



Shenzhen; bustling street life in an urbanised village. Baishizhou, 2015



Istanbul; plotted neighbourhood. Eyüpsultan, 2014

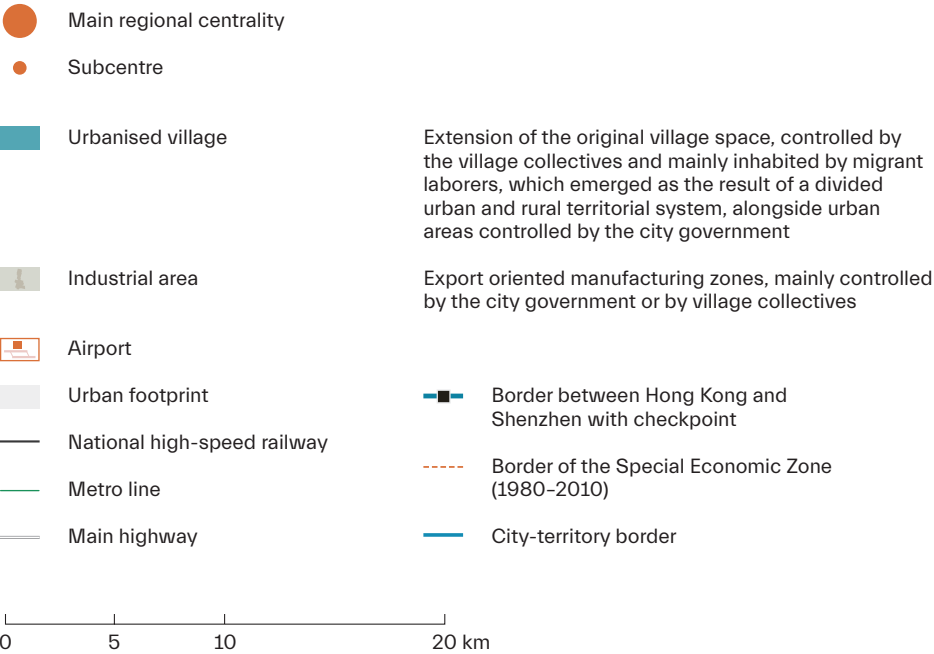


## PLOTTING URBANISM AS AN ORDINARY PROCESS OF URBANISATION

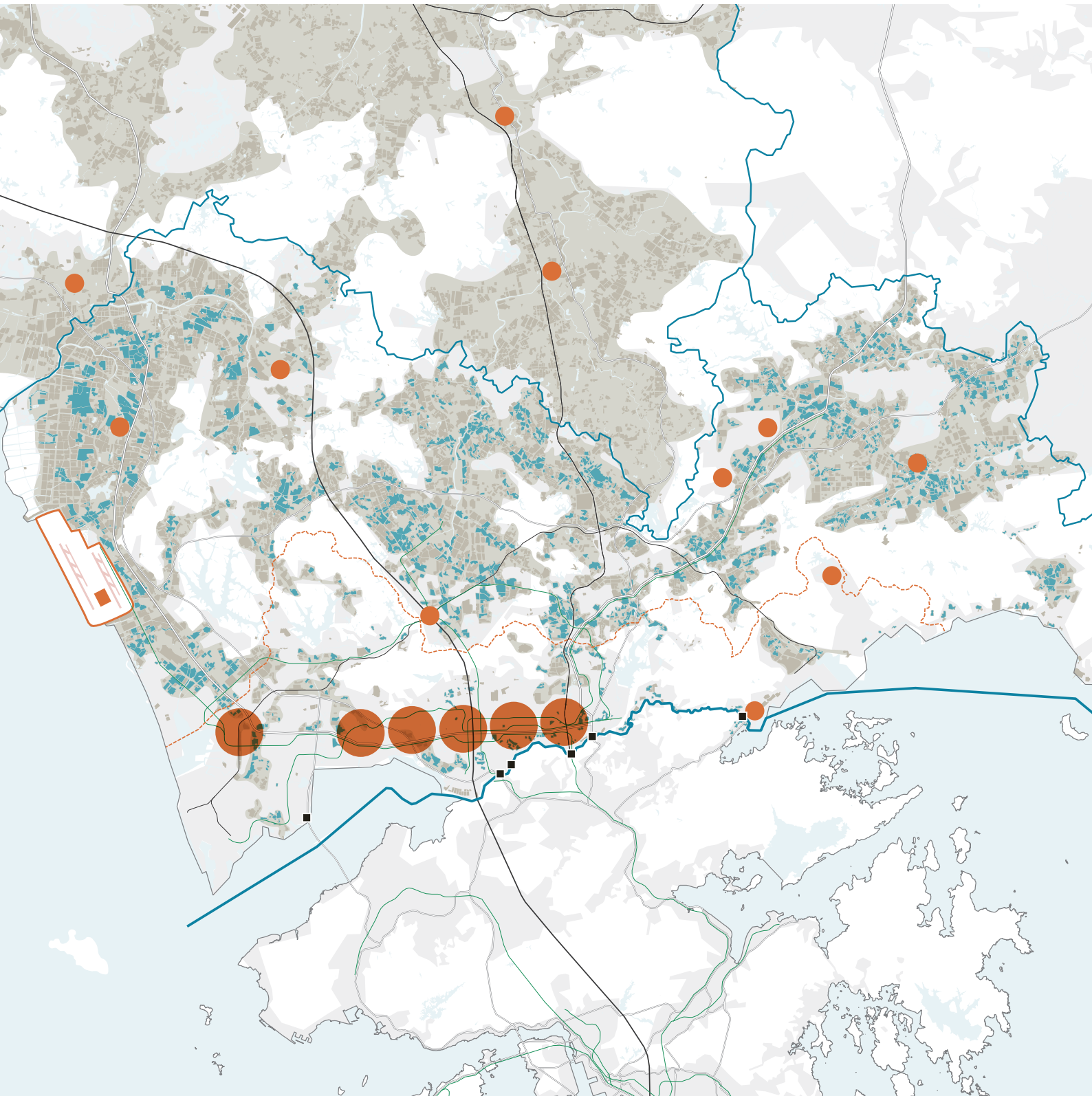
Lagos; far plotting. Ikotun, 2012



# PLOTTING URBANISM

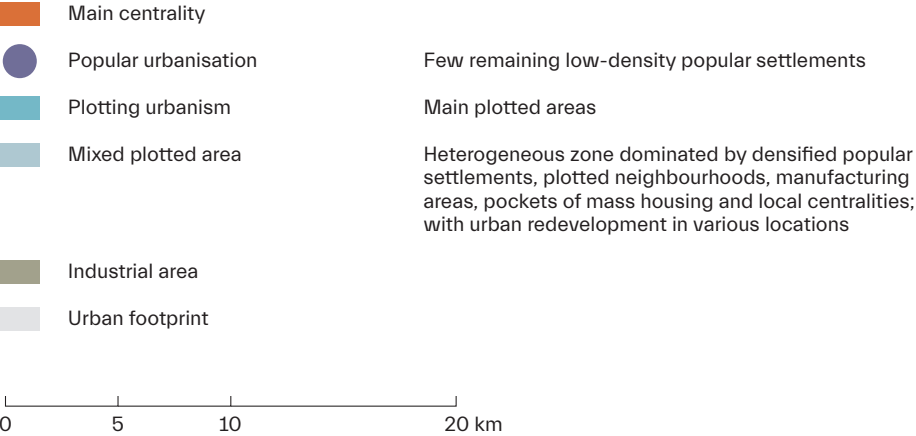


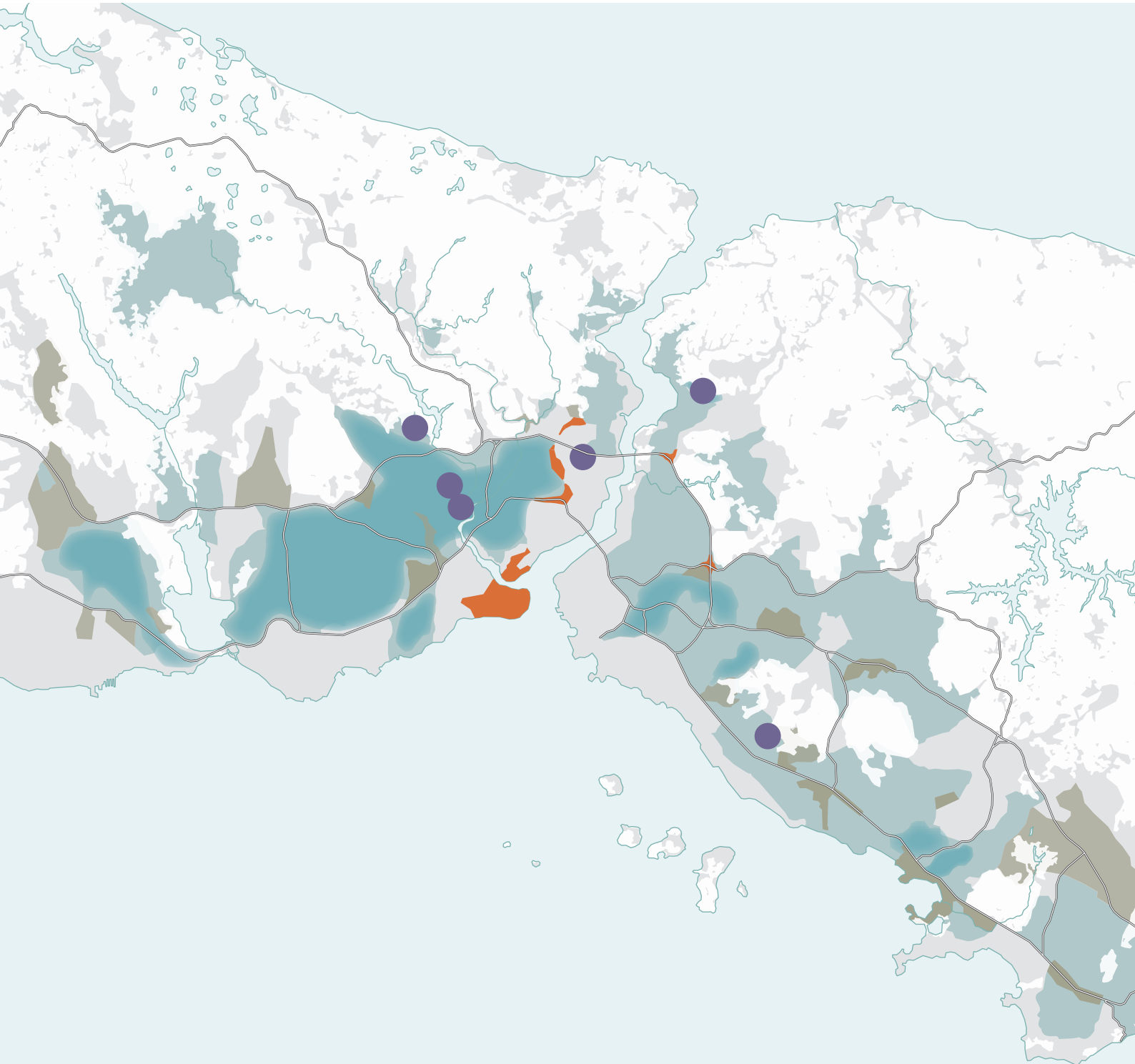






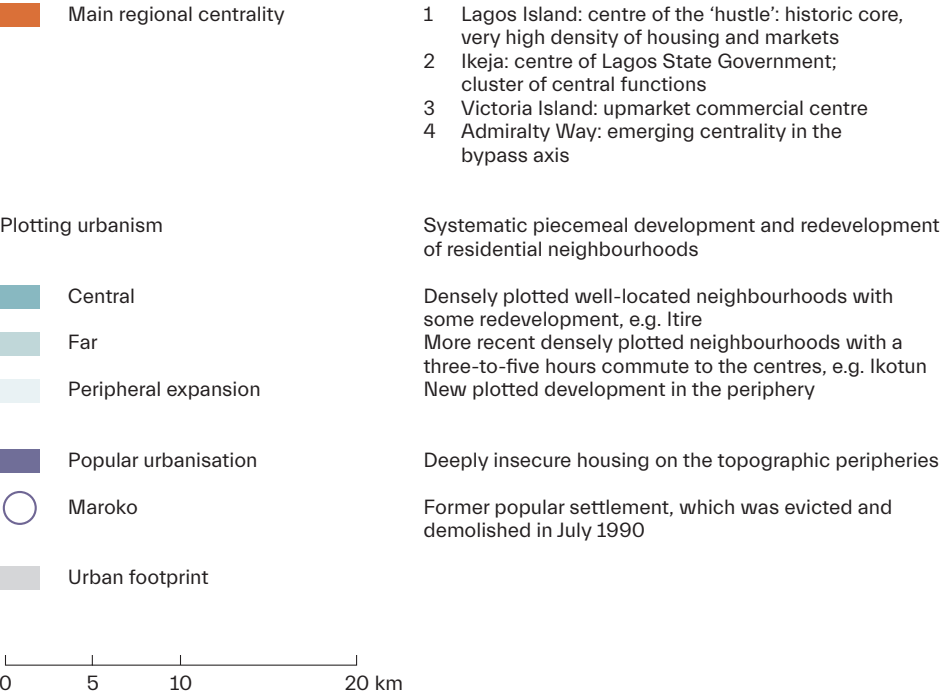
# PLOTTING URBANISM

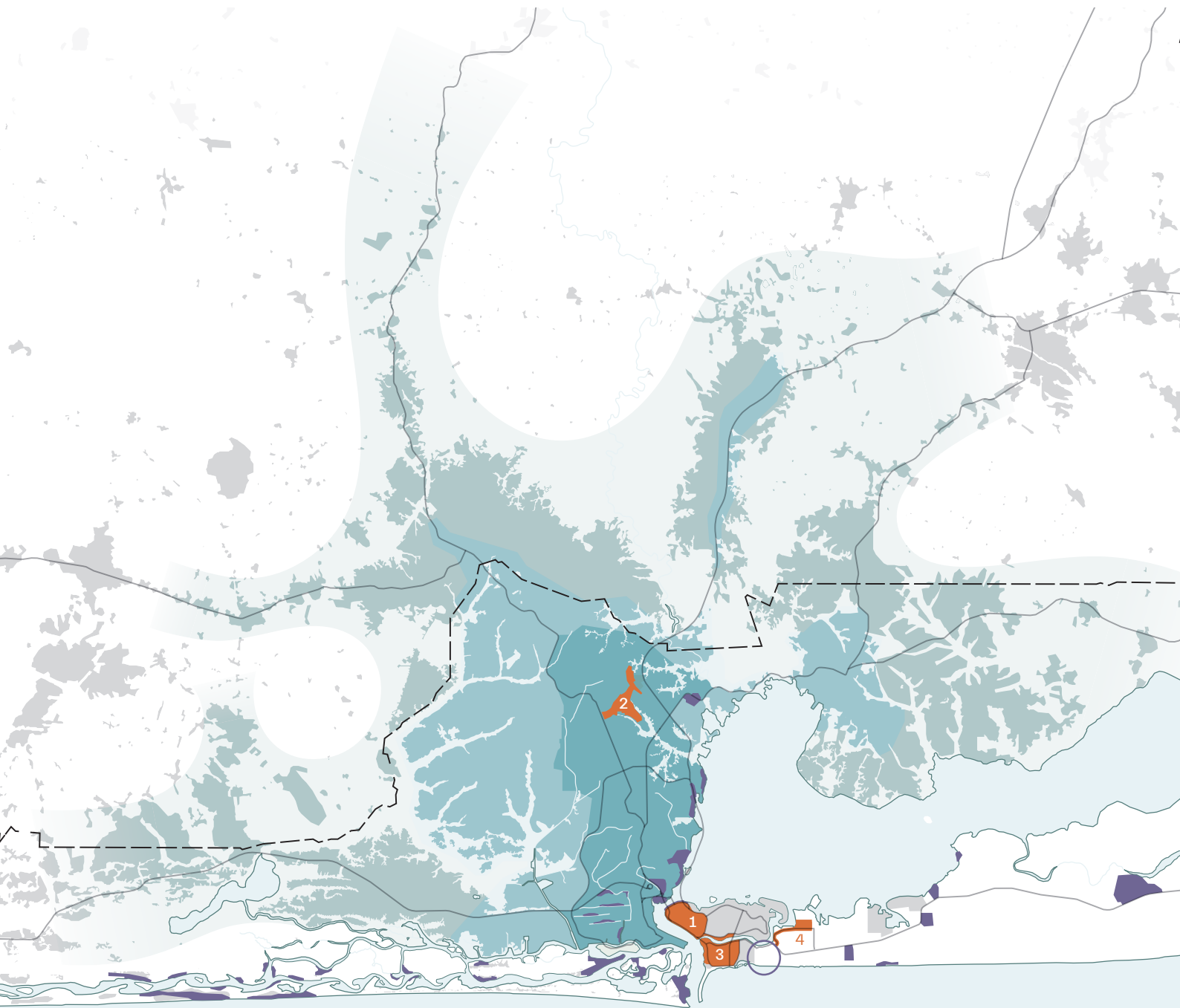






# PLOTTING URBANISM





## BEYOND INFORMALITY

In parts of Istanbul, Shenzhen, Lagos and Kolkata a large number of people live in urban areas that have developed plot-by-plot over time, based on speculative and sometimes exploitative land and housing markets with limited official planning. These areas are transformed by incremental improvements to individual properties or the redevelopment of individual plots. Landlords, plot-owners, government officials, tenants, local elites and authority figures form complex alliances to act for their own individual or group gain in this specific urbanisation process. They navigate, manipulate and circumvent unresolved contradictions and ambivalences, which often result from overlapping modes of territorial regulation, land tenure and property rights. These neighbourhoods are often densely built and vibrant, yet they may lack public spaces, amenities and access to reliable infrastructure due to limited urban planning. People with low incomes or without access to social housing or formal credit schemes may find affordable land, property or rental housing in these areas. More resourceful individuals and communities may also engage in exploiting economic opportunities and political connections to generate a profit through urban development. Even if each of these areas has distinctive features, we understand them as being produced through a specific process of urbanisation, which we call *plotting