Alice Hertzog

# Urbanisation through Movement. The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor

# Chapter 5

Alice Hertzog

Nina wakes at 3:30 am five days a week to cook for her food stall in the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. Cheap and cheerful restaurants like Nina's are synonymous with roadside urbanism all across West Africa. They are called *maquis* in Benin, *Mama's Puts*, *Food is Ready*, aka *Bukkas* in Nigeria, and *Chop Bars* over in Ghana. Nina prepares the food and packs it into two plastic thermal containers. Then, along with her middle-aged sister, caregiver for children always with an infant or two in tow, piled on two moto-taxis with all their day's stock, coolers expertly balanced, and a block of ice carefully wrapped to protect it from the sun. The site they are heading to is a few hundred metres from the toll booth and happens to be a perfect location for feeding hungry truckers. It is also a good vantage point from which to observe everyday mobility and contemplate how this mobility produces extended urban spaces along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. After all, to the east, the road continues straight to Cotonou, Porto Novo, and Lagos; to the west are Lomé, Accra, and, several hundred kilometres further, Abidjan.

Out on the highway, the empty frame of Nina's maquis awaits them. The open structure of the maquis is slightly set back from the road. It is made from bamboo, wooden panels, corrugated iron sheets, and a rapidly deteriorating cement floor. Upon arrival, Nina and her team transform it into a roadside diner. The floor is swept, tarpaulins folded away, and a child is sent to pump water. They fetch the wooden table from the back, cover it in a plastic floral tablecloth, and sprinkle it with kerosene to keep the flies away. They rope a piece of nylon lace over the window and unpack the toothpicks and bottle openers, the palm wine and plastic jugs. Under a makeshift counter, 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 bed sheets to keep the dust, flies, and sun off. Her sister lays out her goods for sale: toothbrushes, sweets, pills and medicine, soft drinks, and disposable plastic bags of whisky. She breaks the ice to cool the 50 centilitre plastic bags of water she will be selling as she

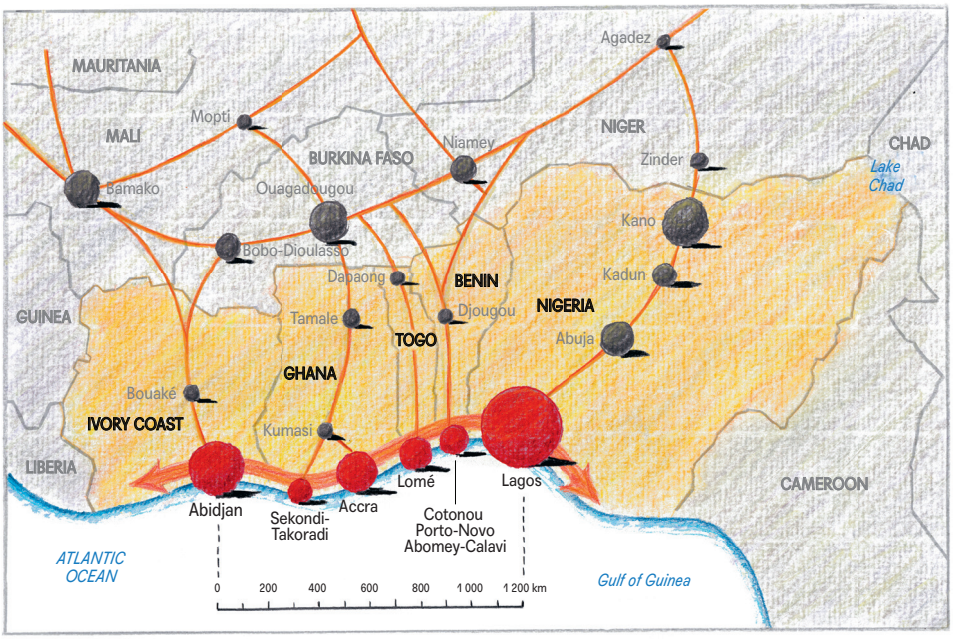
Fig. 1


THE WEST AFRICAN CORRIDOR
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT
Fig. 3

stands on her toes, extending a handful of bags up into a trucker's cab or through a bus window.

All around, vendors are setting up for the day in anticipation of the traffic that will pass through. [Fig. 1] There are women selling watermelons, mangos, piles of limes, and pastoralists primed with buckets of fresh cheese that will later be pressed against the tinted windows of passing four-by-four vehicles. A handful of teenage boys are cycling from the Fan Milk ice cream depot in the periphery of Cotonou, working on commission. They can be spotted from a mile off in their blue jackets, with iceboxes mounted on the front of their bikes, blowing their shrill bicycle horns. Between the lanes of the toll booth, girls are selling bread, madeleines, and peanuts while women are preparing glasses of crushed ice and concentrated milk, and men are pitching racks of pirated CDs. The vendors and hustlers are ready for a long day's work, hopeful for a good day's business.

F. 1 Vendors await traffic at the toll booth.
F. 2 Map of the West African Corridor from Lagos to Abidjan.




THE WEST AFRICAN CORRIDOR
Fig. 2

At the toll booth, like many locations along the corridor, all sorts of people will pass through, loiter or bump into each other. For Nina and her colleagues, there's no knowing what opportunities 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 on a donor-funded training seminar? Or maybe Ghanaian traders en route to Lagos with cash to spare? Most likely, familiar faces will stop for a chat and gossip, and strangers will order food in pidgin English. Here, people will slow down, take a break, catch some sleep, and have something to eat.

The toll booth is one of many stops along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. Situated in Benin between Lomé and Cotonou, it is not quite in either periphery, and it is far away from the bustling districts of Lagos or Abidjan. This chapter starts here, at the toll booth. As a starting place, it does not contain any premature definitions or aspirations of what the corridor could be, should be or will be. The toll booth is never a final destination in itself, and nobody sets out in the morning, intent on eating at Nina's maquis. Instead, they end up here, side-lined as they order yams and fish, watching traffic pass as they rinse their hands and tuck in.

## THE LAGOS-ABIDJAN CORRIDOR

Starting from the toll booth in Benin, this contribution explores the polycentric development of the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, notably the role that migration and mobility play in underpinning urban development between its major city hubs. [Fig. 2] It positions this mobility within a larger historical context that has seen traders, the displacement of slaves, and the forced migration of African labour under colonialism shape this space since the fifteenth century. [Fig. 3] This chapter suggests that to grasp the role of contemporary mobility within urbanisation, theories of extended urbanisation must be "mobilised." This mobilisation involves both operationalising theories and addressing modes of urban development

Fig. 4

through the lens of movement. This chapter adopts a methodology that sticks to the road, considering how transactions between roadside communities and travellers transform urban fabric.

Following on from an initial appraisal of the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, the second section presents findings from the field, or more precisely, from the highway. These explore several processes by which mobility and also immobility contribute to the emergence of an urban corridor. The third and final section pinpoints some of the contradictions between the daily production of space and current political framings of urban development and migration along the corridor. In doing so, it suggests a roadmap for a politics of extended urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor that anticipates the requirements of those travelling along it with the needs of those residing in its wake.

F. 4 Urbanisation, caught between an eroding coastland and lagoons prone to flooding

## A POLYCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN BACKLOGS AND SYNERGIES

The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor is one of the fastest-growing mega-regions in the world. Along the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, a number of urban areas are coming together to form a remarkable polycentric corridor. [Fig. 4] It spans 1,000 kilometres from Lagos in Nigeria to Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, passing through 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] Urbanisation along the corridor includes centres and peripheries with varying densities, built forms, and commercial usages. This territory, whilst opening up new development paths, also brings substantial challenges in governance and sustainability.

