themselves informal or illegal because they had explicit permission from neighbourhood chiefs and could produce stamped paperwork from the municipality

to prove they had paid duty tax to local officials. As this Nigerian migrant described: "Everyone had set up like anarchists, but the municipality collected taxes from them. From that perspective, because the mayor collected taxes, we could say de-facto that they were formally set up there, it could be a legal case, because in terms of occupation of public space, for twenty, thirty years - they could say, well I've been in this public spot… but for thirty years the State hasn't come to evict me… It is debatable." Vendors who had often paid a year's duty-tax upfront, were astonished they were now being evicted. Following the removal of these traders during the evictions, the municipalities across the country lost face and revenue. As such, the urban development projects pursued by central government led to a collapse of municipal power. Local authorities were not involved in their planning and lost both political and fiscal power in the aftermath of the evictions.

6.2.3 Collapsible Urban Models

The clearance operation weakened local government and the urban economy, leaving the capital city without a mayor and many urban dwellers without income. The operation disrupted local forms of self-made urbanism and the busy trading streetscape so familiar in West African cities. This last section questions how urban models arrive in Benin, and how they circulate between international decision-makers and urban planners. The term 'collapsible urbanism' contains two ideas: the first concerns its implementation that leads to the collapse of the city, of its buildings, institutions, and economy. The second is that the urban projects they seek to implement are themselves collapsible, that they are conceived of in one location and then folded up, collapsed, and transported elsewhere to be implemented. Once they arrive, these projects come in parts, are difficult to assemble, and often provide flimsy and disappointing results. This tendency to reproduce projects, echoes Agier's (2015, p.142) claims that the city of tomorrow will be like a kit, that can be turned inside out, transposed, and modulable, with "moving and minimalist infrastructure". Therefore 'collapsible urbanism' as an umbrella term covers both the models that circulate, and the clearances that occur to make room for them.

When international urban projects land in West African cities, they rarely seek to adapt or co-habit with local forms of urbanism, and instead clear them to make way for more novel forms. With backing from international donors and private investors, such projects provide regular opportunities to clear strategic parts of the city of informal activities and drive traders away from the city centres, riverbanks or waterfronts. Hawkers, regarded by the elite population as impeding modernisation as well as a disincentive for investors, are regularly targeted with repressive measures and eviction operations (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2016; Gough and Yankson, 2000; Lyons and Snoxell, 2005; Morange, 2015; Spire and Choplin, 2018; Steck et al., 2013). Indeed, such was the case in anticipation of the France-Africa summit in Bamako in 2017, as well as for the construction of a new bypass in 2011 in Lomé in Togo (Spire and Gourland, 2018). This was also true for the implementation of a new bridge in Abidjan in 2018, and in Dakar prior to implementing the 'Dakar 2025' master plan.

Such projects are part of wider urban models that align with widely adopted principles of neoliberal urban management and are undertaken by governments to meet and conform to international standards of entrepreneurial urbanism (Harvey, 1989).

In 2016, the Beninese government announced forty-five national flagship projects, around a quarter of which addressed questions of urban planning and design and all of which relied on substantial private funding. President Talon called on donors and private investors, offering up advantageous public-private partnerships and strategic land deals. In addition to clearing and evicting, the Beninese government was seeking to align urban space with the innovative, smart, cost-effective, and sustainable models under circulation. To do so, the government sought to replicate fashionable urban examples for riverbank development, downtown regeneration, and smart cities, copying and pasting urban design ideas from one location to another.

Benin has adopted a developmentalist vision of the city that draws on cities such as Paris, Kigali and Singapore. Urban models from these locations are collapsed and transported to Benin in the hope of reassembling them. This vision perpetuates post-colonial entanglements between Paris and Cotonou but increasingly includes references from the African continent that have been mobilised to justify very standard and repetitive processes of urban eviction closely embedded within the colonial management of the city. These models and their circulation draw on South-South inter-referencing (McCann and Ward, 2011; Parnell and Robinson, 2012) as Benin aspires to other francophone African cities such as Abidjan, also known as the 'Pearl of Africa' and 'Little Paris', or Dakar referred to as the 'Capital of Emergence'. A civil servant overseeing the clearance operation in Cotonou boasted that "it will be like Dakar here, we will be overtaking them". Beyond francophone Africa, Kigali in Rwanda emerged as the main reference point during the operation, positioning itself as the 'Singapore of Africa' and enabling a triangulation between Singapore, Kigali and Cotonou. During the operation, the figure of the obedient, clean, and civic Rwandan citizen was referred to as an African role model that the 'uncivilized' and 'anarchic' locals should aspire to. Kigali was elevated as an example of a modern African city that had banned plastic bags, imposed communal clear-up days and obliged motorbike drivers and their passengers to wear helmets. One of the rare voices that spoke out against the clearance operation in the press argued that the government was imposing urban models that had little to do with the local context - seeking to create a 'Kigali-sur-mer' in Cotonou and a 'Geneva' around the Nokoué lake or an Atlantic version of Singapore, whilst ignoring the current urban conditions (Houessou, 2017).

Three months into his mandate, President Talon visited the Rwandan President Kagame announcing: "I am from the private sector where we are results-driven. When you observe from afar someone who is the symbol of success, you want to get to know them" (RFI, 2016). Upon his return he launched the clearance operation. Throughout his presidency Talon has sought to replicate Kagame's charismatic and authoritarian leadership, who in turn draws inspiration from the late Singaporean leader

Lee Kuan Yew. The rapid economic development of both Singapore and Rwanda are understandably attractive models for Benin, a country that faces high levels of poverty, and the circulation of the models, policies, experts and good practices reveal strong political links between the three countries. Collapsible urbanism draws on these examples and anticipates that by replicating urban projects, similar results will be achieved. However, independently of the type of project under construction, the only real guarantee of collapsible urbanism is that clearance, demolition, and eviction will occur.

6.2.4 Collapse of Urban Economy

The programme 'Liberation of Public Space' also led to the collapse of the urban economy. The economy in Benin is largely informal and relies heavily on self-employment and street trading. The destruction of a large segment of this trading infrastructure was felt acutely by the urban population. With no welfare state to soften the blow, many people lost their livelihoods overnight and were left without a source of income. The informal nature of the economy means there is little monitoring of unemployment levels and income. It is therefore difficult to measure the exact levels of employment and professional activity before and after the evictions. Nonetheless, analysis of statistics from the 2003 census reveal how central street trading is within the urban economy. The dominance of professional categories such as street traders are presented in the chart below - based on national census data from 2013 (INSAE, 2013). The chart below shows the percentage of all jobs in various trading categories in Benin, showing rates for Beninese, but also migrants from Togo, Nigeria, and Niger. Of the nineteen employment categories that accounted for at least 1% of the working population of any of these groups, thirteen were in retail (except for hairdressers- included because of the nature of their shopfronts). Moreover, the census informs us that 75% of all jobs are in the informal sector, so most of these traders will be working without a salaried contract. Vending represents over a third of all employment in Benin, and this rate rises within migrant populations to 40% of Nigerien, 66% of Togolese and 73% of Nigerian migrants. Many of these traders depend on street side shops, and will have been severely affected by the evictions, with demolitions affecting migrant economies more severely than locals. With vending representing such a significant section of the job market, the demolition of shops can have a severe ripple effect within the economy.

Through interviews and observations, it became apparent how badly the urban economy had been damaged. As small businesses collapsed, larger formal enterprises, such as restaurants, were also forced to lay off staff, because parts of their building that encroached onto public space had been demolished. Many were unable to reopen because of the cost of necessary renovations after the operation. Small independent businesses went bust or lost their trading spot. These include a middle-aged woman who had set up a congregated iron booth to sell stationary in the parking lot in front of her house. She had obtained permission from the municipality, taken out considerable loans, and paid a year's worth of duty-tax upfront. Within a month of

opening, the booth which had been diligently painted in the standard blue and white colour scheme of the municipality, was demolished. She complained bitterly about the sunken costs, taxes paid upfront, money invested in building materials for the booth and in the stock, and lost future earnings.
"It is the most vulnerable strata, those with little jobs, mechanics, traders, those who have little storage rooms, they have been hit the worst, they have lost their activity, they have no savings, and if we take away their hangar, which also served as their storage room, it is a serious social problem that needs taking into consideration as it will add to the number of unemployed people, and some of them have much to fear for the future." NGO Worker

Although the clearance operation aimed to attract foreign investment, with the reasoning that a cleaner, more orderly city would send the right message to overseas funders, what it did instead was cancel local investments residents had made to improve their urban environment, be that tiling the pavement in front of their house, installing shading and verandas, or building little shacks to trade from. The collapse of local business had a domino effect, as migrants in urban markets were unable to remit back to their families in the rural areas. In one interview with a member of the Beninese diaspora based in Nantes, it became apparent that after the clearance operation and the following economic downturn, her family members in the north of the country were no longer receiving internal remittances from relatives in Cotonou. In turn they were now hoping she would be able to contribute more to the household budget. The operation failed to attract foreign investment, but the economic downturn did put more pressure on the Beninese diaspora to send home overseas remittances.

6.3 Clearance and Demolition

6.3.1 Haussmann in the Tropics

Clearance and demolition are the most recognisable markers of 'collapsible urbanism' as evictions make way for imported urban models. This section examines these evictions as part of a wider colonial legacy that, in the name of development and progress, seek to impose spatial control over African cities. It suggests that 'collapsible urbanism' is not new and draws on urban instruments already present under Haussmann. These instruments are in turn implemented in the tropics to civilise unruly urban subjects. The section looks at how 'collapsible urbanism' becomes a means of control to impose behavioural norms on West African urban citizens, especially on female bodies and their presence in public spaces. Issues of security were used to justify evictions and the application of a slash and burn technique was applied in the city. Drawing on participant observation of the operation for the "Liberation of Public Space", the section details the run-up to the eviction and the appearance of red crosses all over the city, and analyses why, when the bulldozers did arrive, was there so little resistance nor visible opposition. It concludes by highlighting the role of auto-destruction as a key element of contemporary city-making - and argues that this has been overshadowed by celebrations of auto-construction and the self-made city in the Global South.

'Collapsible urbanism' is part of a well-established urban strategy that has been in place since the late 19th century to implement structure and discipline upon urban dwellers. Colonial urbanism in West Africa sought to subjugate, using eviction in the name of development to increase spatial control over African populations. Urban history under colonialism was characterised by repression implemented in the name of 'progress' and 'hygienist principles', as colonial powers sought to separate 'indigenous' neighbourhoods from colonial white neighbourhoods. Today, the repetitive destruction of the contemporary African city through clearance operations has become a standard and mainstream urban instrument.

The clearance operation in Benin adopted classic hygienist and neo-colonial rhetoric, replicating colonial missions to civilise urban dwellers during the French colonisation of the Kingdom of Dahomey in the years 1984-1960. As is the case in much of Francophone Africa, French urban models have heavily informed collective aspirations for urban spaces; dis-embedded from their original site, collapsed and re-assembled, these models have circulated and cultivated through transnational links, the development of urban futurity anchored in overseas sites (Roy and Ong, 2011, p.14). In Benin, as elsewhere in the region, the blueprint of Paris is dominant in the post-colonial imaginary. It continues to inform not only the urban elite, who have little patience with the informality of contemporary African urbanity, but also the city's inhabitants who use Parisian urban norms as a subconscious point of reference.

Inter-referencing to Paris was regularly used to justify the clearance operation, both

by the elite, and by those directly affected. As one trader explained, "Look at that refreshment stand, his terrace goes right to the edge of the road. To get past it you need to walk in the road. You would never see that in Paris or London." One vendor argued "people are not educated and do not know what is good for them. In the end it is unbearable and ugly. When you see Cotonou, you know straight away that it is not a developed country if you compare it with Paris and London that look like clean and liveable cities (…) if we cannot learn to live like civilised people, we are never going to get anywhere." Indeed, the dominant discourse during the clearance confirmed that poor urban dwellers were not 'civilised', but instead were characterized as being too stubborn and anarchic, with the need of being 'tamed'. It was confirmed that the latter were at risk of becoming 'internal enemies.'

6.3.2 Collapse as a Means of Control

Theories of governmentality (Crampton and Elden, 2007; Foucault,1977; Rabinow and Wright, 1982) shine light on how the clearance operation mobilised biopolitics to control the various bodies within urban spaces, policing their presence within public space, re-affirming public/private boundaries and implementing behavioural norms upon unruly subjects. Indeed, clearance and eviction were seen by the elites as a means to modernise and civilise city dwellers and their bodies, imposing new norms regarding 'good behaviour' in public spaces (Harms, 2012). The latter included not only vacating public land, but also refraining from urinating, drinking, sleeping rough or using plastic bags.

Here as elsewhere, urban policies first targeted women (Choplin and Spire, 2018; Morange and Spire, 2017). The large bodies of the '*bonnes dames*', the overweight female traders who sell in the markets and along the main roads- were easy targets for the clearance operation. Often the primary breadwinners for their families, the extra kilos the bonnes dames carried are part of their identity and are used as a marketing strategy (Toulabor, 2012). Their bodies became the source of sexist images which were circulated on social networks showing their large posteriors covered with a red cross signifying they were occupying too much public space. During the clearance operation these women were hit hard by the evictions and struggled to provide for their families in the aftermath. When interviewed, many female traders expressed concern about how they were going to be able to cover the school fees for their children.

A discourse focused on security accompanied the implementation of 'collapsible urbanism.' The clearance campaign echoed a powerful metaphor used by colonial powers, who, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2010) underline, sought to rid the cities of certain categories of people and activities designated as parasites or bad weeds. Poverty could be eliminated by clearing public land of rubbish and informal structures, which like weeds, had grown into the nooks and crannies of the city, but now needed to be cut back for the overall good of the city. This approach to urbanism was justified by inhabitants who compared it to slash and burn techniques employed in the

agricultural sector in Benin, that sought to encourage growth by burning down vegetation, whilst at the same time improving visibility for hunting outside of the harvest season.

To justify the clearance operation, the elite, but also the urban dwellers used this metaphor, arguing that bandits, petty criminals and even terrorists could hide in and among the shacks on public land. By clearing the sides of the main avenues, security forces would have improved visibility and it would be easier to intercept criminals. The state sought to reclaim visibility down the main avenues, keeping them cleared to stop people escaping and implementing a panopticon design. The clearance operation replicated surveillance techniques employed by Haussmann in Paris and transposed 'to the tropics' (Davis, 2006; Rabinow and Rose, 2003, p. 99). A Dutch development practitioner in Benin commented: "Haussmann had to do it in Paris, maybe we should see this as a necessary step."