urbanism*, or plotting for short. Plotting has not been identified as a distinct urbanisation process in the literature so far. In this chapter we delineate the process of plotting urbanism, its characteristics and intrinsic logics and suggest a definition for further discussion and application in research and practice.

The concept of plotting urbanism is based on a somewhat counter-intuitive selection of case studies, and despite the convincing set of characteristics that hold this grouping together, existing terms and concepts kept pulling them apart. As we repeatedly compared the redevelopment of *gecekond* neighbourhoods in Istanbul and *bustee* areas in Kolkata, the formation of 'tenement



housing' in Lagos and of 'urbanised villages' in Shenzhen, a distinct concept kept slipping in and out of focus. On the one hand, the empirical examples we were comparing could simply be seen as specific outcomes of general processes of urbanisation or urban intensification. On the other hand, highly specific terms in each context, each with their own literature, such as *gecekond* and more recently 'post-gecekond' (Esen 2011) in Turkey and 'urbanised villages' (*chengzhongcun*) in China gave the appearance of incommensurability and impeded our ability to recognise similarities among them across time and space. In the end we decided that existing concepts for describing urbanisation processes were inadequate to the task of bringing the different dimensions of these urban experiences together. Many different terms could be applied to analyse the areas under discussion: aspects of urban regeneration are visible; physical improvements and increases in rents might point towards gentrification; some areas featured suburban characteristics; and with varying levels of official recognition and limited regulations, these areas are frequently described as informal. Yet all these concepts fall short of addressing the specificity of the processes that we detected.