In West Africa, 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.[2] Over the course of the past decades, a shift has occurred from city-based urbanisation towards the emergence of city regions, urban corridors, and mega-urban regions.[3] In the case of the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, the "mushrooming" of settlement along the Gulf of Guinea is forming one of the most significant urban corridors in Sub-Saharan Africa. The relevance of such megaregions is only set to increase, and a recent study by the OECD predicts that, given the evolution of population settlement, the emergence of such urban forms will intensify.[4] These new morphologies require new tools for both practitioners and researchers and raise vital questions for urban research.[5]

The cities along the corridor have long-standing backlogs in terms of investment and infrastructure. Examined one by one, the United Nations observes that they have "exhibited incongruous physical development, absence of a resilient tax base and a general lack of sustainable economic development patterns." Such issues have been reinforced by poor policy and interventions, as well as Structural Adjustment Programmes.[6] 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 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the corridor is vital in stimulating economic growth and eliminating poverty.[7] Indeed, the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor clearly has far more potential when compared to the sparsely populated and underdeveloped northern hinterland. This potential is further consolidated by the relative security and wealth of the coastline, which already centralises economic infrastructure and political institutions, as compared to the increasing poverty and ongoing security crisis in the Sahel.[8]

The proximity between the main cities along the corridor is flagrant, with Cotonou at no more than 150 kilometres from Lagos and 350 kilometres from Accra. In this sense, the corridor's potential lies in the high levels of diversity and synergies encountered along the coast. The urban areas along the corridor might have experienced common deficits, but each has a specific trajectory and is highly differentiated. This differentiation, in terms of anglophone or francophone spaces, produces opportunity in and of itself as people travel up and down the corridor in search of opportunity. Yet while the corridor is embedded within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that seeks to promote the free circulation of people and goods along the corridor, it is also disjointed by national borders.[9] These borders, while disruptive, also produce possibilities for exchange and trade by creating a difference, for example, in currencies or available goods. For AbdouMaliq Simone, the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor is an obvious example of how all kinds of transactions could be maximised, "taking advantage of niche markets, differentials in national regulatory structures, and singular economic histories to ply various small and medium-scale trades." This would, in turn, require regional urban development planning to productively connect cities and towns across national borders and rural-urban divides.[10]

## MIGRATION, MOBILITY, AND MOVEMENT

The urban corridor between Lagos and Abidjan is a space of heightened mobility as people travel along the interstate highway crossing the various national borders that cut across the corridor. It is tricky to quantify regional mobility and migration in West Africa, given the informal flow of people and goods that are hard to measure with administrative and statistical tools.[11] Furthermore, migration paths in West Africa are multipolar and shift directions depending on the economic context, with people moving rapidly in response to market fluctuations or political contexts to the decline of some places and increasing potential of others.[12] Most of the migration in West Africa is regional, with regional flows accounting for 84% of movements. This is seven times more than migration flows from West Africa to other parts of the world.[13] The West African region also has the highest number of inter-regional and international migrants


Fig. 5

F. 5 Airplane advertisement promoting the proximity of capitals along the corridor.
F. 6 A map of the Slave Coast, 1789.

in Africa, a figure of 8.4 million, representing 2.8% of the population.[14]

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.[15] This, in turn, has shaped the emergence of urban spaces where mobility determines urban livelihoods. Migrants are often blamed for urban poverty, with governments trying to reduce or control rural-urban migration to the detriment of migrants and other low-income residents.[16] This is equally mirrored by numerous development corporations that have reproduced the sedentary bias of colonial administrations, seeking to keep migrants in their place.[17] For Debbie Potts, "One outcome of livelihood vulnerability has been an increased propensity for mobility, not just into towns, but out of them as well." [18] 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 through the increasing urban push.[19] Entrenched patterns of economic problems, insecurity of urban life, and threats of destitution all constitute drivers for circular migration. This is the kind of "strategic nomadism" Oliver Bakewell, and Gunvor Jónsson describe for Lubumbashi, where African migrants constantly move back and forth between the city and other locations.[20]

All along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, the social capital of relationships is vital for the production of livelihoods, and mobility is a crucial means to enrich and nurture these inter-human contacts. Interactions, such as those occurring at the toll booth, far from being just for the sake of themselves, are deeply embedded in urban subjectivities. [Fig. 5]

This chapter is grounded within a broad scholarship of mobility in West Africa.[21] It combines mobility and migration within the same analytical frameworks of Oliver Bakewell, Loren Landau, and AbdouMaliq Simone and chooses to adopt mobility or movement rather than migration as its lens of analysis.[22 / 23] In the West African context, producing clear-cut categories of movements remains a struggle. When is a journey a fluid mobility, a stable form of migration, or the tipping point between the two, when migration requires mobility or mobility leads to migration? [24] Indeed, when writing about the city of Dakar, the anthropologist Caroline Melly suggests that mobility is an enduring, elusive, and collective value that both embody expectations of migration and exceeds the binary geographies of arrival and departure.[25]

The mobility turn, of which Mimi Sheller and John Urry are key proponents, has promoted the study in social sciences of the interdependencies between the movements of people, information, images, and objects and increasingly called attention to the theoretical possibilities of moving beyond sedentary conceptualisations of place and movement.[26] This marks a shift from studying practices rooted in place to care-