6.3.3 Red Crosses and Advertising Campaigns

The public was informed of the clearance programme through a public awareness campaign. In implementing the clearance operation within the realm of public-good, campaigns on topics such as literacy, child protection or family planning were launched. The operation was presented as contributing to development and correcting backward vernacular practices. Initially billboards around the city announced in national colours, 'Clearance of public space!!! Liberate public space before the 31st December 2016' or 'The sustainable city determines our future.' These were followed, by a series of illustrated billboards depicting poor urban practices marked with a red cross, such as electrical generators on sidewalks or awnings in front of buildings. The accompanying slogans read: 'I love my city, I liberate public space' marking a linguistic shift from 'clearance' to 'liberation' of public space, with the latter term underlying the commendable intentions and further militarisation of the operation. The final campaign featured a cartoon image of the intended aftermath entitled 'Destination Benin.' It featured an eerily empty four-lane avenue, lined with trees, bordered by European buildings with red-tiled roofs and glass office buildings. In the image a red sports-car speeds past the black silhouettes of a few pedestrians walking along a wide pavement, a far cry from the everyday life of a West African city. This generic image is part of the artillery of collapsible urbanism, that circulates ideal types from one location to another. The image sought to educate the urban dwellers as to what a desirable city should look like - no matter how distant or ill-suited to the local context. The public awareness campaign informed the population of the upcoming operation, but never sought to explain, consult, or adapt to the local situation.

Following the public awareness campaign, the first stage of the operation was launched. In late 2016 the National Institute for Geography deployed teams around the cities who arrived unannounced and painted large red and green crosses on structures encroaching on public space several months before the operation. It remained

unclear what the green and red crosses signified, but like in forest management, the markings clearly signified the buildings be torn down. No one dared paint over or disguise the red crosses that stayed up for months keeping the upcoming operation visible and present in the minds of all. Owners, unprepared and uninformed, were publicly shamed as disobedient citizens by the red crosses. The city stood by in alert, and in anticipation of the violence that was to come. More privileged groups sought to reach out to their contacts, as one restaurant owner explained "I am trying to get hold of my friend in the ministry, but he is busy at the climate conference in Marrakech". Renowned expat bars, Lebanese businesses and high-profile buildings were all marked up, a sign that no part of the city, or category of dwellers would be left unscathed.

The operation was launched at the start of the year. Led by the Prefect Tobula, bulldozers moved in at dawn and tore down large sections of the city. The image produced was that of a military chief, regaining control of an environment that had become dangerous and foreign, raging a battle in the heart of the city. In this setting, inhabitants expressed their sense of powerlessness as they observed the scenes of destruction "You should have seen the number of policemen, military… It looked like a small army. People did not dare to move. The message was clear." The operation was carefully curated as a performance of material violence, through the destruction of buildings, but also symbolic violence through the intimidations, presence of both military forces in the street and of heavy machinery. Silent crowds gathered to observe the event, as one vendor explained: "they arrived very early and gave us five minutes to gather all our goods, and they would confiscate or destroy them if we did not have time to recuperate everything. Everyone stayed calm, but the police did not stop screaming at us, and above all they were all armed. So everyone just stayed there, watching as if it were a street spectacle." In this highly militarised context, very few voices spoke up against the clearance operation.

6.3.4 Bystanders and Auto-destruction

Urban research has often focused on mobilisation, protest, the right to the city, and the emergence of urban social movements. In the Global South, specific attention has been paid to negotiation with the state, international institutions, and local authorities through everyday individual resistance to state policies (Bayat, 2010; Benit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, 2011; Scott, 1985; Simone, 2018). Whilst these persuasive studies show how the poor seek (and manage) to contest power, we must not underestimate the difficulties people face to do so. Highly visible urban mobilisations should not obscure the fact that the majority of urban residents in the world do not protest, or that when they do, they do not succeed in making their voices heard, especially in authoritarian contexts with few urban grassroots initiatives or advocacy groups. The evictions in Benin followed a clamp-down on press freedoms and student unions and were subject to a direct ban on protests, whilst the operation itself was carefully curated as a performance of material and symbolic violence featuring heavily armed military presence. In such a context, it is hardly surprising that mobilisation was

limited. In the case of Benin, collapsible urbanism was met with bystanders, and some of those who were directly affected by the clearance operation destroyed their own buildings before the bulldozers arrived. Whilst urban scholarship has celebrated the self-made city and trends of auto construction and DIY urbanism in the Global South, it is worth noting how in the face of imminent clearance, many urban dwellers also engage in auto-destruction and dismantle their homes and businesses.

Any opposition was also made harder to organise due to the spatial distribution of the clearance program. Instead of targeting specific neighbourhoods, the operations cleared the edges of roads and avenues, running down fault lines and impacting the activities on each side. This, along with the fact that it was a nation-wide operation, made it difficult to coordinate a response based on community groups or neighbourhood alliances. People were affected to various extents depending on where their buildings were situated. For example, formal shop-owners who had built exclusively on private land welcomed the operation, because it cleared away the competition of informal vendors. On the other end of the spectrum, fully ambulant vendors had little to lose, having not invested in any built structure. Those in-between, who had started to lay additional claims to the city lost out, people who had constructed extensions, workshops, staircases, awnings, or tile patios in their building that encroached onto public land. There were also traders, service providers, and restauranteurs who had built entire structures on public land, for example on the edge of car-parks, on waste-land - in the nondescript and unclaimed interstices of the city.

The absence of uprising does not mean that people were completely depoliticised and passive, but onlookers' resignation can be read as announcing broader politicising movements (Choplin and Ciavolella, 2017). There was a significant gap between what people as individual dwellers experienced, as they condemned the violence, spoke of their suffering and sense of injustice, and how the same people reacted as citizens who applauded the operation and saw it as a necessity for progress and urban beautification. This dual position created schizophrenic discourses and reactions. It explains the apparent resignation of those concerned who showed little resistance and participated in preemptively dismantling their buildings - chiselling off tiles, dismantling sections of their building, and trying to at least save the building materials. It sheds light on why public opinion framed those affected as uncivilized and illegal squatters rather than victims of state violence, a position also internalised by those directly affected. One woman, as her building was being bulldozed, turned to the police commissioner's team thanking them for their hard work and explaining she would have struggled to demolish it without their help. Even if people were deeply affected and suffered, the destruction and temporary pain caused were seen to be for the good of the people, a throwback to the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s and echoing the rhetoric mobilised to justify financial cuts, deregulation and privatisation along with their disastrous social effects (Ferguson, 2006). And when critiques of the operation were vocalised, they argued that the overarching idea was good, but that the implementation was too stringent. For example, in the case of the

head of a local association for development who argued that, "The clearance operation, from the point of view of the content, was no problem. It was just a question of form. The content is that, yes it needed to be done. The form, was how do you make them move on, what strategy was needed to make them accept to leave of their own accord." Moreover, they regretted that the social component and follow-up was absent from the project, implying that this was an optional add-on feature, rather than an integral part of the conception of urban projects.

6.4 Moving On

6.4.1 Spatial Disruption and Disorientation

Inspired by Gramscian theory, postcolonial urban studies have shown the "urban subalterns" (Bayat, 2010) have the potential to resist dominant groups and can develop unexpected strategies to survive in under-resourced cities of the South. The general lack of mobilisation and protests surrounding the eviction does not mean that dwellers remained passive in the aftermath. The last section focused on the event itself, this next section now turns to consider what happened after the evictions as people moved on, both figuratively and literally. Among devastation and ruination, in the urban aftermath, possibilities emerged back out of the ground (Gordillo, 2014; Navaro-Yashin, 2009; Tsing, 2017).

The impact of collapsible urbanism is felt just as strongly once the dust settles, and the rubble is slowly cleared away. Within the thinking of neoliberal urban planning, there is the idea that after destruction the city bounces back, stronger, and re-invigorated. Indeed, following Harvey's theories on accumulation of capital (2001), evictions and clearances create new 'spatial fixes' and high expectations. This is described by Harvey (1989) as the Phoenix Effect - the idea that a new city will rise from the ruins and ashes of urban destruction, opening new frontiers for accumulation, as urban re-generation feeds into capitalism. In Benin however, this did not occur, but demolitions did create new urban geographies, as they modified both the everyday spaces, and the representations of the city. Situations of forced displacement were produced as people moved to new spots within the city or packed up and left town. Finally, those who stayed put turned to sheltering under flimsy umbrellas as a first step to survival amongst the debris.

Beyond the immediate destruction of buildings, clearance operations disrupt the geographies of cities, removing landmarks and unsettling the functional means that allow inhabitants to navigate the urban setting. In countries without a fixed cadastre or addressing system, everyday landmarks are key to navigating the city. Informal shacks, well-renowned food shacks, or street tailors are part of the shared representations of the street scape. As one local expert in economic development explained, the informal vendors and traders provide a mode of orientation in the city.

"Absolutely everything is up in the air because of these urbanisation measures. We are not used to using street numbers, road names or plots (numbers). We are just not used to it. There are some boulevard names that are used, but for the rest of the time, it is the names of restaurants, food shacks, a shop or a pharmacy that helps identify a house. This means that a large part of these references is being got rid of with the demolitions. I would say for example, when you arrive at the Sacré Coeur Church, walk 300 metres, you will find a vulcanizer and then go down that street. Now if there is no vulcanizer at that spot, you will have to find another reference point." Development Practitioner Cotonou

After the clearance operation, the inhabitants, traders and clients lost their shared geography of the city. The demolition also affected larger businesses that had become synonymous with a certain district, and urban institutions in and of themselves. This was the case for example of a famous cake shop called *J'Adore*; one client reminisced, "the patisserie was a reference point in the area, it had was quite controversial when it was built because the building occupied part of the roundabout. But it had become a marker, even when we indicate a public institution nearby, we indicated it in relation to J'Adore."

Patrons could no longer find their preferred traders, unsettling patron-client relationships that had been built up over years. Traders used various techniques to help their client-base find them again - some scribbled new addresses in chalk on the rubble, others set up signs, one informal petrol-vendor printed a large advertisement on a plastic tarpaulin indicating that he was now down the road. The operation disrupted the geography of trade and the traders' spatial strategies as well as the synergies created between various traders and the complementary services on offer.
"There are those [traders] who have to leave their spot behind completely. Those who must leave completely are much more penalised because people knew that they traded there. I am used to eating somewhere where I take my car to be cleaned. The lady who runs the place left when the time came, and had to leave everything, she went to set up elsewhere. She called me to tell me where her new spot was, but I have never been to eat there. I used to eat there because I would make the most of the time and eat there while my car was being washed. So, for her, anyway, I am a lost client, maybe she will find others in her new spot." NGO worker
The operation disrupted the geography of trade and the traders' spatial strategies. In the aftermath, local business collapsed, as their buildings, networks, and clientele caved in. For those unable to re-establish a foothold in the city, the evictions led to forced displacement and departures.

6.4.2 Displacement and Departures

Rather than revolt and uprising, the eviction triggered a series of movements within the city and throughout the country as those affected by the operation moved on and at times retreated to their villages or distant peripheries. In the aftermath of the evictions, President Talon's electoral slogan 'New Departure' took on a whole new meaning as people picked up their belongings to move on, while their right to reside and trade in the city curtailed.

As the operation progressed to streets off the main avenues, an entire cluster of embroidery workshops was destroyed in a central neighbourhood. A parking attendant in the street commented "it's the new departure" quoting President Talon's electoral slogan in a new light. The campaign focused on moving forward, leaving past errors behind, and launching a new development trajectory in Benin. On the ground, the new departure translated as a series of forced displacements as people's homes and livelihoods were destroyed.

This resonated with the prominent discourse that young Africans should remain in the villages, rather than migrating to the city, a position reinforced by development projects that sought to limit internal migration and "keep them in their place" (Bakewell, 2008). Indeed, a common political discourse during this period was that young men were needed more in the rural sector, and instead of scrapping a living together in the city as motorbike drivers or traders these *'bras valides*' - 'strong-armed men' should return to the fields to help their families work the land. One interview with a Beninese NGO worker was typical of the shared opinion that those working in the informal sector in town would be better off moving back to the countryside. The evictions were interpreted as a tool to encourage these departures:

"Now, if you follow the thread, the idea behind all of this, is to bring people back to the countryside, to get them to work in the rural activities, that they tend to their fields. (…) The government is working on a rural reform package so people go back to the countryside. The State is indirectly cracking down on all of these small jobs (…) Many people left the countryside without any qualifications to come to town to do these small jobs. But you can do these little jobs anywhere, even in the countryside. I think that the demolitions are to canalise these people towards new activities that are going to be created by rural reforms, and the development of new sectors like tourism…. The real problem is that the *bras valides* are in Cotonou. They left the village to work as zémidjan (motobike taxi drivers) in Cotonou. But if an investor arrives in Benin, and decides to develop the agricultural sector, there will be no *bras valides,* because they are all in Cotonou working in the transport sector. They have left the old people, and those who do not know how to drive motorbikes in the village to do the agriculture. There is no discipline. Today, it is true, we cannot just tell them to leave (the city), but we can create certain conditions that encourage them to leave the towns and go back to the villages to work the land." Beninese *NGO Worker*

The operation triggered a series of movements within the city and throughout the country, as those effected by the operation moved on. Whilst they might not have served to boost the agricultural sector, they did indeed push people out of the city centres. Those who were able to draw on trans-local networks sold off their stock at discounted rates and moved on. Many service-providers had to sack their employees because of re-construction costs, a drop in clientele, or simply because their business had been reduced to rubble. Self-employed people went bankrupt, defaulting on loans they had taken out to finance their businesses, and, unable to pay rent, amenities and school fees in the city, they retreated back to the village or distant periphery. Collapsible urbanism, by breaking down the network of economic relationships, makes it harder for those living in already precarious urban settings to continue trading.

6.4.3 A Spot in the Shade

Following the operation, many urban dwellers tried to stay put, and cling onto their spot, devising new tactics to continue trading. The inhabitants, shocked by the vio-

lence of the acts and the immediate effects of impoverishment, struggled to heal the city. With no insurance policies, relocation programmes or official aid packages, people picked up the pieces, devising solutions and response mechanisms. Inhabitants, after having contributed to demolishing their own buildings, now cleared the rubble, trying to recover and resell materials. Those who had the capital, rebuilt facades, plastered over cracks and sought to fix the cityscape and "suture" the city (De Boeck and Baloji, 2016).

In the following weeks, umbrellas appeared all over the city as a "tactic" to survive (De Certeau, 2011). Traders remained primed to fold the umbrella away in a matter of seconds, having learnt that in the face of arbitrary power, they might, at any moment have to gather up their goods, abandon a trading spot and move on. The umbrella is collapsible, just like the demolished shops and businesses, - and provides protection from the sun. Locally the sun is associated with malaria, the term for malaria in Fon is '*hwesivózɔ̃n*' (*un = Hwè Illness = Azɔn),* so getting into the shade is a priority to protect traders' health as well as their goods. As one interviewee explained, "People ill with malaria enjoy going out in the sun, we do not normally sunbathe and try and get a tan, so if someone exposes themselves to the sun, and appreciates the heat, it is usually a sign that they are suffering from malaria." On the street, in the tropical heat, neither the goods nor the traders would last long, as one fabric trader whose material was being bleached in the sunlight put it: 'our goods are rotting like tomatoes'.

Local workshops producing umbrellas out of scrap metal and second-hand bed sheets saw their trade grow as traders rushed to find cheap solutions to replace their structures. This was nonetheless far from ideal as costly solutions still had to be found to store goods overnight, adding extra tasks of loading and transportation to the traders' strenuous days. The government obliged the urban poor to submit to their clearance policy, to yield and bend over, and every evening as they folded up their umbrellas, this submission was re-enacted as traders left their spot for the night. In Benin, and more widely in West Africa, the umbrella has come to symbolise the aftermath of the evictions.