In particular, the concept of urban informality that seems to capture the main feature of plotting urbanism created major problems for our analysis. The difficulties with this concept are well known and have been widely discussed (Caldeira 2017; McFarlane 2012; Roy 2009b; Roy and AlSayyad 2004; see also Chapters 4 and 12). First of all, it is based on the binary conception of 'formal' and 'informal', when in reality the distinctions between these forms of regulations are often blurred and they often even overlap. Second, common definitions of informality rest on very broad understandings of formal and informal procedures, and therefore informality can take very different forms and be identified in highly diverse settings—including affluent neighbourhoods. Indeed, one of the results of our own comparative analysis was to identify two distinct urbanisation processes that are usually subsumed under the umbrella of urban informality: plotting urbanism and popular urbanisation. We define 'popular urbanisation', which we observed in Istanbul, Lagos and Kolkata, as a people-led process of land appropriation and settlement building based on collective action, self-organisation and the labour of the residents (see Chapter 12). In contrast, plotting urbanism is characterised by more individualised strategies of urban development and intensification of land use, strong processes of commodification as well as a marked socioeconomic differentiation between property owners and tenants. Popular urbanisation and plotting urbanism therefore refer to two distinct logics of urbanisation resulting in different urban outcomes. This distinction is not clear-cut, however. There may be hybrid or transitional forms where aspects of popular and

plotting urbanism can be observed at the same time in a given area. For instance, some level of commercialisation and certain tenant-ownership relations often accompany popular urbanisation (see Gilbert 1983).

In putting specific urbanisation processes in Shenzhen, Lagos, Istanbul and Kolkata in conversation with each other, the contours of a discrete urbanisation process with certain characteristics came to the fore, such as consolidation and intensification of the built-up structure, incremental urban development, ambivalent territorial regulations, landlord-tenant relationships and land speculation and commodification, particularly through rental housing. We finally arrived at the term *plotting*. It is useful for its many inferences: first, it can refer to the subdivision of land into individual plots with fragmented ownership or entitlement. Secondly, it focuses on the piecemeal plot-by-plot pattern of urbanisation over large areas that results in a more or less regular urban form that is clearly discernible in the urban fabric but emerges without an overarching plan. Thirdly, plotting alludes to controversial, strategic scheming, or even illegal actions in the production of the urban fabric at the individual or group level. And lastly, it evokes the various plot-lines that appear in official and non-official narratives about these places.<sup>1</sup>

The following section places the concept of plotting urbanism in relation to the wider analytical context and considers how to differentiate it from other closely related concepts. The chapter will then present the three case studies of Lagos, Istanbul and Shenzhen before offering a detailed definition of plotting urbanism and exploring some of the agendas and questions that this concept might raise. Although Kolkata formed an important part of the comparative discussions and conceptualisation of the process of plotting, the case study is not included here due to the additional degree of complexity a fourth case would have created as well as restrictions of length.

# TOWARDS A DIFFERENTIATED VOCABULARY OF INFORMALITY

Discomfort with the existing range of concepts to analyse urbanisation processes has been expressed for some time, particularly by postcolonial scholars. Thus, a series of heuristic concepts has been generated over the last two decades to grasp some specific but fleeting aspects of 'Southern' urbanisms, such as 'quiet encroachment' (Bayat 2000), 'occupancy urbanism' (Benjamin 2008), 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston 2009), 'incremental urbanism' (McFarlane 2011), 'the urban majority' (e.g. Simone and Rao 2012) and most recently 'peripheral urbanisation' (Caldeira 2017). Working from different analytical angles or entry points and not as a coherent body of work, these present a certain problematic: the prevalence of ordinary urbanisation processes in relatively poor neighbourhoods where local people are the primary agents of urbanism, which are organised across varying structures and scales and entangled with state actors in complex relationships. This is not to say that all these concepts engage with precisely the same processes, but they shed light on various aspects of widespread but not-easily-accounted-for urbanisation processes and outcomes.

Both Asef Bayat and AbdouMalik Simone have introduced concepts, based on ethnographic research, that address the role of individual and collective action in the absence of overarching organisation or mass mobilisation, which nevertheless achieve cumulative gains. Bayat's (2000) concept of the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' brings into perspective often overlooked forms of resistance by subaltern groups, highlighting mundane acts that become contentious politics and encroachments that are made without a clear leadership or organisation. In a similar vein Simone's collaborative work on Jakarta (Simone and Fauzan 2012; Simone and Rao 2012) and on Yangon (Simone 2018) uses the notion of an 'urban majority' to explore the articulations and workings of districts that are often located at the core of southern urban regions and are marked by a mix of various ways of life, class backgrounds and functions (Simone 2018: 23). This heuristic concept is not derived from a quantitative measurement of the urban population, but refers to a heterogeneous group of people that constitutes itself through various practices and relationships. This idea of a heterogeneous population that is invisible in its ubiquity but which becomes visible at certain times, for example as a voting body, is a powerful one.

Solomon Benjamin and James Holston re-emphasise the importance of modalities of claims to land and show how various groups can

manipulate specific power structures and legal instruments. They argue against simplistic understandings of power, politics, organisation and agency, and emphasise instead entanglement, multiplicity and complexity. In his concept of 'occupancy urbanism', Benjamin (2008) uses land as a conceptual entry point to look at highly politicised forms of urbanisms in India. He conceptualises cities as consisting of contested terrains constituted by multiple political spaces, all inscribed by complex local histories. With this concept he acknowledges the existence of a popular political consciousness that transcends passivity or exploitation and opens up a space of politics where poorer groups may engage various levels of the state but remain autonomous from it, and where low-level government agents and bureaucracy are in turn deeply embedded in local community politics. Turning to the urbanisation of the peripheries of Brazilian cities, Holston (2009) uses the term 'insurgent citizenship' to question notions of illegality, its distinction from legality, the relationship between land occupation and law and the entangled role of individuals, civil society and the state in shaping urban areas. Illegality and contradictory regulations and practices, instability and bureaucratic irresolution are shown not just as norms, but as what makes land occupation possible in Brazil, and constitute the means by which the urban poor and the subaltern make meaningful gains towards consolidation and security of tenure.

Referring to case studies from Sao Paulo, Istanbul, Santiago de Chile, Delhi and Mexico City, Teresa Caldeira (2017) develops the notion of 'peripheral urbanisation'. She uses the term 'peripheral' as a metaphor to characterise pervasive urban spaces that are produced in a very different way from North Atlantic urbanisms. Peripheral urbanisation is a broad concept that addresses the many different groups of people who are in poverty and live in inherently unstable neighbourhoods.

As this short review shows, there is already an important and inspiring body of work seeking to understand prevalent urban phenomena in southern urban contexts. These contributions conceptualise many aspects that we have also come across in our own case studies. However, the combination of aspects that our comparative analysis identified points to a specific multidimensional process of urbanisation. In the following section, we explore plotting urbanism in Lagos, Istanbul and Shenzhen, revealing that there are compelling similarities in the production of a dominant urbanisation process among these very diverse urban contexts. We finally outline a definition of plotting urbanism that might be relevant to other contexts and is therefore open to further discussion and revision.

# LAGOS: PLOTING AS THE ORDINARY PROCESS OF URBANISATION

Mr Ladipo<sup>2</sup> grew up in the 1960s in rental accommodation in Mushin, a plotted area on the mainland of Lagos that was already fully developed. At the end of the 1960s his father bought a plot in Ijesha, around 5 km away, but the family remained in Mushin for another ten years while they worked to consolidate the waterlogged land and build a couple of rooms at the new place. When they finally moved in, Ijesha was still ‘bush’, but it gradually filled up with people and the area was fully developed by the 1990s. They had bought the plot from the *omo onile* of that area, the customary landowners, and have never had to pay any further money to them since. *Omo onile* is a Yoruba term that literally means ‘son/child of the soil/land’. The first government intervention in Ijesha was when piped water was laid out in 1997. In 2012 Mr Ladipo’s father was required by the state government to pay a land use charge of around N 12,000 per year (US \$70)—now his rubbish is being collected. He has never tried to obtain formal documentation as he knows that to do so will mean paying twice, first to the *omo onile* (who might demand a repeat payment at the current market price) and then to the government for expensive title deeds (which cost up to

30 per cent of the land value). Mr Ladipo’s father initially built a ‘face-me-I-face-you’, a typical Lagos multi-family tenement building, renting out rooms and adding more floors as he could afford them. More recently he made the rooms self-contained with their own bathroom and hotplate, as he reasoned that people no longer want to share facilities. The family now owns several properties in the area and Mr Ladipo is a property agent. It is incredible to his father that properties in Ijesha are now selling for N 15 to 20 million (US \$85,000–115,000).

As the example presented above shows, plotting urbanism enables rapid urban development to occur in Lagos even though buildings on individual plots can take years if not decades to be finished. The typical face-me-I-face-you buildings, such as the one that Mr Ladipo’s family built, are concrete block tenements with four rooms mirrored over a central corridor with shared services at the end of each floor. They can be up to four storeys high and house an average of six people per room, and occupy up to 90 per cent of the plot area but they are always detached (Towry-Coker 2011). They are a ubiquitous idiom of Lagos life, filling neighbourhood after neighbourhood from the older central areas to the far reaches of the peripheries (Sawyer 2016).