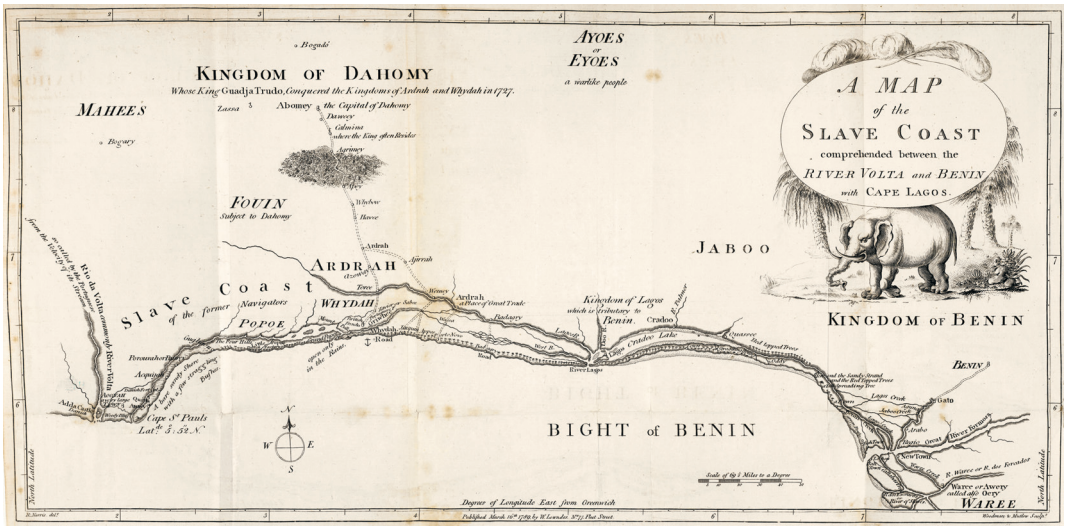


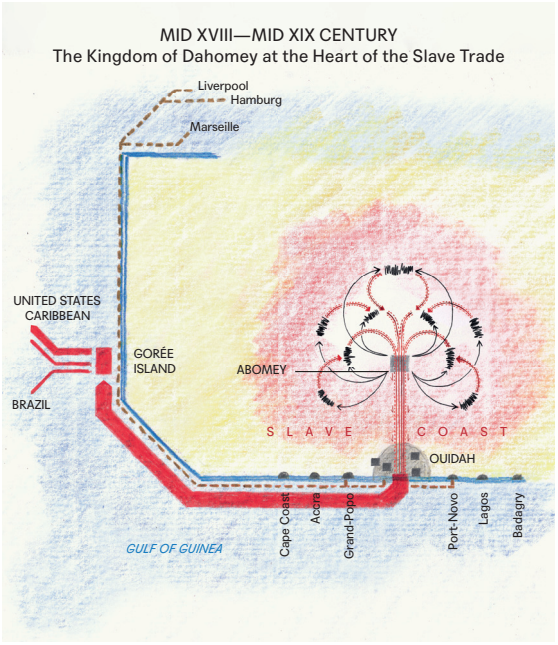

Fig. 6

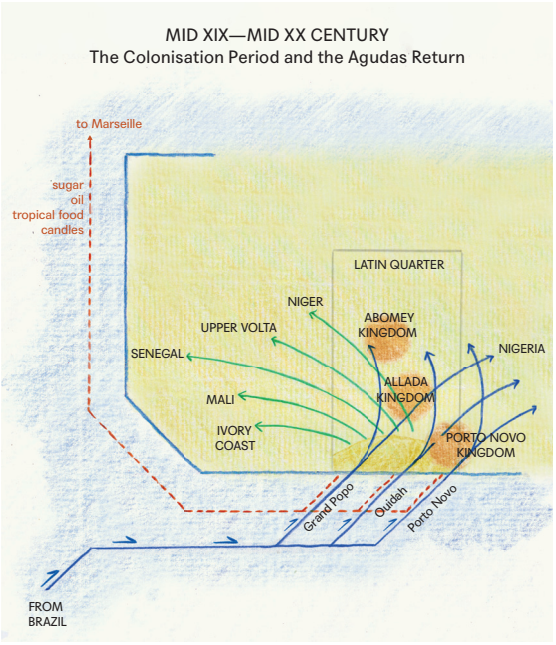
fully considering the many mobility practices that make up everyday life. It brings to the fore an emphasis on fluidity and motion, drawing together various forms of movement and circulation and highlighting interdependent forms of mobility that organise social life around movement, distance, and absence.[27] From this perspective, as Mimi Sheller and John Urry write, places are tied into networks of connections "that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an island." [28] This resonates strongly in the context of West African urbanisation, where livelihoods are underpinned and sustained through mobility and where, as Loren Landau observes, planetary urbanisation is made real through "micro-level socialites, individual and familial projects." [29]

## ANCIENT LAGOONS AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Whilst the scale and intensity of urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor are new, the connections and movements along the coast are well established. Historically, traders and travellers have navigated the waterways creating a network of coastal lagoons along the Guinea Gulf.[30] Dating back to the fifteenth century, this extensive system of lagoon networks enabled people to move along the gulf while avoiding the rough Atlantic coastline.[31] Described by the historian, Law as an "important medium of lateral communication," 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.[32]

Traders and merchants have moved for centuries between cultural groups, establishing lateral communication along the West African coastline. Since then, the coastline has been shaped by a series of departures and returns, the most significant of these being the trafficking of slaves from Ouidah and later the return of enfranchised Afro-Brazilians who played a dominant role in the development of urban centres along the coast.[33] [Fig. 6] These returnees, referred to as the Agudas, settled, for example, in Porto-Novo, a former Portuguese slave-trading port founded in the sixteenth century. Equipped with trans-border networks and both social and economic capital, many Agudas 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.[34]



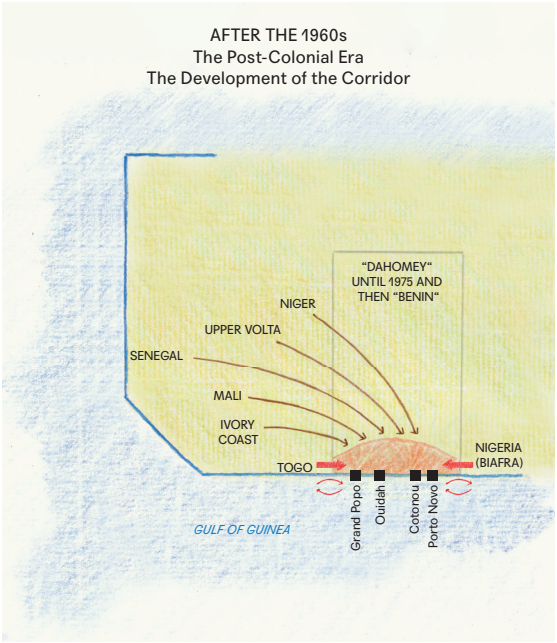

- Trade route linking Dahomey to Europe

SLAVE ROUTES

- Removal of inhabitants from the interior and forced displacement to the port of Ouidah
- Transport of slaves by ship
- Sphere of influence of the Abomey kingdom's "palace town."
- Forts and facilities belonging to colonial and slave powers

- Trade route between Dahomey and Marseille
- Return of Agudas (enfanchised slaves from Brazil)
- Dispatch of lettered elite from Dahomey for administrative support
- Development of urban armature along the coast with the arrival of Agudas
- The three initial kingdoms becoming a French protectorate and colony

Other waves of mobility and return have followed. [Fig. 7] These include the displacement of African workers under colonialism to meet the economic and administrative needs of imperial powers and, more recently, the plight of refugees in the post-independence period.[35] These groups created and maintained strong links, often of a kinship or ethnic nature, between places of origin and destination. For example, during the Biafra war in Nigeria from 1967–1970, refugees fled the civil conflict to seek refuge in Benin, as did political refugees fleeing electoral violence under the dictatorial rule of the Gnassingbé family, which has "won" all six presidential elections in Togo since the 1990s. The displacement of both Togolese and Nigerian refugees in the period of post-independence reinforced trans-border trade that remains central to the urban economies and a structural part of livelihoods along the coast. In each period, ancient, colonial, or post-colonial, mobility, rather than settlement, has played a defining role in the creation of urban hubs along the corridor. Today, the lagoons are harder to navigate and overgrown with water lilies. [Fig. 8] In their place, the highway connects the various urban centres and has become the main backbone of the region.




MAPPING WAVES OF CONSECUTIVE DISPLACEMENT
Fig. 7

## MOBILISING THE CONCEPT OF EXTENDED URBANISATION

This chapter focuses on how contemporary mobility patterns produce extended urbanisation. This is, for instance, the case at the toll booth, where travellers and passengers are contributing to the production of urban space in an unbuilt section of the corridor. It argues that mobility is key to producing urban space in this region, especially outside the urban centres.

The highway along the corridor allows us to observe how everyday urban life is closely tied to being on the move. There are two sides to this picture: first, the people who are actually travelling, and second, those dwelling along the highway, who are reliant on this passage of people and goods in order to sustain their livelihoods. In this sense, the highway is not a road that simply passes through the countryside, connecting cities, but rather a piece of infrastructure that urbanises the land it crosses.