As seen in Hong Kong, it is not the first time that the umbrella becomes the symbol of passive resistance for an occupy movement. In Benin, there may have been no protests, but in the aftermath of the evictions, the umbrella was much more than a symbol, it was a concrete and rapid solution in response to urban destruction that remained in the streets as a permanent feature of the new cityscape of post-eviction. The quiet encroachment of umbrellas crept back into the public land where salons, workshops and eateries had once stood. But it is also a marker of ordinary, everyday resistance and a tenacious effort to remain put. It seems the traders are respecting the new presidential order and, since the eviction, have not rebuilt sturdy structures on public land or along the roadsides, respecting the imaginary red line that the government has drawn in the sand. At the same time, traders are challenging authorities on a daily basis as they put up their umbrellas, fan out their canopies, and remind

passers-by, authorities and politicians that they are still present and open for business. Indeed, one development practitioner was clearly aggravated by the cheek of the traders who were "cheating" and breaking the rules with their umbrellas.

"People are starting to cheat again. That is why we need ongoing measures. If you leave it up to the people, they will start coming back again. They will use the umbrellas to stay put exactly where we told them it was forbidden. They are not able to make a shelter with conventional materials, so they cheat to be able to stay nearby. (…) With their parasols, they can quickly take them down and leave if the police decide to come back and evict them. They have not gone home, they are still on the side of the streets, using their parasols instead of sturdy materials." Development Practitioner

In this daily movement of opening and closing, dwellers are both obedient and uncivil, enemies and victims within the government's ambitious plans to develop the city. To borrow a term from Bayat (2000), this 'quiet encroachment' of umbrellas meets two needs: it provides basic shelter from the sun and defies the government by showing that the urban poor are still standing and claiming a right to the city. The 'umbrella city' is characterised by the power struggle between the authorities and urban dwellers, the latter who have been flattened through eviction and clearance but who are reacting in turn by fanning out their umbrellas all over the city. However flimsy and temporary the umbrella, it has emerged as the most durable solution in the context of collapsible urbanism.

6.5 Conclusion

Through the analysis of demolitions and evictions as instruments of 'collapsible urbanism', this chapter delivers some insights into urban production in West African cities. The collapsible city described here, does not stand alone on the margins of formal urbanisation processes, but rather, it is part of current neoliberal urban management in West Africa. It accompanies state strategies to upgrade the urban environment. Collapsible urbanism emerges when urban projects are repackaged and relocated from one urban setting to another without due consideration for local context. And as collapsible urbanism is implemented, all things fall apart, from local political powers, in this case the municipalities, to the economic fabric that holds towns together. The case of Benin is in no way exceptional, it is a standard application of well-established urban strategies that emerged through colonial rule and sought to control urban residents rather than empower them. However, what was remarkable in Benin was the extent of resignation from the local population and the lack of mobilisation, as people not only complied with the state violence, but participated in it by destroying their own livelihoods. Collapsible urbanism is here understood not just as the moment of destruction, but also as the aftermath of the new geographies drawn up in the rubble, and the forced displacement that occurs in terms

of both intra and inter-urban mobility. For those who try to stay put, the modest umbrella is the material manifestation of collapsible urbanism, as people look for a spot in the shade.

Eviction processes, and their accompanying non-violent reactions, are not only shaping cities in the Global South but also in the North (Desmond, 2016). They produce two-tier cities, creating tension as the ideals of the desirable city rub up against the reality of the city, which, in the aftermath of evictions, is left in rubble. The dissonance this creates between what is desired and the actual consequences of this desire, in turn produce high levels of frustration from both the elite and city dwellers. In Benin, the government implemented the 'Liberation of Public Space' as it simultaneously sought to roll out new urban projects branded as 'smart' and 'innovative'. Within this strategy, the clearance programme served a role: to demonstrate that government was taking concrete action and creating urban change. In demolishing buildings, the government built up anticipation, pointing towards potential futures and the implementation of urban models from abroad. However, as can be observed in this case, these urban models often fail when governments seek to implement them in a local context, being too ambitious, too costly, or ill-suited to the needs of urban populations. In this context, informal urban dwellings are collapsible, but so too are the urban projects that intend to replace them, they are flimsy and transfer poorly from paper into reality. Project delays and cancellations put urban development on standby, as urban dwellers await a promised future, growing increasingly frustrated.

The evictions in 2016 stemmed from a poor diagnosis of local modes of urbanity, and the everyday experiences of trading that make up the fabric of Beninese cities. As one NGO worker reflected, evictions had been prescribed for a problem that had yet to be framed:

"We do not know how and why they got to this point. Right now, is street trading really creating problems for us? Reforms, they should come after a diagnosis. And the solution is the therapy that you choose to get better, to correct the difficulties that have been diagnosed. If you come to my house, you are not just going to say, take aspirin. Non, you will not just tell me to take aspirin. First, you need to ask the question, why do you want to take aspirin? C'est ça hein? Ou bien?" NGO worker

Collapsible urbanism is the direct result of the circulation of urban models and the inter-referencing of urban conditions elsewhere in Africa and Asia. As urban models continue to circulate within the Global South, a call for a closer reading of what happens when they collapse, and the tactics employed by the urban poor to claim a spot in the city is required. In the Beninese context, the network of civil society is spread very thinly with few urban grassroots initiatives or advocacy groups such as Slum Dwellers International. And whilst there is a significant donor community present, the majority of development practitioners interviewed saw the operation as being in the long-term interests of the inhabitants and the city, presenting the clearance as a painful but necessary step in terms of development. Despite many aid pro-

grammes seeking to promote decentralisation, encourage economic activity and small business, there appeared to be a lack of awareness that the operation would destroy the economic fabric of informal vendors. The rural bias of many aid initiatives in Benin could have prevented the development of critical discussion around urban growth and informality. The position of international donors was reinforced by Benin's status as a 'donor darling', a country that transitioned from colonialism to a Marxist dictatorship and then to a democratic system without violence or conflict, receiving much official development aid. The operation, in that sense was not interpreted as a sign of the authoritarian nature of President Patrice Talon, nor an affront on citizen rights. The operation was welcomed by Beninese elites, who saw it as concrete action rather than just words, and an opportunity to formalise and modernise the city.

In Benin, urban areas collapsed in the face of a neoliberal authoritarian government with no regard for the everyday livelihoods upholding the informal urban economy and producing forced displacement. Several years into President Talon's mandate, democracy and other civil liberties now also appear to be on the brink of collapsing. In 2019, a new electoral code prevented opposition parties from participating in legislative elections. This time around, city dwellers did protest, setting up barricades and attacking prestigious shops whilst the state responded by firing into the crowd. Marchers attacked the offices of RwandAir in Cotonou, a sign of growing frustration with the attempted 'rwandisation' of Benin. The government condemned protesters' 'barbaric acts of vandalism' as they damaged, looted, or burnt private property. The fact that tensions flared up so quickly in a country renowned for its peaceful democracy is of little surprise, given the display of violence and force during the clearance operation and the resulting pauperisation of the urban poor. The parallelism between the two events - evictions in 2017 and uprisings in 2019- was not necessarily drawn by the media, politicians and dwellers. However, it was obvious as some messages circulating on a messaging application reminded us: "President Talon, at the beginning of 2017, our mothers, sisters and brothers were broken. Many people died following this operation. Not a single calming message came from you to reassure the victims". And, whilst in the aftermath, victims found temporary shade under the umbrellas, the state failed to support them, and traded in bulldozers for riot forces.

Our analysis of collapsible urbanism shines a light on how residents' and traders' ties to urban spaces can be abruptly interrupted. In this context, the slipknot allows us to think about how dwellers react to swiftly-changing environments. The slipknot functions here to describe the reaction of vendors who quickly detach from the urban fabric, moving elsewhere to salvage their livelihoods. However, it also enables us to analyse the strategies of other migrant communities who are able to relocate in times of trouble. The slip knot is mastered by diasporic trading communities, notably the Lebanese community who are well-established in West Africa and shift rapidly from one location to another in times of crisis. This was the case in Benin following the devaluation of the Nigerian currency, the naira, in 2016, which led business leaders to abandon extensive plots of land where they had been trading second hand cars for

the Nigerian market, and relocate to other sectors. The slipknot is of course also used by non-migrant populations, for example, in the case of rising water levels along the coast, that have seen whole residential areas eroded, or regular floods in the precarious neighbourhoods built along the marshlands. This knot is a response to the inherent vulnerabilities of urban livelihoods and strategy that respond to sudden vulnerabilities within the urban fabric and an absence of entrenched rights to the city. Finally, the slipknot is most successful as a strategy when combined with our final knot, the double loop. The double loop, as we will now turn to discuss, is a knot that reflects the multi-sited attachments of migrants in Benin and the manner in which translocal households remain grounded in various localities. This, as we have seen throughout the chapter, is a precious resource in times of crisis.

Fig. 40 An informal cigarette trader tallies up her stock for the day

Fig. 41 Trading of fish and peppers - the vast majority of jobs are informal

Fig. 42 Before and after demolition of a telephone and money transfer service

Fig. 43 Press drawing by Claudio LenFan 29.12.16 entitled : "The Evictions will still happen on the 2nd Jan 2017". "I'm tired" says the woman, faced with municiapl taxes and eviction, "Demolish, and let's be done with it"

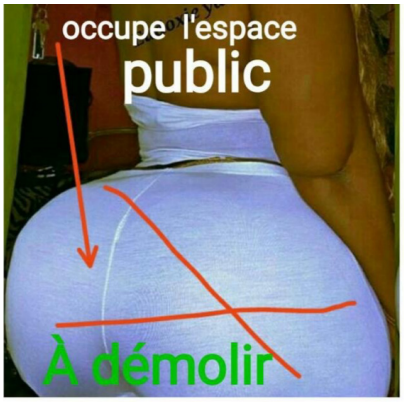


Fig. 44 The Mayor (left) and Prefect of Parakou (right) orchestrate the demolition of a transport hub

Fig. 45 The Prefect Tobula leads the first day of the clearance operation

Fig. 46 Image circulating on WhatsApp during the demolition: "Occupy Public Space - To Demolish"

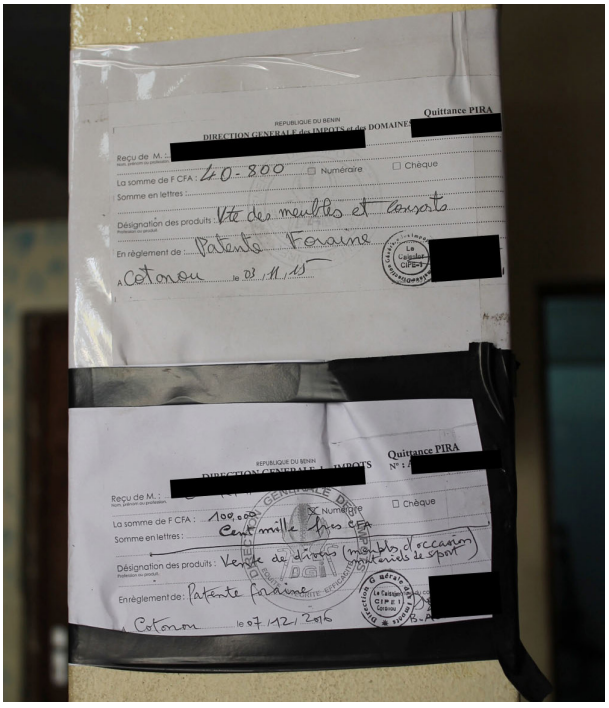


Fig. 47 The central avenue of the Missébo market - over 100 traders were occupying this space before clearance Fig. 49 Demolition of a telephone and money transfer service, after demolition

Fig. 48 An evicted trader's proof of payment of municipal taxes to occupy public space

Fig. 49 Public Announcement "Clearing of the Public Domain!! Liberate Public Spaces before the 31st December 2016 / The sustainable city determines our future", Cotonou

Fig. 50 Public Announcement "Destination Benin"

Fig. 51 Public Announcement outside the city of Dassa, advertising future changes post-clearance in the city of Cotonou: "The sustainable future city determines our future"

Fig. 52 Public Announcement in Cotonou: "I love my city, I liberate public space"

Fig. 53 "Fear in the City" - leading title of national newspaper "Matin Libre", 26th Jan 2017

Fig. 54 "81% Approve, only 38% Satisfied" leading title of national newspaper "Matin Libre", 16th Feb 2017

Fig. 55 A restaurant is 'closed for building work' after the facade was demolished

Fig. 56 An informal sandwich vendor advertises her new spot in the adjacent street

Fig. 57 A small shop informs clients of the location of its new premises

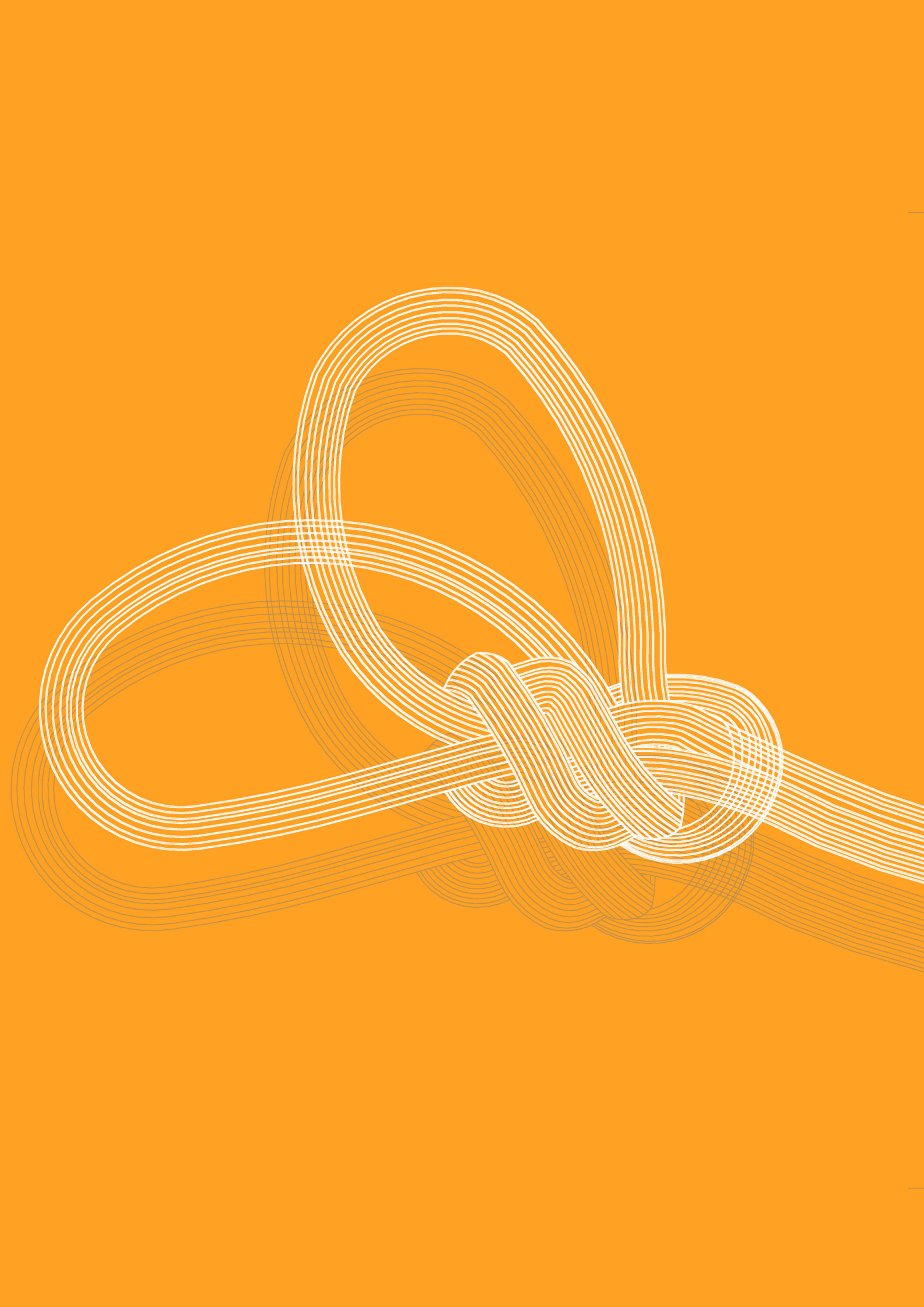
Fig. 58 All that is left of the shop 'Aunt Aurore' after demolition

Fig. 59 Evited vendors write their contact details on the wall in the hope of finding their clients

Fig. 60 A fabric retailer informs clients of his new vending spot

Fig. 61 Materials from an evicted shack are salvaged and driven away in a hired taxi in Cotonou

Fig. 62 An evicted tradesman sets up shop on the pavement with his tools



7. THE DOUBLE LOOP: ATTACHING TO MULTIPLE SETTINGS, TRANS-LOCAL LINKAGES AND MIGRANT HOUSING

The fourth and final knot to be presented in this thesis is the double loop. This knot is made by slipping one loop over the other loop, and then pulling lines in opposite directions to lock the loops together. As such the knot allows its user to attach to two places at the same time, enabling a double attachment. In this chapter we use this knot to consider how migrants along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor do exactly this, maintain multi-sited attachments, cultivating ties to several locations simultaneously. In doing so, we seek to shed light on trans-local urbanization strategies, seeking to understand how migrants transform the urban landscapes of the places they move to, and the places they come from.