This urbanisation process follows a highly individualised pathway, which is tailored to people’s personal circumstance, allowing some to become property owners and landlords without formal financing (Lawanson 2012). Because only a very few people can obtain a bank loan, people save

Lagos: peripheral plotted expansion. Ifo, 2013





over a long period of time and often take out smaller loans from religious, ethnic or home town membership groups (*esusu* savings groups). Plot-owners are thus already established in the area or in a membership group by the time they start to build. Likewise, people can obtain plots of land through customary landowners without having to resort to expensive and protracted bureaucratic procedures (Aina 1989a; Durand-Lasserve 2004; Lombard and Rakodi 2016). At the same time, plotting provides high volumes of affordable rental housing for the low-income tenants that form the majority of Lagos' residents. Yet this flexible and incremental urbanisation process also has its downside. First of all, it creates a huge social difference between the plot-owners and the tenants (Kumar 2011). Plot-owners have invested in their property and are established in the area; they may have saved or constructed buildings for years, but becoming an owner greatly increases their social standing (Barnes 1986). The masses of tenants however have few rights and, as the demand for rooms is so high, they are at the mercy of the landlords, who frequently raise the rents and often do not maintain their properties well (Oni and Durodola 2010). Yet being a tenant in a plotted area is a significant step up from living in even worse and more precarious areas of popular urbanisation with more flimsy buildings and little tenure security, and constitutes a viable option for a broad section of Lagos society, including students and civil servants.

Forged through more than a century of ambivalent governmental policies that officially condemned the development of plotted areas but did nothing to stop it, and constant political, economic and social instability as well as contradictory land policies, plotting urbanism can be seen as the prime model of urban development for the majority of Lagos (Sawyer 2016). However, few scholars have examined these vast areas as a meaningful object of study. A notable exception is Aina's work (1989b). Instead, urban research on Lagos tends to focus on the difficult living conditions, often taking the worst examples as representative of these very heterogeneous building types and areas, sometimes in the process giving rise to the classic 'slum city' narrative (Agbola and Agunbiade 2009; Davis 2006). However, most urban spaces in Lagos, even for the elite, face great infrastructural challenges. When even mansion owners have to organise their own sources of dependable power, water and sanitation, it is not access to publicly provided basic services that indicates wealth or poverty in Lagos, but the form and capacity of infrastructural services that the household can afford and obtain privately (Acey 2007). The need for nuanced distinctions also applies to material space: plotted areas can be highly heterogeneous both within and between neighbourhoods according to particular features, such as

access to transport links (and this differs among users of private cars and public transport) and proximity to markets (although being too close to a market is often seen as less safe). Wealthier streets are quieter, with less street activity, and plots are usually gated.

In general, the absence of building standard requirements and the lack of planning procedures, particularly in terms of densification and the provision of public space, has led to a low-quality building stock and an often degraded urban environment. However, this varies according to the relative wealth of the residents of a plot, street or area. For instance, there are high-capacity generators or cheap ones; residents may have a private borehole or need to buy water from vendors; they may employ a live-in security guard or put a gate across the end of the street at night (for more detail, see Sawyer 2014). Thus, plotting urbanism produces a finely differentiated urban fabric where services can be closely tailored to available resources and the personal circumstances of tenants and owners, and may vary from plot to plot. Recognising the viability of plotting urbanism and its affordability does not diminish the challenges faced daily by residents over the lack of publicly provided infrastructure. Thus, the strategies of plotting and individual service provision show both the potential and the limitations of urban development for most sectors of the population, almost entirely without any form of government intervention (Sawyer 2016).

While Mr Ladipo's case illustrates the pattern of plotting urbanism in Lagos, it is relatively unusual because he did not have to face any conflict over land (Akinleye 2009; Aluko 2012a). In many situations, the dual land system of Lagos has created unresolved contradictions and resulted in widespread contestations over ownership and land title. This dual land regime has existed in Lagos since the imposition of British law through colonisation in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Hopkins 1980; Mann 2007). The British colonial administration was never powerful enough to impose its land laws and planning regimes on the whole of Lagos (Peil 1991). Much of its power was focused on the central Lagos Island and Apapa port areas. To regulate and service the fast-growing areas of mainland Lagos, they leaned heavily on existing structures of customary authority to maintain minimal administration and turned a blind eye to the customary owners' extensive influence over land divisions (Barnes 1986). In this way, *omoluwabi* have continued to exert their social and political power on the urbanisation process and maintain their authority and legitimacy through their claims to the land (Vaughan 2000).

These disparities were even further exacerbated through the formal division of 'mainland Lagos' and the 'central district' between 1954 and 1967 as part of the creation of new regions in Nigeria that sought to more adequately represent and distribute power between the different ethnic groups (see



Williams 1975). The central district includes Lagos Island, Victoria Island and Lekki peninsula as well as Apapa, Ebute Metta, Yaba and the University of Lagos on the mainland side. Lagos mainland refers to the contiguous urban area beyond the central district. We use these two names here because the official names for these areas change frequently under different political regimes. As the central district was already densely populated at the time of this division, most growth largely occurred on the mainland, fuelled by colonial development, rural-urban migration, natural population growth and the urbanising effects of the Second World War (Harris and Parnell 2012). Plotting flourished under these conditions and the population more than tripled. What little formal development there was on the mainland at this time (mainly the development of Ikeja) served only as a catalyst for the process.

A series of military coups in 1966 started three decades of profound economic, political and social instability that further inhibited the implementation of large planned urban developments or housing programmes. In 1978 the national Land

Use Act was introduced with the aim of establishing a unified policy on land and tenure that would resolve some of the contradictions between statutory land law and customary practices that had emerged since colonisation. However, plotting continued to be the de facto mode of urbanisation for the mainland. The Land Use Act in fact served to compound the contradictions inherent in the dual land regime by enshrining the paradox of dual root titles in its pages; it is written in such a way as to recognise customary landowners' claims of an inalienable right to land at the same time as it vests all the urban land of Nigeria in the government (Aluko 2012b).

The bureaucratic procedures required by the Land Use Act are costly, protracted and prone to corruption, and consequently very few plot-owners in Lagos sought formal titles. Today, notarised documents of transactions from customary authorities are the norm and offer security comparable to formal titles. However, customary concepts of land tenure, particularly the inheritance of land and property, are not standardised and therefore are open to manipulation within and between both sides of the dual land regime, giving rise to a culture of conflicts in plotted areas. Newspapers and online forums are full of stories of people who have been duped in buying a plot, or who have lost their plot to omo onile making real or fraudulent claims to an indigenous right to land (Akinleye 2009). It is not uncommon to hear of someone having to pay for their plot again (or suffer losing it entirely), a decade or more after first buying it, in order to settle with a family member of the original seller who disputed the sale (Peil 1991). In these cases, both sides often have competing and contradictory documentation.

Today, plotting urbanism continues to transform Lagos, intensifying newly plotted areas at an ever-increasing rate and pushing the frontiers of the urban region outwards beyond the boundary of Lagos state into neighbouring Ogun state. Once-peripheral plotted areas, which now find themselves in the centre as a result of the rapidly growing urban region, are increasingly desirable to a broad section of upwardly mobile people and are now undergoing what might be understood as a second stage of plotting urbanism. As there is a rising demand for self-contained apartments, face-me-I-face-you buildings are being demolished to make way for more expensive and better serviced houses. While wealthy plot-owners buy more land and redevelop their plots, less affluent plot-owners are selling to small-scale developers and moving out to the periphery to buy a new plot, fuelling subsequent rounds of plotting (Sawyer 2016). Low-income tenants are particularly affected by these urban transformations because they are likely to be forced further out.

Since democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999 there has been a period of unprecedented political stability in the leadership of Lagos state and a strong political will to promote a consistent

Lagos; ordinary inner road, unpaved. Itire, 2014



Lagos; ordinary main road, paved. Mushin, 2013



urban development (Cheeseman and de Gramont 2017). However, urban planning has primarily focused on transportation infrastructure and continued to reinforce the central axis of development between the port, Ikeja, Victoria and Lagos Islands (see Lawanson and Agunbiade 2018). Recently, this central axis has been extended to the Lekki peninsula, which has been profoundly transformed by ‘bypass urbanism’ (see Chapter 14). In less central areas there has been some resurfacing of main connector roads and drainage canals have been constructed. In 2012 the Governor of Lagos state implemented house numbering that included most plotted areas. Nearly 90 per cent of the entire city has a waste collection service and water levies and taxes are more efficiently collected than before (even if the service paid for is not always provided). However, continuing their ambivalent approach to the plotted areas of Lagos, the state government is not directly involved in the process of plotting urbanism and has no plans for further formalisation. In the most recent master plans commissioned for the mainland area, most plotted areas are just designated ‘mixed residential’, without any explicit plans beyond widening the exterior main roads (Dar Al-Handasah 2011).

In light of these ambiguities and contradictions, the future of plotting urbanism in Lagos remains open. The most pressing question for future urbanisation is how to improve the legal situation for plot-owners and tenants without unbalancing the complex social, political and regulatory status quo that helps maintain the various advantages, such as flexibility and affordability, offered by this urbanisation process.