Indeed, advocates of planetary urbanisation have argued that major transportation corridors contribute to the "blurring and rearticulation of urban territories" and produce expansive catchment areas that stretch beyond any single metropolitan region and cross

Fig. 8

multiple national boundaries.[36] This description of an interdependent and polynuclear urban megaregion is a fairly accurate portrait of the urbanisation processes at play along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. But to further mobilise the concepts of planetary and extended urbanisation, attention must be drawn to how mobility and immobility occur within the corridor and how this, in turn, produces specific urban forms.

This chapter "mobilises" the concept of extended urbanisation and looks at how new forms of urbanisation can be captured through a close, ethnographic analysis of mobility. This is done by working on a cross-section of spaces that have previously been considered as either urban or rural. In the following, I will explore the potential for thinking through modalities of urbanisation that are produced through mobility as opposed to settlement. For Henri Lefebvre, movement, notably commuting, is one of the core elements that produce urban space, as people move over territory and urbanise both their place of residence and work.[37] However, the movement along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor encompasses a much wider spectrum of mobility than commuting, including, for instance, trans-border trade, hustling, and labour migration.

The question arises as to how mobility contributes to the emergence of an urban corridor in the absence of manufacturing industries and a formal job market. How are roadside communities along the highway leveraging mobility, and what happens when this mobility slows, when traffic and passengers come to a stop, be it through sudden breakages or planned pitstops? We discuss the various encounters and transactions along the corridor between roadside dwellers and people on the move. Is the highway just a highway, or is it creating an opportunity for urban livelihoods, a certain density and diversity that is contributing to the creation of urban spaces? This hypothesis mirrors initial observations at the toll booth. As traffic slows down, urban form emerges from the simultaneity of events, perceptions, and elements to the bringing together and meeting of people and things. These everyday

F. 8 The floating village of Ganvié on the outskirts of Cotonou: one of many along the corridor.
F. 9 Sand for sale to be used in the building sector.
F. 10 A neighbourhood chief observes construction work to limit the erosion in his constituency.

Fig. 9


Fig. 10

practices create a certain number of contradictions with extant territorial regulation, be it regional integration, spatial planning, or migration management. The chapter examines how these contradictions play out, for example, in the case of regional development strategies that seek to improve the road infrastructure to enable traffic and goods to flow more freely, while local communities are encouraging traffic to slow down and spend money, enabling them to capture resources as they flow by.

## A THOUSAND KILOMETRES OF URBANISATION OFF THE MAP

African urban studies have spent too long on the periphery of urban scholarship. Indeed, whilst the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor has played an important role in the political imaginary of post-colonial regional integration, it has received little scholarly attention. An exception to this is the work undertaken by Armelle Choplin, a geographer whose recent work has sought to elucidate the current forms of urbanisation through the production and consumption of cement along the urban corridor.[38] [Fig. 9]

Yet, we still know so little about this corridor, especially when compared to other urban megaregions, like BosWash along the north-eastern US coast of the United States, 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.[39] This also reflects how traditionally, urban research has focused on individual cities along the Gulf of Guinea rather than the dynamics and urban processes that cut across them. This has privileged knowledge production on national capitals, historical cities, and larger trading cities along the coast while overlooking research on more extended metropolitan areas. In contrast, the study of Lagos, for example, is flourishing, emerging as a dynamic sub-field of its own.[40] Meanwhile, significant urban research is being undertaken in Accra.[41] Less can be said of Lomé and Cotonou. Indeed, up until now, little attention has been paid to what is happening in less populated sites in-between the capital cities.[42]

There are three possible explanations as to why this substantial area, nearly 1,000 kilometres of urbanisation, has remained off the map in the field of urban research. The first is that it is difficult to define the exact boundaries of the corridor. In itself, it is not an established administrative unit, and the exact territory it covers is debatable. 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 and other multilateral organisations refer to the GILA, the Greater Ibadan-Lagos-Accra Corridor.[43] Although the endpoints 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 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. [Fig. 10]

A second obstacle to a more encompassing urban scholarship is the colonial legacy of alternating anglophone and francophone countries. Academic collaborations, training and studying abroad, and teaching exchanges continue to privilege connections between former colonies and old powers. The linguistic geographies have resulted in anglophone scholars focusing on urban spaces in Nigeria and Ghana, whilst francophone scholars are predominant in studies of Benin, Togo, and the Ivory Coast. In turn, both urban theories and empirical findings remain too often confined to either Anglo or Franco communities. Universities along the Gulf of Guinea 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. Rare are the scholars such as Amandine Spire, who considers

Fig. 11

a more diverse cross-section of Anglo and Franco spaces in her analysis of strangers in the cities of Accra and Lomé.[44]

There is a third possible explanation for the lack of scholarship on this urban corridor. Researchers observing that there are still rural areas between the capital cities have, at times, come to the premature conclusion that this indicates there is no metropolitan region. Indeed, when there are breaks in the cemented landscape, the corridor looks, at times, deceptively rural. 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 motorbike taxi drivers. One of the dangers of maintaining the conception of a rural-urban dichotomy is that these places are not considered to be participating in the emergence of extended urbanisation, and are used as arguments against the hypothesis of an urban corridor running between Lagos and Abidjan.

F. 11 Road sweepers after their morning shift at the tollbooth.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STAYING ON THE ROAD

The urban corridor is a territory that mirrors contemporary urbanisation patterns described by Andy Merrifield as "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." [45] In this space, my research sticks to the highway between Lagos and Abidjan that has become the backbone of this corridor and provides a material surface to work from. More specifically, it focuses on the Beninese section of the corridor, drawing on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the context of my doctorate and in policy analysis for the Swiss Development Cooperation.[46] This chapter can be read alongside the web-

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

F. 12 *Zémidjan* motorbike taxis navigate traffic and perilous road conditions.
F. 13 A petrol smuggler takes a break; his motorbike has been converted to navigate the road system between Nigeria and Benin.

documentary *Parcours de Migrants* produced in 2021, which showcases the voices of both people, along with policymakers, academics and cartographers who address current trends in mobility and urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor.[47]

The territories of extended urbanisation along this corridor are far more expansive than a mere strip of road, at times stretching north to encompass commuter towns and lagoon settlements and bulging when passing through towns and villages. 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 at various tempos, sometimes coming to a standstill, willingly or not.

Sticking to the road is to "think infrastructurally" and to consider the physical networks, goods, and people who move through the territory.[48] As Brian Larkin puts it, "infrastructures are matter that enables the movement of other matter," even when that matter is people.[49] 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 the movement. The road privileges, facilitates, and legitimates certain forms of movement and resulting urban forms while limiting others. This chapter builds on the anthropology of roads and, particularly in the African context, extends agency to include the various material features of the road, the asphalt, or the hole.[50] Roads, as connectors between various urban centralities, are an ideal entry point to understanding how urbanity occurs outside the city. As an analytical device, roads focus attention on the in-between places and, like extended urbanisation, explode the idea of a bounded urban site. Furthermore, roads as infrastructure are assemblages that bundle together various

scales and rhythms of mobility as everyday commuters travel side by side with once-in-a-lifetime pilgrims.