The final knot, the double loop, draws in discussion held during a workshop in June 2017 at the ETHZ entitled 'The Role of Place Attachment in the contexts of migration and urbanization', which brought together place attachment researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. This led to a joint paper exploring migration and place attachment (Di Masso & al. 2019). A shorter version of this chapter has been accepted for publication under the title "No One Is a Prophet at Home: Mobility and Senses of Place in West Africa" in the book Changing Senses of Place: Navigating Global Challenges, edited by Christopher M. Raymond, Lynne Manzo, Timo von Wirth, and Andrés Di Masso and published by Cambridge University Press.

Following the introduction, this chapter is structured around two sections, first looking at how one loop enables migrants to attach to their new urban settings, and then considering how the other loop is used to keep a hold on their place of origin. In both sections, we consider this question through the prism of housing - looking at living conditions in their place of residence, and projects to construct housing in their place of origin. However each section draws upon a different set of data, and it is important to note that we are not comparing the same households in our discussion of the first loop and the second loop.

In the first loop we build our analysis primarily on national census data, looking at households that have moved into urban areas within the previous five years. We ask how migrant lives in urban areas compare to natives, are they successful in gaining access to decent housing, education or employment? Are they at a disadvantage from having weaker or more recent ties to their place of residence? We study the second loop, that is to say the attachment of people to their place of origin through the prism of remittance housing, drawing on interviews and observations, in order to understand the motivations and difficulties in maintaining ties to the urban fabric back home.

7.1 Translocal Urban Strategies

7.1.1 'No One is a Prophet at Home'

In South Benin mobility plays a central role in navigating everyday life in the city. The local expression 'no one is a prophet at home' suggests that home is a place one must leave in order to succeed. As one young Beninese man explained, 'when you stay in your own milieu, no one respects you, but when you leave and come back, the children run to welcome you!'. Such departures and returns reflect the translocal strategies at play in West Africa, as people move in and out of urban areas, seeking to leverage the benefits of mobility to improve their livelihoods. The knot in question, the double loop, enables us to think about how migrants tie into multiple settings, and by doing so, how they are contributing to urbanisation both in their place of origin and in their place of destination.

The chapter takes the expression "No One is a Prophet at Home" as a starting point from which to explore how migrants tie into the urban fabric in the places they move to, but also, in the spirit of the double loop, how they maintain an attachment to the places they come from. Upon arrival in new areas, how do urban migrants set up a home in the city? How do those who have left maintain links with their place of origin despite prolonged absence? And what role does house building play in securing these bonds? The chapter engages with the research field of place attachment and theories of people-place bonds. Drawing on examples from South Benin, it examines how processes of migration and urbanisation are transforming people-place bonds and reshaping 'senses of place' as people move into urban areas on an unprecedented scale.

This last chapter also pays particular attention to how this is unfolding in a post-colonial context, and the contribution post-colonial approaches can make to the field of place research. Since the colonial period, migration and urbanisation in West Africa have been positioned as fundamentally problematic. For Mbembe and Nuttall (2004, p. 353) the "African city itself has been perceived as an emblem of irresolvable conflict" and is considered to be "populated by misunderstood and deviant, and therefore dangerous forces and masses" (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2005, p. xxviii). Migration to the city is often blamed for causing urban poverty, with governments trying to reduce or control rural-urban migration to the detriment of both migrants and other low-income residents (Tacoli, Satterthwaite and Gordon, 2015). In addition, there is an increasing preoccupation with West African migration to Europe or North America (Bakewell and Jónsson, 2013; Collyer, 2019; Schmitz, 2008) whereas in fact approximately 70% of sub-Saharan African international migration remains within the African Union (Landau and Kihato, 2018).

As people move into, through and out of urban areas, African cities undergo significant changes, and place identity and place attachments are reconfigured for both host populations and new arrivals. Given the geographies of urban growth and mo-

bility patterns, academic conceptualisations of sense of place are set to be challenged as they seek to account for people-place bonds in new and rapidly shifting environments. Whilst sense of place has been called out as an abstract, somewhat fuzzy concept (Barker, 1979; Shamai, 1991; Shamai and Ilatov, 2005) it can be concisely defined as way in which people experience and feel about a particular setting (Najafi and Shariff, 2011) or in short "the lens through which people experience and make meaning of their experiences in and with place" (Adams, 2013, p. 47). As such, sense of place shares many features with place identity, place dependence and place attachment (Low and Altman, 1992) and can be considered an umbrella concept for other place-related concepts. It is often presented as a multi-dimensional concept, a psychosocial structure that represents and organises "beliefs, emotions and behavioural commitments" (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001, p. 233) or describes people's relationships with places, expressed through emotions, biographies, imagination, stories, and personal experiences (Basso, 1996).

The chapter first turns to address the necessary widening of its theoretical lens in order to incorporate post-colonial perspectives in place attachment research. Then, the chapter will draw on national census data, ethnographic observations and interviews conducted in Benin to question how sense of place plays out in migrants' host and home localities. It suggests that when they arrive in town, new migrant households do better than host populations. It then turns to look at how migrants maintain a sense of place back home, illustrating the multiple senses of place that often accompany translocal lives. Finally, it presents the implications such findings hold for practitioners and how they can inform transformations in the governance of mobility and urbanisation.

7.1.2 An Extroverted Sense of Place

In the early nineties, the Marxist geographer Massey (1991) penned an essay entitled 'A Global Sense of Place' on the progressive potential of sense of place in an increasingly mobile world. It argued that claiming a sense of place is all too often associated with reactionary opposition to newcomers in a context of rising nationalism and antagonism to outsiders. It asks if in an era of globalisation, it is not possible instead for a sense of place to be "progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking?" (Massey, 1991, p. 24). In line with this call, this chapter conceptualises sense of place beyond the scale and boundaries of the place itself. It adopts an extroverted sense of place and questions a focus on sedentary roots to consider the various links and networks established between home and host localities. It does so by mobilising the fourth knot of this series, the loop knot, which allows a double attachment. An extroverted sense of place we suggest is one that not only recognises place bonds beyond the current place of residence, but also one that problematises sense of place from outside the habitual sites of place research.

Place research provides a clear understanding of place meaning as a social construction that enables subjective and fluid notions of home across cultures (Manzo, 2005).

Place attachment literature also recognises the highly influential role of cultural place meaning (Scannell and Gifford, 2010) along with social, ethnic or religious backgrounds (Canter, 1977; Shamai and Ilatov, 2005b). However, at the risk of becoming inward-looking, the theorisation and application of sense of place has drawn principally on European and North American experiences. Rarely does this field of investigation venture outside the confines of such case-studies. Studies on cultural variation have focused on minority groups residing in the West, for example Hispanics and African-Americans in the United States (Johnson, 1988; Taylor, 1989; Virden and Walker, 1999) or indigenous groups such as the Maori in New Zealand (Hay, 2009) or the Apache in the United States (Basso, 1996). However, place research has struggled to address sense of place in post-colonial contexts.

Post-colonial here refers both to places that have been colonised, along with the spatial and temporal aftermath of that colonisation, and to a school of thought that seeks to challenge the dominance of western knowledge production. As such, 'post-colonialism demands more globally informed, rather than western-centric knowledge' and an increased sensitivity to how place is experienced in other cultures (McEwan, 2019, p. 31). It is as Roy (2011, p. 308) highlights, both an "urban condition" and a "critical, reconstructive methodology". Urban and migration studies have both employed post-colonial thought to de-colonise scholarship and move beyond western mindsets. As a result, much of what is currently known about urban mobility in West Africa has been informed by post-colonial thought.

A post-colonial perspective is all the more relevant in place research, given how senses of place have been globally disrupted by imperial history. With concern to urbanisation and migration, colonial instruments reshaped senses of place, be it by imposing new languages, drawing up borders, controlling population flows, re-ordering land, restricting citizenship, re-naming localities, imposing political structures or planning new cities. As Myers (2011, p. 30) notes, colonialism led to a "normative reordering of African spatiality", the legacy of which remains still present sixty years after national liberations as postcolonial powers continue to replicate colonial tactics. As such, sense of place in West Africa continues to be shaped by colonialism and cannot be untangled from this history. A post-colonial perspective is necessary in this context but is also valid for the study of place in the West, as colonialism modified senses of place in both the heart of the empire as well as the colonial outposts. Furthermore, such a perspective helps to avoid adopting western perspectives on place as universal and helps make explicit certain underlying biases.

The sedentary bias is one such marker of the colonial enterprise and its attempt to shape people-place bonds. This bias was acted upon by colonial administrators who sought to keep Africans "in their place" (Bakewell, 2008) and control personal and household mobility. A post-colonial approach requires moving beyond a research agenda that has focused on positive bonds to stable places, expressed through rootedness in residence and community and privileging connections to the place of residence (Manzo, 2003; 2005). Place attachment research has traditionally valued long

and deep experience and involvement in the place, focussing on emotional connection based on belonging, attachment and commitment (Shamai, 1991b), length of residency (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 2011), experiences among various generations (Pred, 1986), family activities, memories, continuity, and familiarity (Lalli, 1992). Such preoccupations reflect western epistemologies of place bonds and do little to account for the translocal lives experienced elsewhere.

The focus on attachment to a specific place has overlooked the multiple senses of place often cultivated by migrants and people on the move (Gustafson, 2001). However, much of the work on sense of place and migration has been concerned with migrants' sense of place in their country of destination (Shamai, 1991b; Shamai and Ilatov, 2005b). It has in turn remained blind to ongoing relationships with other places, be it for example places of origin, or transit or even a diasporic homeland. Narrowing the prism of sense of place to arrival locations overlooks the trans-local nature of many migrant lives that cultivate relationships in multiple places simultaneously. To do so requires re-situating the current place of residence as one of the potential loci of attachment, but not necessarily the principle or most significant (Manzo, 2003). There is a need as Di Masso et al. (2019) have suggested, to move away from "sedentaristic" assumptions to consider the various ways in which fixities and flows are articulated. This implies more relational and multi-sited senses of place that are spread across various moorings.

A relational sense of place we suggest is also one that considers how kinship ties us into various places. Kinship itself is heavily associated with knotting, for in the "field of human relationships, knotting is symptomatic of the binding of lives in relations of kinship and affinity" (Ingold, 2015, p.20). Kinship and its ensuing marriages and migrations link previously distinct places. For whilst affiliation and descent bind people, they also bind places, pulling threads from various locations together. Yet, as Simone (forthcoming) emphasises, the conundrum is how to allow these various unanticipated strands to inform our understanding of urbanisation. For relationships, he writes, are always moving across other relationships, "turning themselves inside out and outside in, opening up possibilities and closing other ones down (….) at the same time, relations are twisting each other into particular kinds of knots". As lives are stretched along wider urban territories, trans-local families diversify their locations, entangling themselves into multiple settings to spread risk and seek out opportunity. The double loop reflects this strategy and encourages us to consider a more extroverted sense of place, that can take into account the multiple anchorages cultivated by households in West Africa.

7.2 First Loop: Tying into the Place of Destination

7.2.1 At Home in the City? Urban Migrants in West Africa

The following section starts with one of the loops, the loop that attaches migrants to their new urban settings. This knot might not be as strong as the natives who have resided for greater periods of time in urban settings. How does this change develop outcomes for migrants? What follows will present empirical findings on migrant households residing in urban settings in South Benin. It looks first at their place of residence in the arrival cities. It demonstrates that in urban settings, migrant households are more successful at accessing urban resources. In comparison to households with longer residency they perform better on a wide range of development indicators. This questions how useful strong people-place bonds are for navigating the vulnerabilities of contemporary African cities and suggests that a strong attachment to the current place of residence does not appear to produce development benefits.

Our findings in Benin align with studies in the region over the last forty years that demonstrate that locals fare no better than new arrivals in the city (Beauchemin and Bocquier, 2003). What this highlights in turn, is that urban integration problems concern everyone, both migrants and natives - questioning the assumption that 'the native-born are "well adjusted" to their place of residence since they have lived there all of their lives' (Goldscheider, 1983 cited in Beauchemin and Bocquier, 2003, p.6). In the post-colonial city, even those with deep roots and strong place bonds struggle to access urban amenities. The status of urban migrants in West Africa lies therefore in stark contrast to the status of migrants in Europe, who, arriving from less affluent countries, are often employed in low-skilled jobs and reside in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

In Benin, these findings were confirmed, drawing partly on data collected during the 2013 census, that surveyed over ten million people.[1] The census provides nationality, place of birth, previous place of residence and current place of residence as well as various individual household indicators of development and well-being. A government paper reporting the census data found similar findings, suggesting that more mobile persons had better livelihoods (INSAE, 2016). With limited access to a draft version of this paper, we noted several inconsistencies in how the calculations had been made and the categories defined. For example, the paper failed to distinguish between urban and rural settings. Given that most migrants move to urban settings, this made it tricky to establish whether migrants were doing better simply because they were living in more prosperous areas. Working with Federico Rogai, we compiled more detailed descriptive statistics, tracking various indicators for people on the move, distinguishing urban and rural settings. Our findings show that even compared to their urban peers, more recent arrivals to urban areas were still better off.