## ISTANBUL: PLOTTING AS CONSOLIDATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF THE GECEKONDU

In the late 1980s Ahmet’s family—originally from Turkey’s Black Sea region—lived as tenants in Bağcılar, a rapidly transforming popular neighbourhood at the time. Ahmet bought a plot of illegally divided agricultural land in an emerging neighbourhood in the western outskirts of Istanbul. In 1991 he started to construct a house, without the necessary permits. He built the first two floors employing handymen but did not move in immediately. A year later, seeing that the neighbourhood was developing, he moved in permanently and continued to improve his building over the years, bribing inspectors along the way. Currently his building stands five storeys tall. The first three floors are complete; he benefits from two businesses located at the ground floor that he rents out. The last two floors with four apartments remain unfinished. He now has the resources to complete construction but is waiting for legal uncertainties to be resolved before he is prepared to invest further. He estimates that he can charge 300 TRY (US \$133) monthly rent per apartment, which would be a decent source of income.<sup>3</sup>





This story from a resident of Istanbul's vast urban peripheries exemplifies a phenomenon that goes beyond the notion of *gecekondu*, a form of low-cost popular housing that initially emerged in the form of provisional shanties usually constructed on state-owned land. The *gecekondus* were constructed and extended by their inhabitants and later went through phases of densification and commodification. From the late 1940s onwards *gecekondus* provided much needed housing for rural-urban migrants, whose labour power was indispensable for the rapidly growing and industrialising economy of Istanbul. We use the term 'popular urbanisation' to designate such areas constructed through the collective efforts of their inhabitants (see Chapter 12).

In the decades that followed, thanks to clientelist networks and populist policies, *gecekondu* areas were transformed into dense urban neighbourhoods. Several laws sought to control and legalise *gecekondu* areas (known as *gecekondu afları*, 'gecekondu amnesties'). The Gecekondu Law of 1966 was a landmark piece of legislation in this process because it recognised the existence of *gecekondu* areas and prescribed policies towards their containment and improvement (Şenyapılı 1998: 311; Tekeli 1992: 68–69). In increasing tenure security, however, it also facilitated the commodification of the *gecekondus* and the quality of buildings and infrastructure improved visibly (Tekeli 1998: 19). In subsequent stages, single storey *gecekondus* were replaced with multistorey reinforced concrete structures alongside the entrenchment of informal land markets (Şenyapılı 1992; Tekeli 1992: 91–92), while some *gecekondus* were even started with subsequent vertical extensions in mind; namely, as the first storey of an extendable reinforced concrete structure. This process of vertical development was particularly striking during election periods, when the authorities preferred to turn a blind eye to illegal expansions (Keyder 2005: 126; Öncü 1988: 47). The truly dramatic transformation of *gecekondu* areas occurred following a series of amnesty laws issued in the wake of the military coup of 1980 to legalise and regulate informal housing. Thus began a period of intensive plotting urbanism in Istanbul.

These amnesty laws, the most important of which is Law 2981 from 1984, issued amnesties for *gecekondus* and for unauthorised constructions on illegally subdivided agricultural land. Beyond granting residents assurance against eviction, these amnesties also explicitly allowed the upzoning of many low-density *gecekondu* neighbourhoods (Ekinci 1998). This opened the floodgates to speculation (Duyar-Kienast 2005) and ushered in what Orhen Esen (2011) calls the post-*gecekondu* period. *Gecekondu* owners were issued title assignment documents (*tapu tahsis belgesi*), which are essentially written promises they would get a legal title deed pending the execution of an improvement plan (*islah imar planı*) by the local authorities. Many *gecekondu* neighbourhoods attained legality through this policy while some still remained in a limbo when, for various reasons, the municipalities did not implement an improvement plan. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s the central government kept on issuing new legislation to regulate unlawfully developed areas (for details see Tercan 2018).

The availability of funding schemes and the procedure of plotting urbanism depend largely on the locational advantage of an area and the degree of tenure security that is in place. In areas with low demand for renting, plot owners rely on their individual resources and are often personally involved in the construction of a dwelling

Istanbul; old and new plotting. Esenyurt, 2014



Istanbul; urban landscape shaped by plotting in the 1980s and 1990s. Zeytinburnu, 2012





(Şenyapılı 1992). The vertical extension of the structure proceeds in different stages, as political and economic opportunities arise. In areas developed through self-financing the intensity of plotting tends to be limited, often blurring the distinctions between popular urbanisation and plotting (for instance, in the case of building on an additional storey for a family member). In areas where demand is high and with locational advantages, plotting is based on *yapsatçılık* (build-and-sell) (Duyar-Kienast 2005; Esen 2011; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Ozdemir 1999). In this model, individual owners strike deals with contractors. The plot (which typically includes the footprint of the built structure as well as outdoor spaces such as a garden and courtyard) is redeveloped as a multistorey apartment building. The owner and the contractor negotiate the share of flats to be handed over to the contractor. In parallel with the replacement of *gecekondus* by multistorey buildings in the 1980s and 1990s, another form of plotting urbanism became prominent, in which vast segments of peripheral districts of Istanbul (such as in Sultanbeyli, Altınşehir) were newly developed on illegally occupied or subdivided land (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Öncü 1988; Yonder 1987). Here, rather than replacing an existing *gecekond*, plotting entailed constructing an apartment building directly on an empty plot, although often in an incremental way.

It is often argued that the development of informal land markets and the vertical redevelopment of *gecekondus* alleviated the negative effects of the neoliberal transition of the 1980s, which weakened redistributive state mechanisms, deepened socioeconomic inequalities and increased labour precarity (Başlevent and Dayıoğlu 2005; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 82–83, 165; Şenyapılı 1998). By overlooking and in some cases even providing

incentives for squatting through frequent amnesties, and later by providing the legal framework for plotting, the state effectively offered a source to compensate for the negative effects of neoliberalisation. The amnesties also instilled an ethic of home ownership and provided incentives for precarious social groups with potentially subversive political inclinations to become profit-seeking owner-citizens (see e.g. Erman 2001: 987). *Gecekond* residents actively lobbied borough councils and participated in local politics—often pragmatically switching party affiliations—so as to advance their property interests and legitimise retroactively the unauthorised structures that they had already erected (Esen 2011: 480). It is also during this time that the dominant representation of *gecekond* residents changed from being the disadvantaged Other to the undeserving rich Other (Erman 2001).

Increasing commercialisation of land development under plotting has most notoriously manifested itself in a fierce competition to capture wealth based on land rent, the entrenchment of a rentier class and the exploitation of the poorest segments of the population (Bugra 1998; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 82; Payne 2001). While some of the additional apartments are usually reserved for relatives who get married, the rest are sold or rented out. In prime locations the incentives for commodification can be very strong (Esen 2011). In their analysis of the commodification of informal housing and the increasing precariousness of the urban poor, Işık and Pınarcıoğlu (2001) propose the term ‘rotating poverty’ to characterise the situations in which certain segments of the urban poor, notably those who arrive first, are able to accumulate wealth at the expense of latecomers. They use the case of Sultanbeyli, a hitherto peripheral rural area that was informally parcelised and rapidly settled using



Istanbul; a vestige of *gecekond* amidst plotting urbanism. Zeytinburnu, 2012

religious-communitarian networks, to demonstrate that those who participate in the earlier rounds of land occupation get the lion's share of land rents, and latecomers join the network as secondary buyers or tenants. The creation of wealth under this system is dependent on new members joining and constant growth (Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001). There is a reverse correlation between the date of migration and possibilities for upward socioeconomic mobility, as Altınoluk and Enlil show in their detailed study of this pyramid-like scheme in Istanbul's Çeliktepe neighbourhood. In the 1990s and early 2000s the losers of rotating poverty were often Kurdish citizens displaced as a result of the armed conflict in south-east Turkey (Altınoluk and Enlil 2008). A large portion of recent tenants are international migrants, including refugees from Syria.

Another obvious downside of plotting is the poor environmental and material quality of the resulting urban areas (Duyar-Kienast 2005: 27–29). Under conditions of continuing growth in real estate markets, and within the framework of a populist approach to unauthorised urbanisation, most of what used to be low-density *gecekondu* neighbourhoods and peripheral agricultural land was urbanised rapidly and in a haphazard fashion, resulting in a low quality of building construction. Even though improvement plans by local authorities sought to ameliorate the situation, their impact was limited due to the *de facto* nature of development and the ongoing violation of building codes. Especially in high rent areas, the owners built more storeys than was permitted and encroached on common ground. There was practically no oversight on the quality of construction and the structural robustness of the buildings. In some extreme cases this resulted in tunnel-like streets with up to six-storey buildings on both sides. Parks and other public areas are rare and if they exist they are often found in small corners left over from the construction flurry. Zeytinburnu, one of the earliest *gecekondu* settlements dating back to the late 1940s, which experienced heavy plotting in the 1980s and 1990s, is a prime example of this. In his meticulous documentation of Zeytinburnu, Akçay (1974: 27) mentions rows of fruit and ornamental trees, behind which 'gecekondus become invisible'. The physical situation today, characterised by a dense jungle of reinforced concrete is a far cry from that. Çetin, a shop owner in Zeytinburnu, was born and raised there.<sup>4</sup> Recalling his childhood in the 1970s he spoke about houses with gardens and trees and how he spent his time playing on the streets with his friends. In contrast, his children are stuck at home, as there is no space for them to play. 'Now everywhere is full of cars ... I want to send my daughters swimming. But there is no place. Everywhere is full of houses. No empty space. They sit at home.' The dramatic increase in density and population was in many places accompanied by

the anonymisation of interpersonal relations (Ayata 1989; Özdemir 1999) and the increase in petty crime (Yonucu 2008).

Plotting in Istanbul came to a near halt in the early 2000s as a combined consequence of the severe economic crisis of 2001 and the ravages of the 1999 earthquake, which claimed hundreds of lives and revealed the poor quality of construction. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which came to power in the wake of the crisis, initiated an agenda of 'urban transformation' and fortified the Turkish Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) as its main agent (Karaman 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Türkün 2014). This top-down model of renewal faced resistance from residents and did not have a significant impact. In this context, plotting has resurfaced in many former *gecekondu* areas (such as in Gaziosmanpaşa and Esenyurt). This latest wave of plotting differs from the previous ones in two respects: firstly, the material quality of construction is vastly superior; secondly, these new buildings usually follow zoning and building codes. Nonetheless, local power relations and negotiations are still crucial for the outcome.