## THE PRODUCTION OF AN URBAN CORRIDOR: A VIEW FROM THE HIGHWAY

Shaped by boom and bust, the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor is constantly re-enacted as people travel up and down, weaving their trans-local lives into the urban fabric. And it's not just people on the move, the territory itself is also shifting. On the one hand, coastal erosion edges away neighbourhoods due in part to the trade in the sand for construction along the beaches. On the other hand, new pieces of land appear as residents pour cement into the bog-land around the lagoons to reclaim land and get a footing on the corridor. Drawing on fieldwork observations in Benin, this section explores how mobility along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor shapes urbanisation processes. It does so by focusing on the interstate highway, examining both its materiality and the various immobilities that occur along it. It asks how mobility, congestion, and interruptions to journeys are producing urbanity. How are people crafting a livelihood from this road? Are they street hawkers or roadside boutiques? [Fig. 11] And how are specific strategies seeking to make a living from the people and goods that flow along the corridor also replicated on the level of state and local governance?

### FROM DIRT TRACK TO ASPHALT: ROAD SURFACES AS URBAN ACCELERATORS

The highway along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor is one of the few asphalt surfaces in the coastal area. Even in the capital city of Cotonou, only a handful of strategic avenues connecting the port to the airport and presidential palace are asphalted. Locally, there is a strict spatial hierarchy that distinguishes between different road surfaces: right at the bottom is *la piste* (dirt tracks), followed by a slightly improved category of the road: *le von* (the French colonial acronym for *Voie d'Orientation Nord*, North-Orientated Road), then *le pavé* (paved road), and at the top of the typology, *le goudron* (asphalted road). [Fig. 12–13]

Access to the main road with a *goudron* increases the price of land. The price of plots varies depending on how close they are to the *goudron,* a detail that is mentioned in all real estate advertisements. For example, research by Gisèle Glele in the periphery of Cotonou noted that in 2010 prices for a standard plot of land far away from a road were around 700 USD, while average prices of plots adjacent to an asphalted road were 2,200 USD.[51] Up and down the corridor, land on each side of the Lagos-Abidjan highway has been snapped up through speculation because the asphalt makes it highly accessible, and living on the edge of a highway is a considerable advantage. In this sense, the highway is producing extended urbanisation, creating an incentive for people to settle on each side of the road, drawn by the prospect of more accessible transport and connectivity.

At times the roads leading off the highway are upgraded, and their status shifts from dirt track to cobbled street to asphalted road. At other times this is done in response to higher levels of circulation or imposed by urban planning—it also often coincides with the prestige and political power of those who reside along it. The asphalting of a road is embedded within everyday urban governance practices *and* local corruption. This became evident during fieldwork when the Beninese First Lady inaugurated her charity in one of the wealthier neighbourhoods in Cotonou. It was originally on a *von* but was rapidly upgraded to a *pavé* in order to better connect the foundation to the main artery, the *goudron*.

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 also enables a whole series of urban practices that take place along it: roller-blade teams practice, young Lebanese men race their flashy sports cars up and down, and housewives

lie washing out on edge, along with batches of fish and peppers to sun-dry on the tarmac.

## POTHOLES AND HOLD UPS: WHEN DELAYS PRODUCE URBANITY

The surface quality of the roads in the region is far from permanent and can quickly deteriorate due to bad weather, potholes, accidents, poor engineering, and embezzled maintenance funds. Given these fluctuations, the quality of road surfaces is a critical concern to people on the move and the constant topic of conversation and press articles. This is understandable, 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.

Congestion is an ever-present feature of urban life along the Lagos Abidjan Corridor. In African cities, people get stuck in traffic, but their projects, aspirations, and futures also get stuck. Writing about Cotonou, Armelle Choplin and Riccardo 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 the job market.[52] Along the corridor, nothing flows freely; people and things get caught up, stuck in traffic, or break down. Caroline Melly's work on Dakar is key to theorising stagnation as a marker of contemporary urbanisation.[53] She argues that the bottleneck or the *embouteillage* has been a defining feature of life and policy in Dakar. In her terms, the bottleneck signifies an era in which "urban and global mobilities are both intensely valorised and increasingly regulated, restricted and deferred." And she describes the bottleneck as an unpredictable, widely generative, "critical urban force that often exceeds management, planning and intervention."[54]

Such bottlenecks are often caused by holes in the road. Holes are common on the highway and play a prominent role in the collective imagination. Locals refer to Cotonou as "Coto-trou," *le trou* meaning both holes, and places of little significance, outside the glare of the megacities. For the anthropologist Filip De Boeck, the hole becomes a meta-concept of African urbanism, reflecting material ruination, sites of erosion, and social decay in the city.[55] Nonetheless, these holes also generate activity along the road and, at times, are even dug out by youths, who set up ad-hoc check-points and then ask for contributions to "repair" the road.

As traffic slows down around the hole, all types of activities emerge. An example of this road-hole phenomenon is captured in Nigeria by the author and journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski in describing, "The edges of the hole have become a centre of attraction, generating curiosity and encouraging initiative. Thanks to this god-forsaken hole, this place, this sleepy deadly suburban ruin… transforms spontaneously, into a dynamic neighbourhood, full of life and noise. Social life gets colourful, the edge of the abyss becomes a place of encounters, of discussion, a children's playground." [56] Holes, breakdowns, and pitstops along the corridor become opportunities and potential encounters that generate urbanity from Lagos to Abidjan.

One day at the toll booth, a loaded bus hurtling down the corridor en route to Lagos broke down. It was an absolute wreck of a vehicle, and it took days for the driver to find the right replacement piece and fix the engine. Many of the passengers, unwilling or unable to pay for another ticket, got stuck for several days, which, in turn, kept all of the vendors at the toll booth busy for several days. 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 Nollywood 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, creating a veritable neighbourhood that disappeared as quickly as it had appeared once the bus was repaired.

The obstacle—be it a hole in the asphalt, traffic lights, speed bumps, customs check-points, a crashed lorry, or a toll-booth—enables 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 highway. As those on the move get stuck, there are people waiting, ready to barter services, wash and repair cars, and sell petrol from large glass demijohns, plastic bags of fried manioc snacks, tomatoes, hot peppers, salt, dried fish, and haircuts.

## ROAD HAWKERS AS A VITRINE OF EXTENDED URBANISATION

The road provides a site along which to barter and trade goods. And as traffic slows down, roadside dwellers display their wares, hoping to entice clients as they travel past. Trade along the corridor transforms the roadside into a series of sales points, from shacks to sturdy constructions. Be it a simple basket, a wooden stall, or a makeshift metal shed, these structures are subtle indicators of urbanisation along the corridor that relies on the mobility and immobility of people travelling between the urban hubs. As one nears the urban centres, these ephemeral roadside stalls become individual shops set back from the highway, turning into long rows of one-story storefronts.

These roadside shops announce the aspirations and urban futures at play. The various goods on sale speak of urban 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 onto the fake leather. These material goods respond to the growing market of urban households along the corridor seeking to equip and furnish their new homes.