1 Census RGPH4 - conducted in 2003 by the Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (INSAE) under the Ministry of Development, Prospective and Economic Analysis

We defined recent arrivals as all households where the head of household had moved into the commune within the last five years. These households had overall better employment opportunities, higher levels of education, improved housing conditions and owned a wider range of material goods.[2]

We learnt that even compared to their urban peers, more recent arrivals to urban areas were better off. These households had overall better employment opportunities, higher levels of education, improved housing conditions and owned a wider range of material goods. For example, the heads of migrant households in urban areas reported higher monthly incomes than natives (82 USD vs. 68 USD). The chart below presents a clear and long-standing development indicator, literacy. It compares national levels in urban and rural settings to levels of literacy in urban migrant and rural migrant populations. Among the many literacy variables in the census, it presents the three most significant: literate in French, literate in another national language or illiterate.

Literacy rates of migrants and non migrants in urban and rural settings, in percentages

	Average in Urban Settings	Average for Urban Migrants	Average in Rural Settings	Average Rural Migrants
Litterate in French	37.65	46.86	23.44	35.99
Literate in a national language and French	10.93	14.17	6.61	9.18
Cannot read and write	28.24	21.19	44.67	34.08

Chart 6 Source: INSAE 2013

As can be observed, urban dwellers are significantly more literate than rural dwellers. However, the most literate are new migrants in urban settings, almost half of whom are literate in French, and who also have the highest literacy rates in another national language. Mobility is nonetheless an indicator of literacy in rural settings - with new arrivals in rural locations more than ten points ahead of their sedentary neighbours when it comes to French literacy. These figures illustrate, how when compounded, migration and urban residency provide the most improved development indicators.

However, as descriptive statistics, they do not provide insights into the causality behind them. We wonder if the latter takes place because the most educated people migrate into towns making their literacy rates appear to be higher? What we do know however, is that once they have arrived in urban areas, the children of new arrivals are more likely to attend school at all levels and their advantage over immobile peers increases with the level of schooling, cumulating in new urban arrivals being twice as likely to enter tertiary education than sedentary urban dwellers (16% and 8% respectively). However, even if new arrivals are better off, this should not

2 For a further discussion of methodological choices in the analysis of this data, please refer to the thesis introduction,

overshadow the fact that levels of illiteracy remain high across all groups, with almost a third of urban dwellers unable to read and write.

Our next entry point was employment. We focused on employment categories in urban areas which present a similar story. The census asked individuals between 15 and 64 to report their employment status, however the threshold of being employed was fixed very low: having performed an activity for at least one week over the last three months. Of those in employment, new arrivals to the city are less likely to work in the informal sector and have more chances of formal employment, notably in the private sector. However, in both categories the levels of formal employment are incredibly low, with 47% of urban employment in the informal sector - this drops to 42% for urban migrants but remains nonetheless high.

Employment categories for urban migrants in comparison to national urban levels in percentages.

	National Urban %	Migrant Urban %
Informal sector	46.79	41.73
Formally Employed Public Sector	1.76	3.62
Formally Employed Private Sector	6.11	10.47
Without Employment	61.08	55.82

Chart 7 Source: INSAE 2013

These trends are also reflected in the quality of housing of new arrivals (see chart 8). Urban migrant households are overrepresented in the rental market, with 62% of households renting instead of owning property. Indeed, the Fon term for rental is made up of the term to hire, (or as pronounced in Nigeria "hiya") "*xɔ-xɛya-tɔ*" as rentals were first associated with Nigerian migrants. But despite living in rented accommodation, these houses are sturdier, and migrants are more likely to have brick walls and cement floors than sedentary households, which are likely to be built on earth constructions. This could be because the houses they live in are more recent, given that the arrival of migrants fuels the construction of real estate. On top of living in sturdier homes, new arrivals also report having improved access to urban infrastructure and modern amenities. This includes for example, individual access to the electricity and water grid, the use of a flush toilet, private waste disposal, and cooking with gas. New arrivals also reported owning a higher number of consumer goods, this was the case for all consumer goods, including televisions, generators, motorbikes, mattresses, fridges, or computers. The only two exceptions were interestingly, modes of transportation: bicycles and pirogues, that were more present in immobile households.

Our reading of the census statistics confirms initial government findings that migrants, and especially urban migrants, are outperforming locals on a series of development indicators. Not only do they perform better in fields of education and schooling, they also inhabit sturdier houses which are more likely to be on the grid. Their overall consumption of material goods, from video recorders to electric fans suggest that these households are more affluent than the norm and are leveraging the

positive externalities of the towns and cities to their best advantage. This is one of the significant ways in which migration is driving urbanisation. Our findings counter common understandings of migrants as a disadvantaged category that need assistance to integrate into the urban setting. Here it is quite the opposite, and despite not having strong people-place bonds, new arrivals are quite proficient at setting up a home in the city. If we think of this in terms of the double loop, then it would appear that in the case of Benin, the loop that ties into the place of arrival is quite successful in latching onto the urban fabric. The question however remains, why are migrants doing better than locals?

Housing conditions for urban migrants in comparison to national levels.

	National Urban Rates (%)	Migrant Urban Rates (%)
Property Status		
Individualy Owned Property	28	16
Family Owned Property	41	13
Rented Accomodation	25	62
Building Materials		
Brick Walls	60	80
Earth Walls	28	10
Cement Floor	75	83
Earth Floor	19	7
Urban Ressources		
Individual Access to Electicity Grid	54	66
Individual Acces to Water Grid	20	27
Flush Toilet	9	15
Gas Cooking	8	16
Private Waste Disposal	23	27

Chart 8 Source: INSAE 2013

7.2.2 Locals at the Margins - Three Explanatory Factors

Having established that new arrivals are well-established in urban areas, the questions that follows is why? The descriptive statistics of the national census struggle to provide us with insights into the causality at play. And even when disaggregating the rural and urban settings the query remains, are urban migrants successful because the strongest and most dynamic individuals migrate, or is it because arriving in the urban areas they are more motivated to establish a foothold? Looking at the question from the other side, one could ask - why is it that locals, despite have strong bonds to urban settings are not doing better? What is holding them back? Drawing on qualitative fieldwork, three possible explanations are presented below.

The first factor draws on the colonial organisation of spatial power in the coastal cities of Benin. In this post-colonial setting, claims of being an autochthon does not

align with wealth or power and being a local does not appear to put anyone at a great advantage. Colonialism disrupted local sense of place, for example shifting the urban hierarchy with the foundation of the economic capital Cotonou. A recent exhibition on the capital, entitled "Cotonou, history of a city without a history" (Ciavolella & Choplin, 2018) questioned the notions of heritage and memory in a place that seems to have forgotten its past - a place where anyone might belong. As one migration expert in Cotonou commented: "who in fact is from Cotonou? None of us are - we are all from somewhere else". Power in these cities was not attributed to local natives but instead was withheld by French administrators. The colonial city sought to control and undermine local authority, be it political or spiritual. For example, in Porto Novo, French authorities turned the sacred forest of the *Mito Migan,* the local dignitary in charge of judiciary affairs, into a botanical garden (Juhé-Beaulaton, 2009). Whilst in Cotonou, the Cathedral Notre-Dame de Miséricorde was built on the site of the Yovogan, the chief of the slaves' village in Cotonou (Ciavolella & Choplin, 2018, p.27). In Cotonou, urban planning separated the city in two, with the European town along the coast and the indigenous quarters in the North-West both areas separated by the train tracks (idem., p.109). The communities in Cotonou who are regarded as the most established are known as the *xwala-toffinu* and are located in the North of the city. Their presence dates back to the early eighteenth century and they were originally a floating village on the Lake Nokoué (idem., p.28). However, following a conflict with the colonial powers over tax collection, their settlement was demolished in 1910 by the French, and they were forced to settle on the shoreline to facilitate taxation. Today this community remains very much on the margins and is one of the most precarious neighbourhoods in the capital.

A second factor points to the importance of trans-local trading networks in the urban economy. These networks remain important providers of trading opportunities in the urban marketplace, especially because of the low levels of private sector initiatives in Benin that have in turn increased reliance on foreign traders and their skills. For example, from 1967 onwards, Igbos, fleeing the Biafra War in Nigeria, settled in and around Porto Novo and Cotonou, and today there are an estimated 50 000 Nigerian refugees living in Benin, (Quintard, 2015). The displaced population rapidly formed business networks, providing goods to Nigeria, whose economy was weakened by the war. By the time of the petrol crisis in 1973, this diaspora was well established into structured associations and trade networks and able to develop a series of commercial activities orientated towards the booming Nigerian economy (Igué and Soule, 1992, p.53). Cotonou had become an annex for the Lagos economy, hosting in 1988 104 Igbo companies, with more than 200 associates. (Gbaguidi, 1990). Many Igbo remain present today, trading second-hand clothes and car pieces. The Lebanese form another strong network and first settled in Benin between 1889 and 1935, in the coastal towns of Ouidah and Porto Novo. Prominent families such as the Nahoum, Karam, Manaise and Abdallahs were considered by colonial forces to be more organised and efficient than locals and took over trading in the palm oil business when French taxes were too high for locals to compete (Igué and Soule, 1992). After the first world war, only a small presence remained, and in 1947-1948, only two Leba-

nese businesses were in the listings of colonial businesses (Quintard, 2015). This grew in the late twentieth century, with - 63 businesses in Cotonou in 1990 belonging to Lebanese traders, and 160 businesses belonging to "Arab" business leaders (Gbaguidi, 1990). Today they remain omnipresent in the second-hand car trading business (Beuving, 2004; Rosenfeld, 2013) as well as several key sectors, for example construction materials, electronic household goods, water bottling, and hospitality. With much of the vitality of the urban economy in the hands of diasporic trade networks, locals find themselves excluded from the opportunities available within these sectors.

The third aspect is that rootedness and strong bonds to an urban locality do not shield households from the numerous uncertainties of everyday life in African cities. This is the case in even the most prosperous urban area of Benin, situated along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, where much of the national wealth, ports, markets, and political power is concentrated. It has better infrastructure and public services than the northern hinterlands that are impacted by climate change, soil degradation and growing security threats in the Sahel. Life in the towns and cities along the corridor is unpredictable. The rising coastline and seasonal floods (Sossou, 2019), state-sponsored demolition (see chapter six), and the absence of formal cadastres (Lavigne Delville & Houngbedjji, 2019) all pose threats to private property. In these post-colonial cities, inequality is high, and employment, especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis of the 1980s, remains largely informal (INSAE, 2018). Both new arrivals and permanent, established residents are exposed to the fluctuations and volatility of everyday urban life in West Africa. In this context, households that can cultivate people-place bonds in multiple settings spread risks across various locations rather that tying assets down in one location, making mobile households more resilient in the face of shocks and crisis.

These three factors therefore could account for why urban locals remain at the margins, whilst newcomers' livelihoods improve: the undermining of locals in colonial urban planning, the importance of diasporic trading networks, and the volatility of everyday life. This first section has sought to present how migrants tie themselves into the city, looking at one half of the double loop. Their relative success at developing urban livelihoods, whilst positive for migrant populations, raises much more problematic questions for locals who appear to be less well off. The second section of this chapter now turns to consider the other half of the double loop. It looks at how migrants maintain ties to their place of origin, notably through the lens of remittance housing.

7.3 Second Loop: Keeping a hold on one's place of origin

7.3.1 Building a Sense of Place: Remittance Housing

Migrant households in South Benin draw on translocal networks to navigate the city. While they live in better houses than sedentary residents, they do not necessarily consider themselves at home. As people on the move navigate the West African city, the home remains a key factor of sense of place. However, that home is not necessarily in town or in the current place of residence - but can be a home back in the family village, or another third place. Using the image of the double loop, whilst one loop ties into their place of residence, another loop connects them to their place of origin. Here we consider diaspora housing as one example of the how migration drives urbanisation.

Relationships and networks are maintained with these places through a series of practices and beliefs, participating in ceremonies, returning to the village for retirement, sending remittances and responding to social obligations. In Benin, this attachment to one's place of origin has been described through the prism of funerals (Norret, 2010) with urban dwellers often choosing to be buried in their ancestral villages. In this section however, we consider the impact this double loop has on urbanisation processes, focusing on remittance houses. As in many other places in the world, migrants in West Africa build houses back home, using bricks and mortar in their absence to lay claims to their place of origin. In doing so they cultivate an extroverted sense of place, one that draws on locations outside of their current place of residence and builds on links and networks to maintain bonds with places elsewhere.

Driving out of the international airport in Cotonou, a real-estate agent's advertisement targets overseas Beninese, offering his services to acquire plots of land and to build houses. Urban migration transforms the places people move to, but equally the places they come from, as migrants seek to maintain a bond to their place of origin, investing in home ownership and launching trans-national construction projects. As such, the way migrants transform the built environment is multi-sited as the circulation of wealth, ideas, and aspirations materialise as remittance homes. Migrants' houses literally build a sense of place, and the analysis of these homes can contribute to grounding place attachment theory in concrete urban practices. This aligns in turn with Choplin's call to consider what "concretely makes up the city" by focusing on its material foundations (2019, p.3). Remittances houses also draw attention to how urbanisation processes are underpinned, not through the presence of migrants, but from their absence, as they toil elsewhere and send money back to build. As migrants seek to maintain claims to belonging, they take part in the transnational urbanisation process, through which the city is not built by its inhabitants, or by new arrivals, but by those who have departed.

Migration is producing new urban forms as people invest in housing in their places of origin. This takes the form of remittance landscapes in Mexico (Lopez, 2015) or

neoliberal suburbs in the Philippines (Ortega, 2016) as migrants seek to build a home from home (Boccagni, 2017). Here migrants' multi-sited sense of place contributes to urbanisation occurring not just in bounded settings where they reside, but through translocal, multi-sited practices. The most tangible manifestation of this extroverted sense of place in West Africa is the production of remittance housing (Lessault, Beauchemin and Sakho, 2011; Melly, 2016; Pellow, 2008; Tall, 2009) that has transformed the 'urban landscape of the countryside as much as that of metropolitan areas' (Gaibazzi, 2015, p. 33).

Interviewing a leader of the Nigerien community in Cotonou, he explained how his compatriots who had migrated to cities in South Benin were reinvesting in housing back home in the Sahel:

"When you leave your home to come in exodus to a country, the first thing you do is to build back home; you make a roof for yourself at home. All of the Nigeriens who are here, their first preoccupation is to build. It is the diaspora that is building the country - they even build housing estates. Ah oui! At Niamey, all along the market it is built by the diaspora from Lomé. The first preoccupation of the immigrant is to build back home. It can only be beneficial for him. He can house his family, or if the family already has a roof, he can rent it out. Et voila!"[3]

By building remittance housing, Nigeriens in Benin continue to tie into, and produce the urban fabric in their place of origin, and in doing so, activate and maintain various networks. This resonates strongly with Massey's (1991) call for a sense of place that links places to places beyond them as a distinct combination of wider and more social relations. Remittance housing in this sense upholds networks of relations, for example housing one's wider family, and maintaining a claim to belonging, not in the arrival city, but in one's place of origin. This enables a novel way of problematising space-time assumptions and shifts the lens from focusing on migrants' integration in the arrival city, to how they navigate sense of place, despite absence in their place of origin.