These various examples show that the trajectories of plotting in Istanbul are very diverse and result in uneven patterns of urbanisation and urban landscapes. These are shaped by various factors, most notably tenure and landownership status, proximity to centralities and connectivity to main transport axes (Esen 2011: 485–486; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001: 167; Şenyapılı 1998: 313). While districts such as Zeytinburnu and Bağcılar are heavily plotted today, some sections of Gaziosmanpaşa, Ümraniye, Sarıyer and Maltepe, among others, maintain their low-rise *gecekondu* character.

Istanbul bears the heavy imprint of plotting in its urban fabric today. Thanks to plotting, precarious settlements have turned into dense robust neighbourhoods and peripheral agricultural land has been rapidly urbanised. These settlements have provided housing for Istanbul's 'urban majority' and have so far proven to be very resistant to top-down schemes to redevelop them. Since the mid-2000s various urban renewal schemes have been attempted, with limited success. Meanwhile, plotted neighbourhoods are slowly being upgraded (in some cases at higher densities) at the scale of individual buildings, and new plotted neighbourhoods continue to emerge—albeit at smaller scales than in the 1980s and 1990s.



# SHENZHEN: PLOTTING AS A CONTRADICTIONARY CATALYST FOR RAPID URBANISATION

Looking from the 100<sup>th</sup> floor of the Kingkey tower in the financial centre of Luohu one may discern, in the midst of dozens of commercial skyscrapers, a cluster of closely packed seven to ten-storey buildings with thin lines of alleys and streets between them. This is Caiwuwei, whose high-density urban form with bustling street life contrasts strongly with its well-organised and controlled surroundings filled with skyscrapers, shopping malls, office blocks and condominium towers. One can also stroll around the grungy and narrow alleys of places like Hubeicun, Sungang and Baishizhou, with tangled electric and internet wires overhead, water dripping from air-conditioners and sewer lines underfoot. These are all urbanised villages, or *chengzhongcun* (villages-in-the-city), which are commonly represented as composed of 'hand-shaking buildings', or building spaces that leave open only 'a line of sky' because of the countless narrow alleys running between the buildings. In fact, these seemingly haphazardly constructed settlements formed the very basis of the growth of the contemporary urban region of Shenzhen, consisting of 12 million inhabitants in 2016 (Shenzhen Statistics Bureau 2017).

In 1980, when Deng Xiaoping declared Shenzhen as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), it was a rural area located in Bao'an county between Hong Kong and Dongguan, with fields surrounding the small town of Shenzhen. Village collectives owned the land and exercised rural government functions inherited from the people's communes. The central government established a SEZ of 327 km<sup>2</sup> in the southern part of Bao'an county on the border with Hong Kong. As a forerunner of the future national economic policy, the administrative status of Shenzhen was reshuffled from a county (*xian*) to a city (*shi*). In 1988 the city government was directly subordinated to the central government in terms of economic planning. However, this administrative reshuffle created a legal twilight zone in which rural and city government systems coexisted and became interwoven, which soon produced a whole series of contradictions and conflicts.

The first problem emerged from the fact that much of the land belonged to the village collectives, while the city only owned three square kilometres of land surrounding the former Shenzhen town (SUPLAB 1999). Since the land rights of the villages were strongly upheld in national law, the city government had to acquire farmland and compensate the village collectives, as well as offer jobs to the villagers affected. In order to promote urban

development, the government introduced a new policy of land exchange: it acquired farmland while granting the village collectives the right to develop a portion of their own farmland into industrial and commercial zones ('non-agricultural land'), thereby enabling the creation of jobs and an additional income for the villagers (Zhang et al. 2003). However, this pragmatic solution in turn triggered subsequent contradictions because it created a dual institutional structure in regard to land development. On the one hand, land owned by the state was delegated to the city of Shenzhen; this land was defined as urban land and could be used for housing, industrial and commercial uses. On the other hand, the land of the village collectives retained its rural designation. This dual land policy led to a contradictory urban development process: while the city government started to develop the urban land according to master plans, it created at the same time the institutional framework for the village collectives to participate in the urbanisation process and also to develop their rural land. Throughout the 1980s, villagers were encouraged to construct new one- to two-storey concrete buildings with courtyards, which soon sparked the massive expansion of the settlement areas of the villages. As a consequence, the village collectives continued to own and manage their inherited land, while the city government enacted new building codes and regulations for this rural land, but relied on the village leaders to implement both (Wang et al. 2009). A policy of red lining





was applied to demarcate village boundaries and to contain their expansion. However, during the late 1980s, villages started to build houses on farmland outside the red lines, but only on a modest scale (Wang et al. 2009). This practice, which villagers understood to be conforming to their collective rights, was deemed illegal by the city government. Thus, the co-evolution and overlapping of the divided spaces of rural and urban government generated a legal twilight zone (Ho 2001) and led to the development of the spatial form of urbanising villages, a kind of rural-urban interface emerging alongside the expanding urban areas controlled by the city of Shenzhen. In this way, plotting urbanism started in Shenzhen.

During the 1980s Shenzhen legalised the transfer of land-use rights through several rounds of amendments, thereby accelerating urban development (Ng and Tang 2004b). In 1988 another amendment to the Constitution was approved by the National People's Congress, allowing local governments to lease state-owned land to private developers (see Lin and Ho 2005). This fuelled the widespread transformation of farmland into urban development zones throughout the 1990s, widely known as land fever (Cartier 2001). Immediately after this reform, the Shenzhen government accelerated the pace and scale of urban development and eventually deprived many villagers of their landownership rights. In 1989 it imposed an ambitious, forceful and systematised urbanisation

strategy within the SEZ. This included a large-scale programme of farmland acquisition, which aimed at increasing the land reserve of the government for urban expansion, and at the same time sought to remove the administrative barriers that had emerged from the previous piecemeal land acquisition. To do so, it reclassified all rural land, giving it the status of state-owned land (administrative-allocated land), on which village collectives could hold land-use rights as leaseholders (Shenzhen Urban Planning Bureau 2005). According to the Constitution, the procedure for changing rural land into state land would have necessitated land expropriation and compensation; instead, the practice the Shenzhen government adopted was to simply reclassify all collective landownership as state-owned land. Additionally, the Shenzhen government had to integrate the existing rural collective system through a policy of 'rural urbanisation' for all villages in the SEZ—at the time, about 46,000 villagers were registered in 173 villages within the SEZ (Shenzhen Museum 1999: 383–384). This administrative restructuring meant granting the status of urban residence (*hukou*—see below) to the villagers and it also included the transformation of rural cooperatives into (modern) shareholding companies.

The purpose of these reforms was to abandon the dual land regime, to eliminate the institutional barriers between rural and urban systems and to impose urban standards of administration and planning across all village land. The then Party leaders promoted these changes as part of the modernisation of Shenzhen by integrating the rural into the urban society (*chengxiang yitihua*) (Shenzhen Museum 1999: 383). However, this top-down strategy triggered widespread discontent amongst the villagers, who responded to it with a massive wave of plotting through the illegal conversion of land and constructing buildings.<sup>5</sup> Plotting thus became a form of resistance through which villagers opposed government policies by occupying land, thus defending their land rights on the ground. This is a well-known practice of peasants in China, called *zhongfang baodi*, meaning 'planting houses, defending land' (Nanfang Zhoumo 2014).

Since the late 1980s plotting has also taken place in the outer zone beyond the SEZ border, in a vast area of about 1700 km<sup>2</sup> located in Bao'an county. While the *chengzhongcun* inside the SEZ gradually developed into densely built urban areas, the villages beyond the SEZ border (*er xian guan*), for example, in Shiyan, Longgang and Shajing, were urbanised as a result of the spillover of industrial development from the SEZ. The outer zone thus developed into an assorted and fragmented urban landscape, because the agricultural plots around traditional villages were subdivided into industrial districts, multi-storeyed buildings, gated housing estates, markets or government buildings and public facilities, somehow connected by the ever-expanding highways and metro lines (UPDIS and UESPKU 1998).



Shenzhen; village towers for Foxconn workers. Longhua, 2012

The conditions for plotting in the outer zone were different from those in the SEZ (see Ma and Blackwell 2017), because of the various conflicts that emerged among the different actors involved in the development and regulation of the land, including the county government, the town governments, village collectives, village households and the city government. In order to accelerate land development, the city government of Shenzhen made several attempts to gain control over the entire territory outside the SEZ. Firstly, in 1993 it changed the territorial system so that the city government could unify and control the planning process within the whole territory of Shenzhen. Secondly, in 2002, it started to convert the rural village system and to integrate the collective landownership under urban administration; a measure that affected a much larger territory than the previous administrative reorganisation of the SEZ had done. However, even as these changes were being pursued, local officials were informally issuing housing permits, while village cadres and villagers illegally subdivided farmland for various purposes and made a profit from the sale of unofficial land leases, which finally contributed to the failure of the implementation of the new land policies (UPDIS and UESPKU 1998). These changes created conflicts over land interests and eventually led to widespread resistance by villagers through plotting the land, especially at some prime locations. Many villagers hesitated to register their properties or to sign an agreement of new landownership because by doing so they would acquire land-use rights for only 70 years and lose their landownership rights permanently. A new burst of plotting emerged after 1999 when the government announced new regulations against illegal construction. In 2001, a new policy of legalisation was introduced for some illegal structures, which fuelled another round of plotting because some villagers perceived this as an opportunity to maximise the floor space eligible for legalisation.