The shop fronts are overlaid with another series of vitrines—those of the street vendors, who move in and out of the cars, expertly carrying glass display cabinets. They make the most of the cars and buses at a standstill at roundabouts and traffic lights. They pitch gadgets, books, political pamphlets, maps, car accessories, mouse traps, and the latest CDs of Lagos dance tunes. They weave in and out of the vehicles and often target the minibuses' open side doors, which become shop windows used to display goods. In this sense, the road is much more than a surface that is travelled. It is a place for trade and interaction where goods are pitched and sales are made. Items are passed through windows and considered while prices are bartered. People often do this just to pass the time, as passengers window shop in a drive-through bazaar of imported goods. Road congestion incites people to inhabit the road differently and leads travellers to combine travel with window shopping. The manner in which various groups inhabit the road along the corridor points to the role of movement and how it structures opportunity along this linear, polycentric region. Up and down the corridor, various groups are looking, in the absence of formal employment, to capitalise from the resources and people moving along the corridor either by speeding them up or by slowing them down. This includes individual traders, community groups, and local governments, who are all taking their share of roadside businesses.

## OPERATING IN THE ENTREPÔT STATE

The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, or more precisely, the taxation of goods that are imported and then transported along it, is a key source of revenue for the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. For the geographer John Igué, Benin functions as an "état-entrepôt," a warehouse state that relies on goods and resources that circulate within its borders as opposed to internal production.[57] This strategy relies on generating income through customs taxes in the absence of manufacturing industries and producer services.

However, the central state is not the only one collecting customs taxes along the road. All along the corridor, local leaders use the roadside location of their constituencies to generate revenue from the corridor. Such practices hook onto opportunity as it passes by, overturning the logic of point-to-point logistics or economies of

scale. Rather than delivering services to facilitate the fluid transport of goods, fees are extracted by delaying and side-tracking goods and people. Nina at her *maquis* can only generate an income because the toll both delays and interrupts the journey of those travelling along the highway, and the same applies to many other communities residing along the corridor. From the perspective of these locations, the corridor is not just connecting hubs and crossing borders. It is also distributing resources along its edges where it disposes of residues, people, things, and money.

One such place is PK10, a neighbourhood that got its name because it is situated 10 kilometres out of Cotonou (*Point Kilométrique 10*). It is located between the port of Cotonou and the Nigerian border and occupies a gap between the highway and the coastline. The neighbourhood is a mix of high-end residential units, informal settlements, industrial warehouses, and a university campus. As I spent time with the neighbourhood chief, shadowing him in his daily duties, I learned of an intricate scheme for the neighbourhood to generate money from the corridor.

The neighbourhood is strategically situated by a second toll booth. This one, much like the toll booth Nina works at, charges a high fee for lorries once their weight is over a certain threshold. However, local officials have devised a workaround so that the lorry drivers can avoid paying the fee. They would instead pay a smaller fee to the locals from PK10, letting them pocket the difference. Heavily-loaded lorries could pull into warehouses in PK10, where local young men off-load the goods onto several small pickups. These pickups then cross the toll, paying only a nominal fee. The empty lorry also drives through, paying only a nominal fee, and on the other side, the young men reload the goods onto the lorry. The whole operation takes time and labour, countering the logistics of economies of scale. However, in this *état* speed and fluidity are no longer a priority, as money can be made by slowing down the circulation of goods.

These processes are highly codified and organised and are far from random interventions along the highway. One morning I accompanied the neighbourhood chief, who was summoned to the district chief's office. His superior had noticed the revenue from the warehouse operation decreasing and had sent out his men to investigate. An assistant had diligently noted every lorry that was coming in and out. There were clear discrepancies with the sums he had been receiving. "It's not rigorous," he admonished his colleague, "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 roadside, and the wider district—some of which is reinvested in local services to cover neighbourhood costs, all whilst reducing the money collected at the toll booth intended to fund road maintenance. It is both a case of budgetary imagination and the everyday corruption at play in West Africa. In a context where there is little local formal employment and, therefore, a reduced tax base, local authorities, just like vendors, are turning to the corridor to generate income.

## [IM]MOBILITY AS A DRIVER OF CORRIDOR URBANISATION

The corridor produces urbanity both through mobility and also through these moments of immobility. On the highway, journeys are slowed down by congestion and breakages that slow down travel and keep people stuck in traffic jams. This means that, more often than not, journeys along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor are marked by moments of immobility. Trips start and stop as passengers get stuck in traffic, wait for busses to fill up, queue to cross borders, are pulled aside by police agents, or have their cars break down.

On the one hand, there is a porosity between road transit and roadside communities. The various pitstops and the road design favour numerous interactions between travellers and local dwellers. Unlike highways elsewhere, the

Fig. 14

highway along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor has no identified exits, crash barriers, constant speed limits, or lay-bys. It is not separated from the urban neighbourhoods. It moves through physical dividers. At any moment, drivers can pull into the cities, towns, and villages that line the road. At some moments, to tame the road, communities have added improvised speed bumps and pedestrian crossings to navigate the fracture the road creates when it cuts through localities. For those residing along the corridor, there is an imposed proximity created by congestion and the fact that neighbourhoods extend onto the road, often occupying the asphalted surface, seeking to engage with those travelling through. Indeed, this highway doesn't bypass villages and towns but runs straight through them. In this way, 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 in the middle.

Various levels of governance along the corridor rely on this immobility to collect revenue from goods travelling through the territory. This is one example of how territories situated between the major cities along the corridor generate revenue from stalling mobility along the corridor. Interruptions in the flow of people and goods contribute to creating moments of ephemeral urbanity but also highlight the many political challenges facing the governance of mobility and immobility in such territories of extended urbanisation.

In 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 creates 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 of road maintenance, everyday corruption along the corridor does

F. 14 The tollbooth manager generates enough income to keep two young wives.


Fig. 15

maintain local communities, who have identified and sought to capture revenue as the trucks roll past. [Fig. 14] 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 extended urbanisation.

## ROADMAPS FOR A POLITICS OF EXTENDED URBANISATION

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. Here we move from the various elements along the road, such as a toll booth, a hole, or shock absorbers, to consider the political implications of mobility and immobility along this linear and transnational urban space. We suggest here that everyday movements along the corridor are deviating from official roadmaps and challenging current territorial regulations.

The mobility of people along the corridor raises fundamental questions about the constitution of politics in this emerging urban configuration. The urban extends over borders, blurring the boundaries of municipalities, ethnic groups, and linguistic zones and, in doing so, muddles the associations between political power and defined spatial areas. Along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor, people move in and out of different political territories, at times showing a yellow vaccine card, at others bribing a border guard to cross between constituencies. This large, emerging urban space transcends the unities of political action and encompasses various national and ethnic territories. This third section considers how various political actors are addressing regional integration, territorial planning, and migration management in this context. It asks how stakeholders on various scales exert power when both the social and spatial basis it seeks to govern are continually shifting.

## REGIONAL INTEGRATION AS A SHARED ASPIRATION

There is an initial tension here between interregional intentions to increase fluidity and local tactics that seek to slow down traffic, for example, in PK10, where the local community tries to make a living out of the road. Thus, on a regional level, development projects seek to increase the fluidity of traffic along the corridor, whilst local communities seek to slow down the traffic in order to generate revenue for side-of-the-road and border towns.

There are concerted inter-governmental efforts to maintain good road surfaces and increase the fluidity of persons and goods along the corridor in order 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.[58] One such body is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which promotes the free circulation of people and goods within its 15 member countries. The maintenance and development of the road are 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 reduce the cost of goods by reducing the cost of transport.

Another central body is the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Organisation. The organisation was founded with US funds from the Millennium Challenge. Its original mandate was to prevent the aids epidemic from spreading via truckers and sex workers along the corridor. The organisation has since 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 that seeks 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. The main objective here is to improve the flow of traffic; however, it pays little attention to the urbanisation of territories situated along the highway and their needs in terms of access and resources.