The double loop is a serious financial investment for West African migrants. A survey of 1508 households conducted in Benin in 2012 concluded that 23% of remittances were intended for construction projects.[4] Construction projects heavily outweigh the share of remittances used for education (6%) or health costs (4%) and are only second to everyday consumption (30%). Nationally, households in the departments along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor the Mono, Littoral and Ouémé, receive a higher level of remittances as a share of their household spending. This suggests that significant remittances are being sent into this territory and is likely to be in part intended for construction projects.

3 Nigerien Community Leader, Cotonou Benin, 8th Nov 2017

4 Survey on Migrant Transfers conducted in 2012 by the Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (INSAE) under the Ministry of Development, Prospective and Economic Analysis

Share of remittances sent and received in each Beninese department in 2013

Departments	Amount received from migrants	Amount sent to migrants	Share of remittance in household spending
	Annual Average	Total Annual	
Alibori	100 000	18 791 234	0
Atacora	576 417	298 965 902	0,2
Atlantique	1 468 416	5 595 831 830	1,8
Borgou	1 918 216	5 623 655 278	2,3
Collines	338 835	708 517 308	0,4
Couffo	535 494	1 514 064 247	1,2
Donga	240 463	149 820 395	0,2
Littoral	1 791 443	15 045 344 950	4,1
Mono	1 147 153	5 747 144 966	5,9
Ouémé	1 395 306	15 970 577 462	5,1
Plateau	941 801	3 056 039 822	2,7
Zou	757 276	2 297 887 391	1,3
Total	1 269 749	56 026 640 784	2,5

Chart 9 Source INSAE, EMICoV, 2015.

Building remittance housing is often a project drawn out over many years, and an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. People build incrementally and migrants' money is sent back to purchase a plot and slowly accumulate materials. As such, it is a process that activates people-place bonds over extended time periods.

As one Beninese migrant who left to work in Nigeria explained:
"I would buy construction materials, tiles, doors and other stuff. I knew I would be coming back after ten or fifteen years - which did not happen, I lost my job earlier. But I had saved some money for the house that I built - my objective was to do a big apartment but I did not have enough, so to not waste what I had, I built three rooms and a big sitting room (…) My brothers helped me out, I told them I wanted to accomplish myself and become free"[5]

A sojourn abroad enabled this man to build a house back home and "become free." Over the course of our interviews it became apparent that in Beninese culture, building one's own home to '*avoir son chez*', to have one's own place, is a central marker of personal achievement and well-being, and often people will indicate their various levels of personal accomplishment depending on if they have 'acquired plots', 'already built' or have 'entered their home.' To move into one's own home, '*intégrer la maison*' or in Fon 'é *jɛ xwé gbè*', is the highest level of achievement, signifying that the construction project has been completed and the inside furnished. This differs to home ownership; it is not just owning a house that is important - but building it oneself. It is considered odd to purchase a house built by another family. To have built, is to be recognised as an independent adult, and a common put-down to boisterous young men is to ask them if they have built their house yet - '*bá xwe ā?*'

5 Return migrant from Nigeria, Porto Novo Benin, 12th March 2017

Numerous persons interviewed insisted that those who continue to rent accommodation without investing in real estate are judged as irresponsible, frivolous members of society who will leave nothing to their progenitor. As one university professor put it, "to not have a house, that means that your life was useless, that you have wasted your money on women and alcohol, that you will never proudly be able to say that you live in your own house". Indeed, a local Fon expression, '*xɔxɛyatɔ nɔ tùn flowa ā*' - meaning "he who rents never plants flowers" is interpreted as meaning "he who rents is never really free". It is worth noting that the term for flowers here, *(flowa)* mimics Nigerian English, as Nigerians were the first to open the rental market in Benin. In Benin, the construction site is a place where belonging and recognition is produced, enabling heads of households to be recognised as established members of society.

Building a house responds to multiple needs beyond simply providing a place of residence. The latter is a marker of achievement and provides social recognition. Purchasing plots of land enables buyers to speculate on rising land prices in the region, for example the price of urban land in the commune of Abomey Calavi rose ten-fold between 2000 and 2010 (Glele, 2015, p.416). For other residents, many of whom are unbanked and mistrust local financial institutions, it also provides a means to lock in capital, away from the claims of needy kin and social obligations. Finally, in the absence of social welfare, constructing property back home often serves as a security net and retirement plan. However, the double loop is a knot that is difficult to tie, and the process of building a house is strenuous, and full of pitfalls, requiring sturdy resolution. Such remittance houses are clear and tangible manifestations of the translocal bonds migrants cultivate with places they no longer inhabit, or places they intend to one day inhabit. As such they demonstrate how the double loop functions and the consequences this has on the built environment.

7.3.2 Commissioning Housing - Build me a Villa

Migration fuels the circulation of architectural aspirations as the Beninese diaspora comes home with new ideas about how to build. Indeed, much of the architectural heritage in Benin is a result from return migration. After the abolition of slavery, and the revolts in Salvador de Bahia in 1835, freed slaves from the Americas, in their majority from Brazil, returned to the Guinea Gulf. These Afro-Brazilian returnees named the 'Agudas' brought with them construction techniques acquired from the Americas. Having built the homes of plantation owners, they reproduced the techniques when building their own villas, using bricks instead of banco, introducing arches and pillars to the facades, elaborate carpentry, and shutters to the windows, tympana and verandas (Triaca, 1997, p.101). This community were behind the construction of many villas in Porto Novo and Ouidah, for example the Villa Adjavon, now a contemporary art museum run by the Fondation Zinsou. Even thirty years ago Sinou and Oloudé (1988) described the difficult attempts to preserve this architecture from ruin both to improve living conditions in the city centre, but also as a site of memory and transmission. Efforts to do so have been very much in vain, and the urban traces of this migration flow continue to slow fall into ruins.

Whereas the Agudas of Brazil arrived from a similar tropical climate, today, the most affluent diaspora is located in the colder settings of Canada, the US or France. There is often a dissonance between the diaspora's representations of the houses they wish to build back home, and what it is feasible to build in the local context and climate. François is a well-established architect, working out of his modernist concrete atelier in the neighbourhood of Cadjèhoun in Cotonou. He participated in the school of post-colonial architecture following independence and was proud to demonstrate the natural light and ventilation in his workshop when the power cut out during our interview. Nowadays, many of his contracts are from the Beninese diaspora overseas, who, having acquired a plot of land in Cotonou, or the rapidly expanding town of Abomey Calavi, want to build a house back home. Riffling through the papers on his desk, he explained how they often drew inspiration from the places they reside in, sending him photos of large villas from the prosperous neighbourhoods of arrival cities, or cutting out images from the local press. He struggles to explain to his clients that he cannot reproduce a North American villa in a Beninese setting.

"I cannot forbid them from having an idea of the kind of home they want based on a model they have seen, but I have to tell them that there is no need to send me the images, that it is just going to complicate things for me. That in our profession, plagiarism is forbidden. If she (the client) had just given me indications, I could have made a proposal. But with this kind of image under my eyes, whatever I do she will not be satisfied. It is always the same thing, someone sees something in Canada or in the real estate magazines and sends it to me over the internet, so I can build the same thing here."

For Melly (2016), such remittance houses are projects seeking to call attention to "transnational privilege and experiences, particularly through architectural design and imported materials" (p. 86). François underlined that these villas are often instruments for social differentiation "the most important thing for the client is to show that he is different", for example by building an American-style villa even if that meant that all the rooms had to be air conditioned to make it bearable in the tropical sun. In this context, the double loop requires building property as a signifier of the migrant's success. In building a house back home they transfer architectural models and aspire to convey the aesthetics of achievement. Nonetheless, such houses are ill-adapted to the local climate and produce stark contrasts in the neighbourhoods where they are built, often standing between modest one-story constructions organised around a traditional courtyard.

Not wanting to paint all the diaspora with the same brush, François also described a category of overseas returnees that are willing to experiment with alternative materials, such as stabilised earth. Such methods, despite being ecological and cheaper, are often overlooked by local residents who associate natural materials with the under-developed countryside and prefer to build in concrete breeze blocks (Choplin, 2019). These clients are more likely to have returned to Benin to live full-time, and as François put it "takes you step by step rather than imposing (a project). This pro-

cess is much better than someone just sending you photos". Having spent time abroad, such returnees are now more willing to invest in local building techniques. This is also the case for West African architects who, having practised abroad, are more willing to promote local building cultures, this is the case for the celebrated Burkinabese architect François Kéré, but also for other returnees currently practising in Cotonou.

This was also apparent during the visit of a new residential neighbourhood, Cité Bethel, developed by the private company GCITT on what used to be a palm plantation (Glele, 2015). Built with compressed earth bricks, it was initially foreseen as low-income housing for locals. However, as the site manager explained, they had been more successful selling the villas to the diaspora – who, in addition to having the necessary income to invest, were more willing to live in buildings made of earth. Furthermore, a single earth road led to the site that was situated in the far outskirts of Abomey Calavi making it difficult to reach the urban job market, schools, or amenities. However, for members of the diaspora this was less of a barrier given that they did not plan to live there full time, but only return for short periods, or once they had retired. Therefore, whilst some migrants dream of replicating an American villa back home, others are more willing to invest in non-conventional materials and more local building techniques. So, whilst migration can drive forms of urbanisation that adopt ill-suited architectural models it can also spur on the revalorisation of local building cultures.

7.3.3 Chateaux for Bats and Remittance Ruins

The Cité Bethel was an attractive option for overseas purchasers because it guaranteed that the house would be finished on time. It is difficult for migrants residing overseas to build houses back home, and many face obstacles including embezzlement, corruption, insecure tenure, and a rapid depletion of funds. As the architect François put it,

"it is really not easy if there is no in-between person (…) given the person does not live here. We send them the plans, but it is the project implementation that is tricky. (…) Often there are problems if the developer isn't trustworthy as often projects never get finished."

It can take years, often decades for properties to be finished and the incremental construction projects leave the landscape scattered with unfinished, half-completed concrete structures. These ambitious projects are referred to locally as 'chateaux for bats' - pointing to their grandiosity, and that they sit empty and haunted, solely inhabited by bats. These buildings offer up another form of ruination (Navaro-Yashin, 2009; Stoler, 2012), not an old building weathered by time, but new constructions abandoned half-way through. Rather than pointing to the past, they indicate unaccomplished urban futures that crumble before having fully emerged.

An urban myth is often told to account for these failures. It often features a member of the Beninese diaspora, who, having sent money home to build a house, arrives to see that the funds have been "consumed" by relatives who have embezzled them. We heard this story repeated often, in private and professional settings, and even policy workshops on the topic of the diaspora or migration and development. One version is told by Philip, a digital entrepreneur:

"There are Beninese, who spend years and years abroad, and when they arrive at the airport, all they want is to be driven to their house that they have been saving up for years. Every year, every month they had been sending money back. They provide reports of the building developments such as: we have just bought the plot, we have just started putting up the garden fence, we have just finished the structure, we have just furnished the inside. But all of that is just bluff. And when they arrive back, they realize that nothing has been done."

We observed how versions of this narrative captivated the various audiences, who, at the end of the story show their disbelief, tutting and shaking their heads. The tale comes under the category of "*beninoiseries*" a neologism and word play on the French for mischief *(connerie*) or annoyance *(tracasserie)*. The neologism first appeared in the 1990s, and has been defined by one journalist as "the characteristic or propensity to harm or disparage others with premeditation, and for no reason whatsoever other than the fact that one is not in the same (privileged) position" (Boni Teiga, 2015). This particular tale of *beninoiserie* serves a warning to overseas migrants who send money over without due precautions; it also underlines the naiveté of the diaspora who, removed for the local context, are easy prey to scams. One thread of the story is a common feature of kin relations in Benin: the lack of trust among close relatives. In the story, it is often a brother left behind who betrays the overseas migrant. For to flaunt one's success from abroad, is to risk attracting jealousy of those at home, and expose oneself to attacks, either spiritually or financially.

Various solutions have been developed to limit these risks, for example WhatsApp is used for video surveillance, bypassing the risk that the photos sent back by relatives to report progress are in-fact of completely different building sites. Other clients use drones to supervise construction sites or purchase cement bags directly online through online trading giants such as Alibaba and Jumia (Choplin, 2019, p.12). A local online platform called WalaWala (which in Fon translates as "quick-quick") targets the diaspora, enabling them to buy products online and have them directly delivered to their families. Bags of cement feature among the classic remittance products such as school supplies, food and Mother's Day presents.

The digital entrepreneur behind the website explained that his company aimed to eliminate the risk of embezzlement, 'So imagine you are Beninese but live in France, you want to build so you send money and ask people to give it to the builder, or you ask them to go and buy you cement. If you send money home to buy five tonnes of cement, you know they are not going to buy it for you. Maybe they will buy three or

four tonnes…' In addition to these digital solutions, developers and the state have tried to respond to the need for reliable construction for overseas mandates. For example a West African bank, Orabank, partnered with a Chinese construction company to produce housing for the diaspora, and the state, after having built villas for the 2008 meeting of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, then sought to resell them to the diaspora.

As this last section shows, it is at times very testing to urbanise from afar. The double loop involves maintaining a hold on both one's place of destination and place of origin. Our discussion of remittance houses points to the difficulties and struggles that can ensue. In trying to urbanise from afar, at times, the loop, like a noose, is pulled tight, and the victim is taken by surprise. In Fon, the dominant language in South Benin, the word knot *nùbìblá* also means complot. And the more ambitious and successful the person is, the more likely they fall prey to the *nùbìblá*.

7.4 Conclusion

This final chapter has sought to present one last knot, the double loop. This knot has allowed us to apprehend how migrant households maintain multiple ties, to their place of residence and to their place of origin. This chapter presented one loop after the other, first focusing on migrant households in their place of destination, and then, in the second section looking at how migrants seek to maintain attachments to their place of origin. In doing so we have gained a better understanding of how, in the context of South Benin, the double loop is contributing to urbanisation. Whilst migrant households are appear to be leading urbanisation in the urban communes, earning more, owning more, and living in better houses. Migrant households are also contributing to urbanisation in their place of origin, building secondary houses through remittances. In this sense the double loop is a manner to thing though how the contributions migrants make to urbanisation are multi-sited. The arrival neighbourhoods along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor are only one aspect of how migrants are driving urbanisation in the region. To provide a fuller portrait of these processes also requires tracing the connections they maintain with their places of origin.

Two specific policy implications can be drawn from this work. The first is that in urban settings migrants are often doing just as well, if not better than natives. In terms of policy this would point to a case of positive deviance, where the factors enabling migrant households to succeed could inform mainstream policies for non-migrants. Secondly remittance housing is often decried by development practitioners as non-productive investments or individual vanity projects. Practitioners could gain from considering the various other functions that such housing projects enable within local cultures. This requires a shift from judging remittance housing as empty investments and unproductive ventures, to a recognition of the role it plays in regulating emotional bonds to places left behind in the search for improved opportunities in town.