To summarise, the recurrent emergence of plotting urbanism in Shenzhen has been driven by various attempts by the city government to extend its control over the territory: (1) Whenever the government sought to overcome the resistance of the villagers through institutional changes, new contradictions and ambiguities were the result (O'Donnell 2017; O'Donnell et al. 2017), spurring further rounds of plotting. (2) For each round of land acquisition, the government had to cede a portion of the land to the villages and thus plotting expanded further. (3) Another contradiction arose when the reclassification of land rights deprived villagers of their inheritable land. But even after shareholding companies and villagers lost their land title, they continued to act as *de facto* landowners (Hao et al. 2012; Lai et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2003).

Thus, through plotting, villages could generate and sustain increasing rents and market values, even if most buildings did not have official documentation.

It is telling that plotting urbanism has been officially considered as 'villages boycotting' the policies of the government.<sup>6</sup> As noted by Bach (2010), although these villages lost their rural status they retained the discursive and spatial imprint of villages in the city. In the entire city of Shenzhen, between 1999 and 2004 the total number of illegal buildings (both residential and industrial) grew from 240,000 to 350,000 (Shenzhen Urban Planning Bureau 2005). In 2014, the total number of illegal buildings (residential and industrial) was 373,000, 87 per cent of which were located in areas outside the SEZ (Shenzhen Tequ Bao 2016). As a result, plotting urbanism has left a fundamental mark on the urbanisation of Shenzhen: it has enabled the clustering of small and medium-sized industrial companies and the construction of various types of infrastructure and facilities within village areas. It also produced a huge rental housing market: about 38 per cent of Shenzhen's total residential floor space in 2009 was located in plotted areas (Hao 2015). In short, the villages developed into mixed neighbourhoods for a rapidly growing, heterogeneous population coming from different provinces. They offered a great range of concrete possibilities available to migrants to organise their everyday lives, establish small businesses and maintain their relationships with their home towns.

Plotting urbanism in Shenzhen thus had a twofold effect: it supported massive and rapid urbanisation and it fostered the creation of a new rentier class with the transformation of village collectives into real estate shareholding companies. As Bach notes (2010: 433), 'Shenzhen's villages became as much an experiment with the market as the [special economic] zone itself'. This process of commodification also profoundly changed the social relationships between local villagers and their tenants. The key to understanding this strongly asymmetrical and unequal social relationship is the Chinese *hukou* system, which continues to impose a dual structure of rural and urban household registration after 1978, tying a large part of the rural population to their original home towns to obtain education, health and social services, thereby also affecting their social status in urban societies (Hao et al. 2013; Wang et al. 2009, 2010; Zhang 2005; Zhang et al. 2003). The state controls internal migration with this system, and in the course of rapid urbanisation it also allows the state to limit rural-urban migration to avoid additional burdens on welfare and social facilities for cities (Buckingham and Chan 2018; Chan 1996, 2009; Fan 1999). The Shenzhen government also used the *hukou* system as a bargaining instrument by offering urban *hukou* to local villagers in return for their landownership rights. Nevertheless, many villagers have been reluctant to give up their land rights for urban status. Moreover, many of the migrants to whom the city of Shenzhen had offered the *hukou* were equally reluctant to accept this trade-off, because they wanted to secure their investments in houses or businesses in their

Shenzhen: workers' dormitories. Luohu, 2012





urbanising home towns, where they expected to return someday.<sup>7</sup> Due to their rural hukou, many migrants have not settled down in a specific city but continue to migrate to different places. However, these migrants are extremely heterogeneous: while there are a great number of floating rural migrant workers, there are also small traders, shop owners, street vendors, people who are self-employed, partly employed or daily workers, or students living and working in the chengzhongcun.

The most recent round of plotting—though relatively limited in scope—started as a reaction to a new urban renewal policy announced by the city government of Shenzhen in 2004, based on the demolishing and redeveloping of chengzhongcun; a strategy that has also been launched in many other Chinese cities (Zhang 2005: 225). In the following years, urban renewal became a new strategy for economic growth and a proposed solution to land shortage. While the new system enabled market forces to produce new urban spaces by offering various incentives to developers (Hin and Xin 2011), it was also deeply motivated by the political agenda of dismantling a large number of illegal chengzhongcun.

Despite the fact that government and media discourses represented the chengzhongcun as problematic, many scholars point to the positive roles that urbanised villages play in the Chinese urbanisation process and highlight the negative social impacts of redevelopment projects (Hao et al. 2012; Song et al. 2008; Wang et al. 2010; Zhang 2005). There are still many chengzhongcun in Shenzhen, but urban renewal has become the new dominant model of urbanisation.

## DEFINING PLOTTING URBANISM

The concept of plotting urbanism allows us to understand the production of certain low-income and highly dynamic neighbourhoods from a new angle. It results from comparing an unusual combination of case studies and captures a multidimensional urbanisation process that has not been conceptualised so far. As the discussion of the three case studies reveals, plotting urbanism occurs in very different socioeconomic contexts. It is underpinned by various political constellations and follows divergent pathways. What keeps these examples in the same category? How can plotting be identified as a distinct process of urbanisation? What are its core characteristics? Despite obvious differences and idiosyncrasies, these examples show remarkable commonalities that can be summarised in four main points. Firstly, plotting unfolds in a piecemeal and incremental way, plot by plot, either escaping or bypassing—at least partly—comprehensive planning efforts. Secondly, plotting expresses and brings to life a specific social relationship to the land, which is based on various ambiguities that are temporarily stabilised by some sort of a territorial compromise between landowners, plot-owners and state actors. This compromise is often based on the conflict-ridden overlap of formal and informal regimes of territorial regulation, land tenure and property rights, and can also include traditional or customary rules. Thirdly, plotting is usually based on the commodification of housing, including in some cases highly speculative land markets. It thus rests upon the exploitation of the rent gap generated through processes of urban extension and urban intensification. Fourthly, the distinction between property-owners (as rentiers) and their tenants, who often live in the same neighbourhood or even the same building, creates specific social relationships and even conflicts in everyday life. However, as our examples clearly show, the power relations between divergent interests change constantly, eventually shifting the dynamics that led to the status quo of plotting in the first place, dismantling the territorial compromise and nudging plotting urbanism onto a different pathway of urbanisation.

### PLOTTING IS A PIECEMEAL AND INCREMENTAL PROCESS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Plotting unfolds incrementally, either as new construction at the urban peripheries or as the intensification of existing settlements. The transformation of plots by their owners, often by the piecemeal addition of new rooms, floors or houses, but sometimes also by replacing entire buildings, forms the material basis of the process. This piecemeal





aspect marks the fundamental difference between plotting and the production of mass housing, as well as the development of condominiums and the construction of 'regular' individual homes. The latter are usually based on comprehensive housing policies and state spatial strategies, follow planning regulations to a certain degree and often use standard layouts and floor plans. While plotting might also be marked by a more or less standard house type, as in the case of the face-me-I-face-you buildings in Lagos, the yapsat apartment building typology in Istanbul and the housing towers in Shenzhen, its concrete realisation also depends greatly on various circumstances, political constellations and individual decisions, which can create a wide variety of urban outcomes. Everyday experience in such neighbourhoods may vary considerably, depending on the particular social situation: the often cramped and crowded plotted neighbourhoods can offer space for a wide range of small businesses and activities on the basement or ground floors, resulting in a lively street life. Plotted areas have a great capacity to adapt easily to changing social and economic conditions, together with the potential for developing more robust urban qualities over time. Simone's (2014) analysis of everyday experiences in mixed districts of central Jakarta illustrate the everyday difficulties and qualities experienced in such neighbourhoods.

However, the predominance of a speculative logic and the lack of comprehensive planning also lead to ambivalent urban outcomes. As actors seek to maximise the exploitation of individual plots, this often results in the lack of public spaces and utilities, dense neighbourhoods with inadequate infrastructure, limited outdoor spaces and inconvenient layouts—all common features of plotting. When up to seven-storey buildings have been constructed on the original plots, eliminating all green space, as in Istanbul's former *gecekondu* neighbourhoods, the streets end up with a claustrophobic, tunnel-like quality. Many *chengzhongcun* in Shenzhen present extreme examples of residential density, with building facades almost touching each other while sparing only 'a line of sky'. Plotting in Lagos unfolds even in the complete absence of any formal planning, often resulting in a low quality of construction, as frequent building collapses testify.

Nevertheless, the piecemeal and individualistic aspects of plotting do not imply that the state or collective agencies are absent. While in Lagos even the procurement of basic infrastructural services is individualised, in Istanbul and Shenzhen state institutions intervene—with varying degrees of effectiveness—to contain, regulate and even provoke or encourage plotting. In addition to state actors, elements of collective organising and community ties also determine outcomes to some extent. Individual actors are constrained by the construction know-how and technology available and are strongly influenced by dominant models

of houses and apartment layouts, and of course their calculations about the profitability of their efforts. Thus, thousands of individual actors may end up following similar trajectories as a result of collaboration, imitation, adaptation, path dependency and the varying constraints imposed by state actors. Entire neighbourhoods with distinctive features, facilities and small businesses thus emerge without using master plans but by constant testing, negotiating and muddling through.