The tension between attempts to produce a fluid transit space and local interests is exemplified at Kraké, the coastal border post between Nigeria and Benin. [Fig. 15] 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, at the time of writing, had still not been inaugurated. Every day 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 border 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. [Fig. 16] 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. In this regard, they have little to gain from opening a formalised border post. Again, contrary to regional development strategies, opportunities are leveraged by roadside communities when traffic slows along the corridor.

## TERRITORIAL PLANNING AND THE PROBLEM WITH CLUSTERS

A second contradiction arises from a mismatch between conceptions and urban realities. While the conurbation continues to grow and merge spaces, territorial planning focuses on individual bounded units. Policymakers, spatial planners, and international agen-

F. 15 Border check-point at the Benin-Nigeria border.


Fig. 16

Fig. 17

cies maintain a focus on cities as the panacea of urban development and often contain their strategies within city limits or national borders rather than considering the transnational urbanisation processes cutting across the corridor.[59] Territorial strategies developed in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana overlook the corridor's relevance and potential for growth and development. Like much research, these planning exercises are often trapped within the limits of methodological nationalism, failing to draw on regional and transnational dynamics.

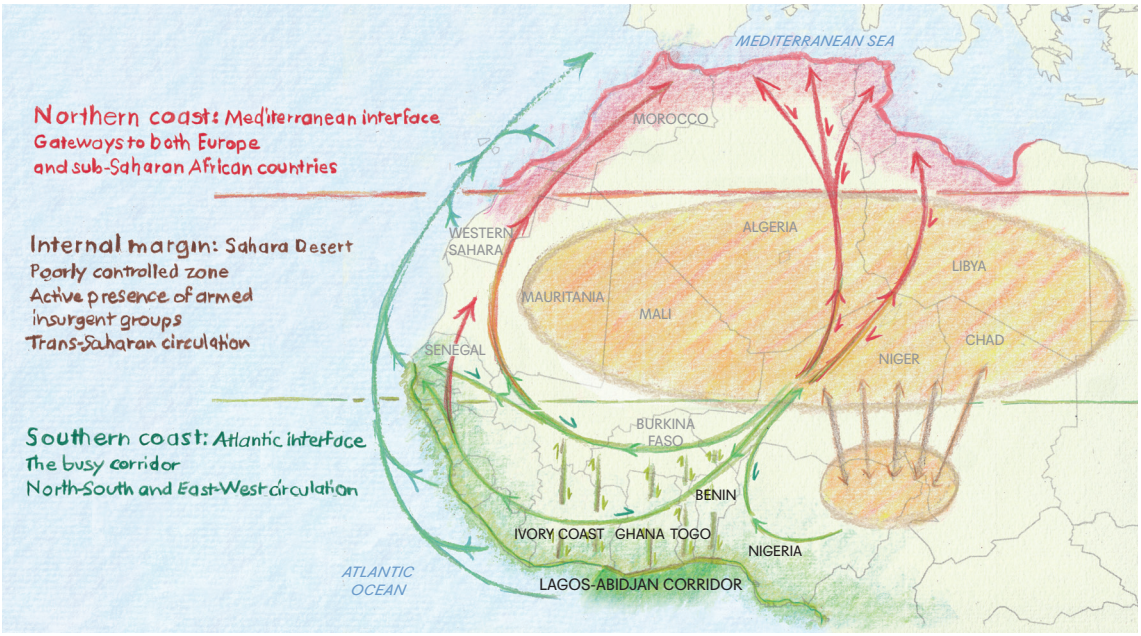
One such example is the Beninese national territorial development plan, launched in 2016. It presents a development scenario structured around regional poles, radiating from secondary cities throughout the country, "structuring each pole around one or more towns as driving forces, with specific potentiality and vocations."[60] The Beninese territorial plan appropriates the notion of the pole from French urban planning that introduced the concept of clusters, or *pôles de compétitivité,* as a legal instrument for urban planning in 2002. Due to the circulation of dominant urban planning models from France to francophone West Africa, 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 kilometres, is divided into the South-East Pole, South Pole, and South-West Pole, each centred on a city and given a specific role. In the document's accompanying cartography, there are no connections between the various regions along the corridor. 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 region's national planning documents that often overlook urban growth along the corridor, along with the dependencies on trade and circulation. [Fig. 17]

Slicing the corridor into distinctive functional units connected to their respective national hinterlands prevents planning authorities from anticipating how the corridor will thicken and grow as it expands 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 Beninois government, for instance, is currently seeking to boost the tourism sector and attract European tourists to its heritage sites, floating villages, and beaches.[61] This is of limited success, but just down the road, in Lagos, there is an emerging market of middle-class urbanites with higher disposable incomes seeking to escape the megacity, its pollution, and "go-slow" traffic for short breaks. Residents in Lagos consider Benin a calmer, safer, and more provincial location and would be a strategic clientele to target. In Benin, decentring policies away from France could enable planners and policymakers to identify potential opportunities in neighbouring countries and build strategies to develop complementary territorial agendas.

## MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AND CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES

Efforts to improve regional integration and territorial planning appear at odds with the lived experience of the corridor on the ground. The same can be said for migration management policies, which, again, produce a contradiction between the discursive framework of policymaking and the everyday experience of mobility along the corridor. Indeed, whereas the vast majority of migration is made up of inter-regional mobility, the political focus remains on departures to Europe. The presence of strangers is part of 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

F. 16 A female trader transports goods across the Benin-Nigeria border during the rainy season.
F. 17 The facade of a building demolished in an urban planning operation.




TWO MIGRATION COASTLINES
Fig. 18

introduced an ECOWAS passport to facilitate crossing 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. There is a danger that these regional 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 tangibly during fieldwork en route from Lagos to Cotonou. Sitting in a *Tokpa* minibus, I was hurtling 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.

The billboard 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. The image was designed for the illiterate and drew on tropes that have become omnipresent in the media, referencing the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean. Looking out from the minibus window, the discrepancy between the everyday experience of mobility in West Africa and the European Union's policy messages were 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. The Gulf of Guinea is largely unmonitored, and 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. [Fig. 18]

In a later interview with a government official working on migration, he recognised that the poster addressed the wrong target group, and if someone was really set on migrating, a billboard 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." [62] Following the 2015 migration "crisis," official development aid delivered along the corridor is increasingly mandated to improve life opportunities in Africa and 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. However, imaginaries, discourses, and projects are increasingly informed by the European fear of mobile Africans. Messages such as these circulate the idea that the movement of people is problematic and overlooks the importance of mobility in shaping the localities along the corridor.

## CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICTS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE LAGOS–ABIDJAN CORRIDOR

In the three instances of regional integration, territorial planning, and migration management, the experiences of the urban majority along this corridor are not aligned with government discourse and policy, creating various tensions between official representations and everyday practices of mobility and immobility along the corridor. Metaphorically, territorial regulation and everyday life 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 within these instruments enables us to understand why these politics are failing to deliver for this territory of extended urbanisation. If traffic is sped up along the road without considering the interests of road-dwelling communities, then there is a possibility that these communities will nevertheless seek to slow it down and create moments to trade. If territorial planning fails to account for the spatial dynamics along the corridor, it will produce isolated urban development projects that overlook regional synergies and the potential of leveraging difference and opportunity, as is the case of the tourism strategy in Benin. Finally, if migration policy is only preoccupied with migration towards Europe and how to deter it, it will overlook the real challenges, vulnerabilities, and advantages of inter-regional mobility.