In West Africa, migrants' multiple senses of place are called upon in times of crisis, and their ability to send money home renders communities more resilient. This makes it a fertile field from which to start pluralising senses of place. Drawing on Massey's (1991) call for a global sense of place, this chapter adopted an extroverted sense of place along with a post-colonial approach to apprehend the translocal livelihoods of West African migrants. An extroverted sense of place calls for a twofold diversification, firstly of the places being studied to integrate a broader spectrum of place experiences, and secondly of the locations of knowledge production. Considering sense of place in a post-colonial setting, the chapter demonstrates how colonialism and its aftermath have modified sense of place in Benin and disrupted ties to the land. An extroverted sense of place is one that thinks from the outside and seeks to extend sense of place in order to incorporate the many diverse experiences of place in the global aftermath of colonialism. It multiplies the diversity of the empirical material we draw on. Testing the concepts of sense of place in new geographies, enables us to evaluate the sturdiness of place theories and their potential in addressing planetary concerns that reach beyond habitual sites of investigation. Benin, a small francophone country in West Africa, is most certainly at the margins of place research, but also has the potential to generate novel insights, and more importantly trouble certain implicit givens within place research. This post-colonial setting teaches us that, if no one is a prophet at home, those who seek to succeed, must at times uproot their ties and multiply their senses of place in order to navigate the challenges of the African city.

Fig. 63 Double attachments, when fabric reflects kinship
Fig. 64 Local communities living at the margins
Fig. 65 An advertisment for the airline "Air Côte d'Ivoire" - promoting the idea of multi-sited lives along the corridor

Fig. 66 Construction site of a returnee migrant and retired school teacher in the outskirts of Porto Novo

Fig. 67 A Château for Bats stands empty in the outskirts of Cotonou

Fig. 68 A landlord protects their property with the message "this plot is not for sale - visits prohibited"

Fig. 69 Remittance housing in Cotonou

Fig. 70 Remittance housing in Cotonou

Fig. 71 Estate agent advertising various services in Cotonou

8. CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to untangle the various manners in which migration is driving urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. It has drawn on observations and data collected over twelve months of fieldwork conducted in multiple locations along the Beninese section of the corridor. It has been particularly concerned with analysing how migration is contributing to the expansion of the urban fabric along this corridor, and the resulting forms of extended urbanisation. It proposed knots as a theoretical tool with which to conceptualise how people tie into the urban fabric. As such, this thesis aims to contribute both to the ways in which we understand the urban fabric and question in turn the role migration plays in producing this fabric.

The first section of this conclusion addresses the trans-disciplinary nature of this thesis, reflecting upon the collaboration with the Swiss Development Cooperation and the lessons learnt from this partnership. We then consider the limits of the study and look back at the main contributions of each of the chapters. What does each knot do, and what does it teach us about current urbanisation patterns along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor? Following this overview, a final section turns to probe a little further into the consequences of theorising migration-driven urbanisation through knots.

8.1 A Trans-Disciplinary Thesis

It has been a privilege to pursue a doctoral thesis in collaboration with the Swiss Development Cooperation, and this has much to do with the openness and curiosity of the staff within the Global Programme for Migration and Development as well as its positioning within current debates surrounding migration and development. Over the course of this project, the landscape of migration and development cooperation has shifted, with development aid, notably from the European Union, becoming increasingly tied down to restrictive measures for migration. This conditionality uses international development to stem migration. The GPMD sits apart in this trend, and as a development partner, has maintained a more measured stance, recognising that international cooperation does not stop migration and maintains a more accurate understanding of the roles between the two. This positioning has enabled us to pursue meaningful research without the expectation that this would in some way contribute to stemming migration from West Africa to Europe. It is not guaranteed that the same would be true had ETH partnered with another EU migration and development programme, given the increasingly political nature of debates surrounding migration over the course of the project. This highlights how sensitive trans-disciplinary projects can be to overarching political shifts in the priorities of partnering bodies.

Over the course of our collaboration with the SDC, the topics of urbanisation and migration have become increasingly salient. Urbanisation was traditionally not a topic of expertise within the Swiss development sector. For example, in Benin, expertise on urban issues came from both the French and Dutch development agencies , whilst Swiss expertise is more prominent in rural sectors. However, over the course of our collaboration, there has been a growing interest in engaging with urban themes. This has seen for example the GPMD dedicating specific resources to topics of urban migration, for example establishing a partnership with the Cities Alliance, or engaging with UN Habitat. On a wider institutional level, within the SDC, a small group of practitioners formed a working group on urban issues in 2016, with a delegation participating in the Habitat III conference in Quito in 2016, and then in 2017 running a 'learning journey' on urban-rural dynamics. As such, this trans-disciplinary collaboration has also contributed to wider reflections within the SDC on the role it may play in an increasingly urbanised world. Whilst the topic of urbanisation has gained more awareness over the course of the project, the topic of migration has become omnipresent. This is highly visible in the 2021 - 2024 strategy for international development in Switzerland. Migration is one of the main topics, along with employment, climate change and the rule of law. However, whilst the other topics are covered in a single paragraph, the topic of migration spills over one page. The dedicated word count shows how central the preoccupation with migration has become within debates in development aid. As a stakeholder, ETH responded to the proposed focus on migration during a consultation on the upcoming strategy, a copy of which can be found in the annex. When we started this project, urban migration was a topic of interest for one of the global programmes and it has now become relatively central within the SDC. This shift means our findings will be relevant within broader

debates, but also requires that we move from the specific findings in West Africa to engage in wider debates that are relevant in other territories.

Another significant shift over the course of this project has been the rise, especially in the US, of a post-truth environment. This is gaining grounds on many topics, for example climate change or the current pandemic, but is especially present in regard to migration. In this context, the validity of claims does not always appear to be the central criteria for their legitimacy. As researchers it is maybe no longer sufficient to provide the facts, build sturdy evidence and support sound policy. There is a need to counter the erosion of trust between the scientific community and the wider public and the growing suspicion of experts and specialists. For as Enfield reported in 2017, "the suspicion of specialists and experts has begun to contaminate a much bigger ecology of knowledge and practice in our society. The result is often post-truth discourse. In our new normal, experts are dismissed, alterative facts are (sometimes flagrantly) offered, and public figures can offer opinions on pretty much anything" (Enfield, 2017, cited in Peters & Besley, 2019, p.1298). To continue operating in the post-truth era requires improving our accountability as social scientists. Trans-disciplinary collaborations and the implementation of co-design and co-production of knowledge are one means of doing so. This aligns with wider trends of citizen science, which for Peters and Besley (2019) could enable scientists to navigate the post-truth era through "dual accountability relationship of science to democracy: (i) opening up science policy processes and promoting a responsiveness of science to the needs of citizens, while at the same time (ii) engaging citizens in communication about science and tutoring them in large-scale research projects through virtual education and collaborative participation in scientific research projects" (p.1301). The next step in this trans-disciplinary research project is to communicate our findings to a wide range of citizens in Switzerland and West Africa through an interactive web-documentary. This web-documentary, currently under production with media teams in Benin will present the findings of this thesis in a more engaging manner. For as our collaborators at the GPMD clearly stated, the facts exist, but they are not enough, what are also needed at times are the narratives and the stories that encompass those facts.

This trans-disciplinary project engaged with one partner, the GPMD, across two sites, the headquarters of the Swiss Development Cooperation in Bern, and a local office at the Swiss Consulate in Benin. And whilst many standard tools of trans-disciplinary collaboration were straightforward to implement in the Swiss context, they required revision and more flexibility in Benin. Nowhere was this clearer than in the case of stakeholder workshops. Stakeholder workshops, or 'ateliers' were a key activity during fieldwork in Benin, and I participated in endless roundtable discussions on the topic of urbanisation, planning, the Lagos Abidjan corridor, migration, mobility, borders and infrastructure. Initially this appeared to be a useful and productive tool to collect information, gather stakeholder inputs and network. Often held in conference centres or hotels, these events were structured around the presentation of a report, panel discussions and question and answer sessions. The majority were financed

by the PTF - “partenaires techniques et financiers”- that is to say, international donors. I would arrive, sign a list of presence being circulated, receive a badge and an A4 folder with the agenda and sit through hours of discussion. At one point there would be a ‘photo de famille’ after which quite often the other attendants would leave. It became apparent, that many of those participating were in fact semi-professional ‘stakeholders’ who received per-diems to attend the workshops. It was often difficult to access the list of people attending and even more so the final version of the report being presented, and at times those attending were otherwise unrelated to the topic under discussion. Other times, the organising institutions were paying lip-service to public participation, for example, this was the case in a meeting organised by the French cultural attaché on cities, during which the only black woman in the room was referred to by the organiser as “la société civile Béninoise”, the Beninese civil society. That is not to say that these ‘ateliers’ did not generate certain moments of insight and some of them were more interactive and inventive than others. However, overall, they were both a draining experience, both for the stakeholders involved, who clearly suffered from stakeholder fatigue,[1] and for me. I decided on the basis of these observations not to add any additional workshops to the already charged agenda – but rather, to conduct smaller, more focused discussions with key members of civil society. That said, we had initially planned to hold a final workshop in Benin at the end of the project to present research findings, fine-tune them and validate them. This however was rendered unfeasible due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic highlighted the digital gap between Switzerland and Benin, and whilst we toyed with the idea of organising a digital interactive workshop, it would not have been possible to implement from overseas.

Finally, whilst a doctoral thesis enables explorative research, it is not always compatible with the timing, focus and deliverables that are often required of research consultants working with development cooperations.. The expectations required of this work from both partners have at times varied, with the SDC requiring a stronger focus on practice and ETH requiring more focus on theory. Furthermore, a doctoral thesis, as a training exercise that does not always follow foreseen calendars, progressing instead in learning through doing, and learning through error. In order to respond to the needs of different publics, the results of this project will also be delivered in the form of a series of policy papers that will allow more direct access to the relevant research findings for practitioners. Over the course of this trans-disciplinary collaboration, we sought to build trust and understanding with practitioners from the Swiss Development Cooperation, engage in mutual learning, and together produce knowledge about urban migration in West Africa. The remainder of this conclusion looks back on the contribution this thesis has made to our current understanding of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, and the potential of our proposed concept of knots as a tool to understand the role of migration within the urban fabric.

1 For a further discussion of stakeholder fatigue in the context of transdisciplinary research see Bracken et al. 2015

8.2 One Corridor and Four Knots

This thesis set out to understand how migration is currently contributing to urbanisation processes along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. The Lagos-Abidjan corridor, whilst also a highly relevant region in and of itself, has provided an opportunity to consider wider questions surrounding rapid urban transformation, and the role migration and mobility play in transforming the urban fabric. Despite current projections of urban growth along the Guinea Gulf, the Lagos-Abidjan corridor has not drawn much attention from scholars. This we have suggested could be attributed to the difficulty in constituting the corridor as an object of study, both in terms of its borders and scale. Another explanation could be the post-colonial division of scholarship that sees francophone scholars focusing on French sections of the corridor, and anglophones on previous British colonies. A last hypothesis is that a persistence of the strong dichotomy between rural and urban spaces has resulted in a sectioning of the corridor - with urban scholars unlikely to consider modes of urban extension outside of cities.

This is not to say that we did not encounter any obstacles ourselves in the study of this corridor. There are various limits to the work presented here, and choices in the research design that in retrospect could have been improved. The first obstacle encountered was the scale of the corridor, the choice taken here was to focus on the Beninese section. This section is not a perfect representation of the rest of the corridor, but instead offers up a profile of one stretch. In the future it would be meaningful to partner with researchers along various other strips of the corridor, in anglophone and francophone sections to compile a more complete understanding of the various conditions along the corridor. Furthermore, whilst the intention of this thesis was to break away from methodological nationalism, and instead study cross-border dynamics, we often resorted back to national data, for example national policy reports or national census material. It is far easier to critique methodological nationalism than to build up cross-border data sets. Another limit of this work, is its failure to engage with urban scholars in Benin, this was due to the limited interest of local researchers on urban processes, and also the limited time to conduct and deliver fieldwork results. Finally, in retrospect, I should have earlier on placed stronger boundaries around the limits of this thesis, curiosity instead drove me down various paths - not always to the benefits of the research. This was in part fuelled by the many partners involved, but was mostly of my own doing. I am grateful for the recommendation received by Armelle Choplin in my second stage of fieldwork to focus on four specific localities along the corridor and gain focus by attaching myself to those territories. This experience raises a wider question about how exactly we can conduct in-depth grounded fieldwork on expansive urban territories.

To apprehend the emerging urban forms along the corridor, this thesis has employed the theoretical apparatus of planetary urbanisation (Brenner & Schmid, 2017), and more precisely sought to operationalise notions of extended and concentrated urbanisation. The Lagos-Abidjan case provides an opportunity to ground theorisation of

planetary urbanisation in empirical observations, even more so given the ethnographic focus of this work. It also challenges an early presumption of Lefebvre's work, in that it provides us with a case of urbanisation without sustained industrialisation, or even a significant labour market. This highlights the differentiation between the various dynamics taking place under planetary urbanisation. This is anything but one all-encompassing universal theory. However, what the thesis further contributes is a portrait of just how differentiated processes of urbanisation are within these urban regions. Each knot presented here has demonstrated a specific process by which migration is driving urbanisation processes. Further research would surely uncover more. Rather than a single, overarching dynamic that would explain the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, we point here instead to the multiplication of strategies and techniques underpinning current urbanisation trends.

This thesis as such, contributes to current debates on the nature of extended urbanisation. It also does so by challenging current definitions of the urban fabric and proposes a more rigorous understanding of how exactly this fabric is produced. From a self-expanding mesh, we have sought to sketch out a more nuanced and varied understanding of this fabric. If planetary urbanisation is the stretching of the urban fabric across the planet, we have shown how this fabric in one region is being produced in part through migration. We have taken Lefebvre's concept of the urban fabric, and sought, using the work of Appadurai (2005) to strengthen it to better account for mobility. Our main theoretical contribution here is to introduce knots as a concept that allows us to think through the various ways in which individuals engage with the urban fabric and transform it. Here we presented four such knots, the bend, the hitch, the slipknot and the double loop. Had we studied another territory, it is quite possible that others knots would have held more explanatory power for the urban processes unfolding, however, other the course of this investigation these were the four that best capture the current dynamics along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

The bend is a simple knot, it is one that ties two parts together. As such, we started with this knot in order to understand how this corridor ties together, demonstrating that historically it has emerged as a consequence of both regional trading, slavery and colonial labour. We have demonstrated how mobility today continues to underpin urban transformation along the corridor, providing a surface, activities and encounters that sustain urban livelihoods. We have gone even further, showing that those residing along the Lagos-Abidjan road have urban lives despite living in rural communes. The importance of migration in sustaining urbanity along the corridor we argue, can be read in the many spatial representations and cultural productions, and remains an inherent feature of the urban fabric long after movement has ceased.

The second knot presented was the hitch. This knot is one that produces immobility, it ties things and people down. This knot enabled us to consider how immobility is producing urbanity along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This is a key finding of this thesis: it is not just the mobility within migration that is driving urbanisation. Urbanisation is also being produced through many instances when mobility is slowed down

along the corridor. This can occur because of the nature of the road, however people and things are also slowed down by border controls, tolls or neighbourhood chiefs. This immobility, which of course is not always welcomed, is nonetheless often generative. This chapter demonstrates the contradictions between current policies seeking to regulate both circulation and urbanisation along the corridor and these observations.