#### PLOTTING EMERGES AS THE RESULT OF A SPECIFIC TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE

Plotting emerges under specific conditions of regulatory ambiguity and recurrent negotiations. We call this situation a territorial compromise resulting from a combination of traditional property rights, hard-fought collective claims and the formal 'legal' rules backed by state institutions. Such territorial compromises often emerge from unresolved conflicts over land and tenure, which may impede further development but may also offer opportunities to a variety of actors involved—such as landowners, plot-owners, customary authorities, state officials and small-scale developers—to make a profit. Because it constitutes a significant investment in land, and competing land rights are difficult to resolve, plotting may be an important strategy for asserting a claim over land and strengthening the owner's negotiating power. Therefore, village collectives, community groups, social movements, religious communities as well as mafia-like organisations can wield a major influence on plotting urbanism, depending on their level of organisation and the political resources they are able to mobilise. In this context, informality and illegality constitute important elements in disputes over land as ways of imposing the 'facts on the ground'. However, this kind of territorial compromise is usually not stable, as it is open to challenge or renegotiation by any of the actors involved.

In Istanbul the conflicts and negotiations underlying plotting urbanism evolved as part of long-standing processes of the consolidation of popular neighbourhoods, as they developed from squatting and tolerated illegality at the beginning to a kind of negotiated and regulated illegality, and finally to regularisation. These uncertainties about shifting rules and regulations found their expression in continuous negotiations over claims to land and development rights, and the frequent amnesties given to illegal settlements finally led to the gradual regularisation of informal areas. In Shenzhen plotting was based on the entrenched ambiguity of control over the land and its designation as rural or urban, manifesting itself in enduring conflicts among village collectives, individual villagers and the city government. In this context,

plotting became the main process driving land transformation and housing production. The village collectives were able to navigate and make use of the constant changes to the territorial governing system and challenge the government's land grab over the course of Shenzhen's urbanisation. Plotting was thus a way of claiming space and of increasing the negotiating power of the villagers, and it was a very effective strategy of resistance to the imposition of state control over village land. As a consequence, the villagers managed to play a key role in the urbanisation process itself and finally became co-owners of shareholding companies and thus developers in their own right. In Lagos, plotting is based on the dual regimes of formal and customary landholding. On the one hand, this duality creates the contradiction between plot-owners and customary land-owners, who are often wealthy families and who use (and often misuse) their claim to the land. On the other hand, it also functions as a driving force for the urban process, making land available on a plot-by-plot basis and thus allowing high volumes of affordable rental housing to be produced for low-income tenants. In a situation where people have learned to expect little from state agencies or from customary authorities, this also resulted in the extensive self-provisioning of urban services. This particular situation has developed over many decades, during which plotting has become the dominant process of urbanisation in Lagos.

#### PLOTTING IS BASED ON THE COMMODIFICATION OF HOUSING AND THE EXPLOITATION OF THE RENT GAP

Various forms of commodification play a key role in the process of plotting. In contrast to popular urbanisation, social housing and forms of cooperative housing in which the use value predominates, plotting is an important instrument for generating and extracting exchange value from the land and thus for realising the potential rent gap in the area. Neil Smith (1996) defines the rent gap, in the context of the gentrification debate, as the difference between the amount of rent the current landowner extracts from a plot and the potential ground rent that could be realised if the land were redeveloped to reach its maximum profit. Adapting this definition for our purposes, we focus on the intensification and marketisation of land use (see also Ozdemir 1999)—rather than on realising the full potential of the rent gap through redevelopment or refurbishment. This revised definition follows Shatkin's (2017) understanding of the rent gap in his comparative analysis of mega real estate projects in Asia. He proposes to decontextualise the concept of the rent gap from the concept of gentrification and its Euro-American settings in order to make it

applicable to a broader set of situations. He shows how the extraction of emergent rent gaps is not only a source of profit for corporations but also a means for states to consolidate and expand their power. As he observes, 'the prevalence of dualistic land rights regimes constrains the commodification of urban space and the realization of land rents' (Shatkin 2017: 28). As the case of plotting urbanism shows, the rent gap may indeed be generated through the stabilisation of land regulations and formalisation of land titles, which might turn dwelling units with low exchange value into assets that are formally recognised and may become instruments for wealth creation (see e.g. on 'dead capital', de Soto 2000). In contrast to mega real estate projects, individual property owners and small-scale contractors, not the state and large corporations, are the primary beneficiaries of plotting. And in contrast to gentrification, commodification by plotting does not necessarily result in the large-scale displacement of residents and small businesses. Even though original tenants may end up being displaced due to increasing rents (see Ozdemir 1999), the outcome of plotting is mostly intensification and densification and thus results in a net increase of housing for people on a low-income.

#### PLOTTING INVOLVES SPECIFIC TENANT-OWNER RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship between landlords or plot-owners and tenants shapes the social and political situation in plotted neighbourhoods in significant ways. In offering newcomers and immigrants relatively affordable housing, plot-owners have the opportunity to maximise revenue and accumulate wealth over time. Owning a plot of land, or ultimately a share in a real estate company, can significantly increase one's social standing and can be vital to participating in local politics and decision-making. The particularities of the tenant-owner relationship depend on the degree of densification, the level of immigration and the specific property rights in place. In the case of Lagos, plot-owners own the entire building and sometimes live in the building they own until they accumulate enough savings to relocate to newly constructed buildings with better amenities. This example approximates to a certain tenement logic, as is illustrated by Huchzermeyer's (2011) study of contemporary tenement formations in Nairobi. In the case of Istanbul, a strong condominium law, which confers ownership rights based on individual apartments, undermined the grounds for a full-fledged tenement concept to be realised: in a single apartment building one may find the original plot-owners, new homeowners who have purchased units from the original owners or the contractor and tenants. In high demand areas former *gecekondu* owners were able to accumulate some wealth,

often at the expense of newly arrived migrants who could find housing only as tenants. In Shenzhen, the income from rents has been a major tool of wealth generation as villages were transformed from agricultural collectives into property empires. While the villagers usually remain in the area, they inhabit separate and better quality housing than the migrant labourers living in the plotted houses constructed by the villagers. In recent years the shareholding companies owned by the villagers have effectively sold their plots to great profit, thus bringing to an end the process of plotting and giving way to large-scale urban renewal projects that eventually lead to significant upgrading as well as displacement.

## CONCLUSION

In our research we detected a process that we conceptualise under the term ‘plotting urbanism’ that goes beyond ‘urban informality’ or specific ‘Southern’ forms of urbanisation. Plotting offers a pragmatic and viable solution to the concrete problem of urban development in specific contexts, where there is not enough affordable housing, access to land is restricted and territorial regulations are unclear, ambivalent or contested. Even if highly specific circumstances and factors have led to plotting in our case studies, the cumulative effects of the individual plot-by-plot strategy have demonstrated astonishing transformative capacities in relatively short periods of time: plotting was the main urbanisation process at a given time in each of the cities we analysed, and it permitted rapid and massive urban growth at a crucial moment of urban development.

Plotting urbanism must thus be understood as a highly dynamic process with a specific temporality, and not as a static and stable urban configuration: it transforms urban territories, but the dynamics of the process itself are also in constant change. Plotting originates from a specific set of conditions, establishing a precarious and unstable new status quo which may change again and turn into a very different urbanisation process. Specific socio-historic conditions and urban contexts may lead to a great variation of patterns and pathways of plotting. Thus, in Lagos, plotting is an almost generic form of urban development which unfolded over decades and today constitutes the bulk of the built environment; whereas in Istanbul the urban process usually started with popular urbanisation, which was based on solidarity and social networks, and over decades turned into plotting, in which the commercial logic dominates. In Shenzhen, plotting can be understood as a specific historical phase of the urban process which formed the basis for the development of an entire new urban region, and now is gradually fading away in the face of large-scale state-driven urban renewal. As the speculative logic becomes stronger, we see conditions for the end of plotting, or a transition to scaled-up versions of it with the involvement of more powerful actors.

As a result of our comparative analysis we finally arrived at ‘plotting urbanism’ as a concept that we think may enrich the vocabulary of urbanisation. We believe this concept could be fruitfully applied to other places and could thus help us to conceptualise hitherto unrecognised urbanisation processes. Soliman’s (1996) account of ‘semi-formal housing developments’ in Alexandria features many elements of plotting. In Jakarta, plotting could be applied to the question of urbanised kampungs, which have been analysed in great detail by Simone (2014) among others.



These areas currently experience another dramatic round of rapid transformation into condo-developments (Leitner and Sheppard 2018), a process that shows striking similarities to the case of Shenzhen. The process of urbanisation through the development of census towns in Delhi and other Indian urban regions also displays many aspects of plotting—an observation that merits further investigation (see e.g. Mukhopadhyay et al. 2020; Bathla 2023).<sup>8</sup>

By conceptualising plotting urbanism as an ordinary and widespread process of urbanisation and by locating it in its historical and territorial context, we may also be able to start formulating more focused, policy-relevant questions and exploring the modes and procedures of housing production that could make use of the positive urban qualities of plotting—such as the adaptability of the built structure to various uses, providing people with access to relatively affordable land and housing and the rapid delivery of housing at a large scale while limiting its drawbacks, such as exploitative owner-tenant relationships, the low quality of construction and infrastructure and the lack of common amenities and public spaces.

- 1 We thank AbdouMaliq Simone for proposing the last connotation of plotting.
- 2 From interviews during November 2014, Lagos. All names throughout the chapter are pseudonyms. All exchange rates are standardised to 2014 values.
- 3 Fieldnotes, 28 September 2014.
- 4 Fieldnotes, 30 August 2013.
- 5 Information given in an interview with a planner from Shenzhen, October 2014. This can be also found in a speech by the then Shenzhen municipal party secretary (see Nanfang dushibao 2003) and in local documents (see Luo 2014).
- 6 Interview with a Shenzhen planner, 2015.
- 7 Fieldwork in some villages outside the former SED border from 2013 to 2015.
- 8 We thank Nitin Bathla and Marie-Hélène Zerah for advising us on this relationship.