The third knot was the slipknot, a knot that allows a quick release. This knot is the reflection of a specific case study, an eviction operation that took place in 2018 in Benin under the moto 'Liberation of Public Space.' This knot reminds us that a realistic account of migration and the urban fabric in West Africa must consider the everyday violence of state-led policies that evict, clear and demolish urban homes and businesses. In this context, and under the threat of displacement, urban dwellers, we argue, must be prepared to cut ties to the urban fabric. The threat or possibility of eviction and demolition impedes dwellers from maintaining their ties to the urban fabric. In this chapter we demonstrated how rather than migration-driving urbanisation, state-led urbanisation projects produce urban displacement along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor.

The fourth and final knot presented was the double tie. The double tie is a knot that captures the multi-sited lives of migrants living along the Lagos-Abidjan corridor. This knot enabled us to examine how migrants along the corridor tie into multiple locations simultaneously. Through careful examination of this knot, we were able to show how migrants contribute to urbanisation through trans-local practices, such as remittance housing. The double loop provides a reading of the multiple attachments migrant households maintain along the corridor. The chapter suggested that, in Benin, given the context of West African cities, migrant households perform better on a range of development indicators than non-migrant households. This we argue suggests that one single connection to the urban fabric is not enough, and households must tie into multiple locations to sustain decent livelihoods.

The analysis of these four knots deepens the notion of the urban fabric and how it comes to be formed. It shows how these knots are closely linked to personal strategies, but also urban policies, responding to the current needs and opportunities available to urban dwellers. This urban fabric is woven together by multiple threads as they tie into or break away from the warp and the woof. Knots extend our conceptualisation of the urban fabric. They allow us to embrace the variety of ways in which the urban fabric is produced, through speculation and tying into the future, through formal and informal practices and mobility and immobility. They also further our understanding of the success or failure of various claims to urban space because they inherently each have a weak spot, and can break, slip and untie, as tactics and strategies fail or are sabotaged. These knots also connect between them and are interlinked, for example, whilst a landlord might use the hitch to tie down revenue from a renter, this in turn provides them with a considerable amount of capital to move on. Whilst considering the knots individually provides a deeper insight into how they

operate, it is also important to keep in mind how these various threads cross-over within the urban fabric.

8.3 Regenerative Urban Knots

Knots, as we have mobilised them in this thesis, are more than a metaphor, or a visual devise to illustrate urban processes. Unpicking these knots provides a far more differentiated understanding of how the urban fabric is produced and offers an opportunity to regenerate the urban fabric as a conceptual tool for the study of West African urbanisation. This thesis has looked carefully at the threads of such a fabric, arguing the entanglements of various lines, and the friction that maintains them in place as being key to capturing the dynamics of the urban fabric, not just as it spreads, but also as it frays, and is darned back together. By paying closer attention to how these knots are formed, an analysis of both personal strategies and structural factors that produce the urban fabric has been enabled. Knots focus the attention of the connections and movements, bringing to the forefront the role of mobility and trans-local migration in shaping the urban fabric.

We finish here by considering the regenerative potential of knots, and their ability to fix up parts of the urban fabric that have worn away. In doing so, it pays attention to how the urban fabric is compiled of new material, but also second-hand cloth. It considers how the urban fabric is at times torn, frayed, and fixed back together again through knots. In Lefebvre's account of the urban fabric, the focus is on its extension and growth. However, as we have seen, the urban fabric also wears down, tears and comes apart in situations of armed conflict, eviction policies, structural adjustment programmes, or chronic under-investment. In such wounded cities,[2] the urban fabric becomes frayed, and knots can serve to darn sections back together. Knots have the potential of being regenerative. Here the urban scholar De Boeck (De Boeck & Baloji, 2016), and novelist Farah (2007) provide key insights into how this process of re-stitching the urban fabric might occur.

DeBoeck & Baloji (2016), mobilise the metaphor of suturing, drawing on the work of medical historian Hunt (2013). Suturing he writes, is both the closing of a wound and the creation of an incision. It is an act that stitches together parts, locations, and points of view. As such, he continues, it is a productive act, that creatively combines elements and is profoundly interactive. Applied to the context of Congo's urban landscape, sutures become junctions and seams, that enable inhabitants to overcome holes in the city and fill the gaps, as people stitch over the various "lacks and losses" suturing over the "folds, gaps and holes of the city" in order to close its wounds, and in doing so open up new alternatives and alignments, new modes of engagement, interactivity and sociability (p. 19). In this work, the suture, a medical knot, seeks to

2 For further discussions of wounded cities see edited collection by Schneider & Susser, 2003

repair the city and recompose the urban fabric. However, this repair does not occur seamlessly but instead creates new fault-lines, new encounters within the urban fabric. Here the focus is on repairing the urban fabric, rather than stretching it.

This is captured perfectly in Farah's (2007) novel Knots. Featuring the city Mogadishu, the novel maps the urban spaces, hotels, villas, streets, roadblocks and grocery stores in the aftermath of the civil war. It traces the trajectory of a returnee, Cambara, who, arriving from Toronto, seeks to suture her own wounds, and that of her home-city. During what is judged by male onlookers as a "foolish adventure into the dark unknowns of Mogadishu's dangers" (p. 46), Cambara tries to tie herself back into the urban fabric and reclaim her family property from a squatting warlord, "I have no idea what I will do with it once the property is in my hands" she says, but "I feel certain deep within me that I will wrench it from his clutch"(p. 79). Throughout the novel, Cambara battles to untie herself from past relationships, from scam marriages with cousins and disloyal ex-husbands, and tie herself into networks of Somali women activists, and new forms of kinship with fostered street children. All the time, seeking to suture the city through providing care, falling in love, and following her own creative endeavour. For Myers (2011), Farah's writing parallels that of De Boeck and Plissart's (2014) on the reshaping of kinship in the wounded city - emphasizing that the reconstruction of these relationships and their reinventing are most important in defining the "rhythms of reciprocity, commensality, conjugality and gender relations in the urban context" (p. 157). The knots in Farah's novel, show Cambara both suturing the city, and knotting herself into it, through the "reconstruction of social and familial relationships (…) and the physical reconstitution of domestic and municipal spaces as places of refuge and hope" (p.160). In Mogadishu, the re-tying and re-articulation of kinship knots become central to the composition of the urban fabric.

Knotting captures the encounters, interactions, composition, and diversity of many urban experiences in African settings. As has been discussed, accounting for knots in the urban fabric, is to account for the urbanity not just in South Benin, or along the Guinea Gulf, but also across a wider range of locations from Mogadishu to Kinshasa. The knot brings together the entanglements of urban life, of people, things, and temporalities, joining a multiplicity into one form (De Boeck and Baloji, 2016). For as De Boeck writes, the knot perfectly captures the inhabitant's experiences of urbanity in Kinshasa, of the various forms of amalgamation and limit situations, of the interlinking, connecting, border-crossing, kinks, closures, blockage and at times suffocation that the knot produces as both a conjunct and a disjunct (De Boeck and Baloji, 2016, p.131). The knot further resonates across various settings in East, West and Central Africa where knots are often strongly embedded within the cultural register. As such, a study of knots holds potential for deeper comparison of the formation of African urbanisms and raising questions about the knottiness of African urban spaces. However, to do so raises three challenges, that we refer to here as 'traces', 'secrecy' and 'loose ends' created by knots.

Knots, as has been shown, come undone. Because they are constantly slipping and unravelling, this raises questions as to how to trace the production of the urban fabric over time. Do knots leave traces in the urban morphology than enable an analysis of the urban fabric? Here Ingold (2015) provides an initial response. When a knot is untied from a piece of rope it retains a certain memory of its past form, even if you try to straighten it. It curls up in the same conformations, the memory he emphasizes is "suffused into the very material of the rope, in the torsions and flexions of its constituent fibres" (Ingold, 2015, p.25). Unlike articulated structures that break into pieces, the knot remembers everything even if a line is untied and cast off in another direction (p.26). Knots then, despite coming undone, leave traces in the urban fabric, kinks and conformations that can be uncovered to provide a historical reading of the urban fabric. For the anthropologist Ciavolella, it is with the knot, that we live through all the contradictions of history, "just as we work to untangle the threads of a tangled world, we cross lines in a new way and multiply our knots: we expand our canvas, but get caught up in new tangles and entanglements" (Ciavolella, 2020, para.22) The story, he reminds us, is never linear, nor is it a thread that curls up by itself, it is a plot, with tensions and connections that are to be unravelled.

How the knot is unravelled is often clouded in secrecy. Sailors, when sharing complicated knots with colleagues at sea, would often do so under a pledge of secrecy, bartering knowledge of one knot for another (Ashley, 1960, p.3). Many of the knots tied by informants are not meant to be unravelled, understood, analysed and depicted by the curious researcher. Some are drawn tightly, so that the strategy at play cannot be read, rendering it impossible to confirm how exactly the urban fabric is extending. In settings where entangled relationships preside over formal regulations, it can be challenging to unpick the various arrangements that enable or impede the growth of the urban fabric. Like the Gordian knot, some are purposefully complex, seeking to hide the various arrangement that have been mobilised to produce the urban fabric. This is often the case in African cities, where informal arrangements, competing land regimes, and hidden interests render a lot of urbanisation processes difficult to understand or penetrate. Whereas the concept of knots does not provide a magic key to untangle these knots, it does however suggest a framework to account for their tight and secret nature. For researchers working in such contexts, revealing the nature of tangled knots can be impossible, or a breach of trust and secrecy. For within these new territories of urbanisation, not all processes are transparent, willing to be explained, and laid out to be unravelled.

To work on knots in the urban fabric, is to accept the loose ends and frayed edges that are never completely tied up. With knots, elements are not distinct and separate (Green, 2014), making it tricky to comment on the definitive state of urban territories. To capture the state of the Lagos-Abidjan corridor is to instead pay attention to its constantly shifting morphology as the urban fabric transforms under the tying and untying of knots. The urban fabric is always being transformed and is never quite finished as its threads extend. The knots are what keep it together, to study the urban fabric is to embrace these loose threads, and endless possibilities of encounters that

occur when they are knotted together. Finally knots remind us how, as researchers, we get tied into places, into relationships, friendships, commitments, contractual exchanges and expectations in our quest to understand the urban fabric.

09. EPILOGUE

The thesis closes with the voices of three women, Zora Neale Hurston, Bernandine Evaristo and Angélique Kidjo. In 2018 and 2019 the work of these three women took central stage in the cities of Paris, New York and London. They all told stories that connected back to Benin, and that dealt with mobility, migration and displacement. These were stories of battles and challenges voiced by black female voices to the cultural, literary and political elite. And whilst they shared tales from West Africa, they were just as relevant, if not more relevant, for the global cities of Paris, New York and London. Indeed, tales from a small country in West Africa might also hold some value for the large metropolises of the Global North. Such narratives might even enable such places to learn something about themselves that they did not know of yet.

We start with the publication of "Barracoon", a novel written in 1931 by the novelist, folklorist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, but refused publication. It recounts the true story of Kossula Lewis, a man living in Alabama who, at the time, was thought to be the last living person captured in Africa and brought to America on a slave ship. Hurston, a student of Franz Boas, was a ground-breaking ethnographer, recording African American cultures, when for many it was deemed irrelevant or primitive. Barracoon, upon posthumous publication in 2018, featured in the New York Times bestsellers list and resonated with current debates on race and migration in the US. The book portrays the intimacy, trust and respect at the heart of good ethnography, as Hurston listens to Kossula's account of how he was captured and enslaved. He recalls the terrifying raid of Dahomey female Amazon warriors who beheaded victims and marched prisoners to Ouidah where they were imprisoned before being shipped to America. As Hurston writes, after seventy-five years, Kossula still painfully yearned for his home country, for the 'Afficky Soil', for his homeland and family, and suffered from a sense of mutilation and painful memories. Barracoon speaks of the trauma of brutal detachment from one's land, what happens when the knots that tie us into our social and cultural settings are slashed. Hurston's book is one that speaks to the challenges faced today in America by the descendants of slaves. It is also a book that reminds us of how the voices of black anthropologists have been silenced and forgotten.

The second event was the publication of the book *Girl, Woman, Other* by the British author Bernardine Evaristo in 2019. The same year the novel was awarded half of the Booker Prize, to share with Margaret Atwood. There is a great irony to this, given the novel's discussion on how minorities voices feature within the cultural establishment. It is a novel that follows the lives of a dozen interconnected characters, mostly black women, against the backdrop of the city of London. The book is a thought-piece on black lives in the United Kingdom, describing the immigrant experience, sexuality and gender. The book opens and closes with the voice of Amma, an avant-garde queer theatre director, who is putting on the production of 'The Last Amazon of Danhomey' at the National Theatre. Her play recounts how "in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women warriors served the king women who lived in the king's compound (…) trained to climb naked over thorny acacia branches

to toughen up (…) and could behead and disembowel their enemies with ease" (Evaristo; 2019, p.24). The plays main character is Nawi, a female amazon warrior in Danhomey. Like Kossula, she is living a life of destitution, old and alone, thinking back to the mighty battles where she won her name, "she is proud of her achievements; video projections show her battles in action, thunderous armies of charging Amazons brandishing muskets and machetes hollering and selling towards the audience" (idem, p.25). Here, a play about Amazon warriors of Danhomey becomes the backdrop to tales of modern-day immigration in the United Kingdom, about casual racism and everyday feminism. As one of the spectators in the novel tweets: "kicking ass on stage! Pure African Amazon blackness. Feeeeerce! Heart-breaking & ball-breaking! All hail #AmmaBonsu #allblackhistorymatters Book now or cry later, peepalls!!! @RogueNation." This novel tells the story of the Amazon warriors who captured Kossula, portraying them in another light and featuring them in discussions around trans-gender rights. In doing so it is another example of how tales from Benin, can feed into contemporary discussions about gender and migration in the global cities of the North.

The last voice in this epilogue is that of Angélique Kidjo, the world-famous Beninese signer, international diva and ambassador for UNICEF. On the 11th November 2018, commemorations for the hundredth anniversary of the first world war armistice were held in Paris. Under the Arc de Triumph, by the tomb of the unknown soldier, Kidjo walked out wearing an electric blue dress in Vlisco print to serenade world leaders. Over seventy heads of states, and millions of viewers, listened to the song 'Blewu'. The song, which translates as 'Go Slowly' was a homage to the many African soldiers, who, enrolled in a colonial army, had lost their lives in trenches far from their homeland. A song that captures the anguish expressed by Kossula, and the yearning of one's ancestors. The presence of Angélique Kidjo was highly symbolic, recognising the role played by Africans in the history of European nations. Merkel, Trump, Poutine, Trudeau, Netanyahu, Erdogan and Macron sat under the rain, as she sung in honour of those who had travelled far from West Africa, of the pain of displacement, and the longing for home. "It's Gently / Gently you'll arrive safely home / Its Gently, but steadily / The Leopard does not make haste."

Hurston, Evaristo and Kidjo in sharing their stories have nourished contemporary debates on the race, gender, and displacement, bringing narratives from current day Benin that remind us of the injustices black lives have suffered and the work that lies ahead of us.

Fig. 72 Zora Neale Hurston, 1938, Carl Van Vechten, via Library of Congress

Fig. 73 Bernardine Evaristo, 2019, Photo by David Levenson/ Getty Images

Fig. 74 Angélique Kidjo, Source unknown

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