It is of little surprise that the European Union and European interventions feature in these contradictions, such as building unused border posts, exporting urban planning notions, or designing ill-fitting migration campaigns. This 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, as in the notion of competitive clusters. Understanding these contradictions paves a path to alternative strategies of action that take into account the interests of road-dwelling communities, for whom the road might be a key source of income. These strategies should consider trans-border exchange and how various scales of mobility are enabling livelihoods up and down the road.

## THE [IM]MOBILITIES OF EXTENDED URBANISATION

Researchers observing still-unbuilt areas between the capital cities along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor have, at times, concluded that this is not indicative of a metropolitan region.

Indeed, when there are breaks in the cemented landscape, the corridor looks deceptively rural. For example, Amandine Spire refers to the desakota concept, which Terry McGee proposed for urban developments in South East Asia's rice landscapes to characterise the corridor.[63] Is it "at the crossroads of the city and the country?" she asks. Or is this hypothesis too risky? What to make of the village settlements, the coconut plantations, and the fields of yams that are between the major cities? [64] One answer would be that these diverse spaces are all participating at different degrees and speeds in the emerging space of extended urbanisation along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor. And perhaps a focus on either rural or urban settings has slowed down the development of a more comprehensive research agenda, overlooking how individuals forge livelihoods across multiple locations, contributing to their transformation and ongoing urbanisation.

The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor is not the sum of the cities along it, nor is it a transnational West African Bos-Wash. This chapter sets out to decentre studies of urbanity in West Africa. As Milica Topalović proposes[65], it eclipses the major capitals and skirts around the predominant city-centrism and Western frameworks of urban analysis. It is a study of African mobility that moves outside the city centres into other urban spaces to examine how movement produces urban form in its interstices.

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 from the megacities. Only then do a series of ordinary places emerge along the coast, places whose development is intrinsically linked to (im)mobilities and circulations. Thinking infrastructurally and starting from the roadside embeds this view of mobility within current theorisations of extended urbanisation. Here, with its bumps and uneven surfaces, the road becomes the main protagonist of extended urbanisation, both as a physical infrastructure and a surface upon which everyday life unfolds. The road nudges theories of extended urbanisation to engage with mobility in more epistemological terms to understand the transformation of urban territories through the lens of movement.

Observing how these processes play out along the corridor 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 translocal relevance. In the corridor, people draw on both the strong nodes of concentrated agglomerations and the threads of thinner extended urbanisation. Along the corridor, the capitals and megacities play a significant role as key nodes and major centralities, bringing 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 20 million inhabitants are transforming all kinds of places along the corridor well outside its boundaries. In neighbouring Benin, the arrival of Nigerian university students has created entire new areas with accompanying Nigerian shops, restaurants, barber salons, and evangelical churches. And as the wealth generated in Lagos fluctuates along the corridor, small tweaks in Nigeria's economic climate, import regulations and currency exchange rates produce shockwaves and shift trajectories of urban development along the coast, making a new business grow or well-established sectors crash.

Mobilising theories of extended urbanisation highlight the political implications of the current processes of urban development. Fractioned colonial legacies, combined with methodological nationalism and a euro-centric framing of movement and territory along the corridor, prevent practitioners and planners from considering the full extension of the corridor in terms of its development. Grounded fieldwork and empirical observations unearth contradictions between the regulation of these urban territories and the processes in play 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 determined. The roadside is a space where the state's authority is reconstituted and challenged.

The specific case of the West African corridor shines a light on how mobility is brokered in spaces of extended urbanisation. It also offers up insights into struggles elsewhere, notably in the north in times of austerity and recession. The first point of comparison is the roadside protests in France and the case of the Gilets Jaunes, whose mobilisations were sparked following a tax on fuel and crossed over traditional political divides. Its base was urban communities living outside of the city centres who rely on affordable 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 in the tactics employed along the Lagos-Abidjan Corridor to create breakages in the road. The second point of comparison is with the rise of the "gig economy" in European and American cities. This relies on direct access to freelancers in the marketplace, allowing companies to remain competitive and flexible without employing in-house staff. Analysis of the West African corridor informs us of how, in the aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programmes, people remained 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 North's cities, and they will speak of their hustle as they jump from gig to gig, clinging onto passing opportunities and driving Ubers as they struggle to craft decent livelihoods in their respective urban centres. On the brink of global recession, places like the West African corridor point to common urban futures where people must remain on the move in the absence of jobs.

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

ENDNOTES

1 Current population estimates: 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.
2 Moriconi-Ebrard, *Urbanisation Dynamics in West Africa*.
3 UN-Habitat, *The State of African Cities*, 94.
4 OECD, A*frica's Urbanisation Dynamic 2020*, 109.
5 Labbé, *Handbook of Megacities*, 1.
6 UN-Habitat, *The State of African Cities*, 98.
7 NEPAD, *Abidjan Lagos Corridor One*, 5.
8 Choplin, "Metropolisation et Gouvernance Urbaine."
9 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).
10 Simone, "The Urbanity of Movement", 381, 388.
11 Adepoju, "Migrants and Refugees,"; Bredeloup, "Migrations entre les deux"; Jerven, "Poor Numbers."
12 Robin, "Panorama des migrations"; Simone, "The Urbanity of Movement."
13 Flahaux, "African Migration"; Landau, "The Future of Mobility"; CMPD, *A Survey on Migration*.
14 IOM, *West and Central Africa*.
15 Schmidt-Kallert, "Non-Permanent Migration."
16 Tacoli, "Urbanization, Rural-Urban Migration."
17 Bakewell, "Keeping Them in Their Place."
18 Potts, "Rural-Urban and Urban-Rural," 10.
19 Jedwab, "Rural Push, Urban Pull."
20 Bakewell, "Migration, Mobility," 5.
21 Bruijn, *Mobile Africa*.
22 Simone, "The Urbanity of Movement."
23 Bakewell, "Introduction: Forging a Study."
24 nccr, "The Migration-Mobility Nexus," para 1.
25 Melly, *Bottleneck*, 9.
26 Sheller, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," 214.
27 Büscher, *Mobile Methods*.
28 Sheller, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," 209.
29 Landau, "Urbanisms and Archipelagic Space-Time."
30 Law, "Between the Sea," 222.
31 Chouin, "Crisis and Transformation."
32 Law, "Between the Sea," 222.
33 Cornevin, *La République Populaire*.
34 Igué, *L'Etat-Entrepôt Au Bénin*.
35 Challenor, "Strangers as Colonial Intermediaries; Quintard, "Benin."
36 Brenner, "Planetary Urbanization," 12.
37 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 313, 317.
38 Choplin, "The West African Corridor"; Choplin, *Matière grise de l'urbain*.
39 Gottmann, *Megalopolis*; Greenberg, "The Gauteng City-Region."
40 Agbiboa, "No Condition Is Permanent"; Sawyer, "Plotting the Prevalent"; Acey, "Rise of the Synthetic"; Lawanson, "Land Governance and Megacity"; Mendelsohn, "Making the Urban Coast."
41 Gough, "Land Markets in African Cities"; Pellow, *Landlords and Lodgers*; Grant, *Globalizing City;* Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra;* Hart, *Ghana on the Go*; Paller, *Democracy in Ghana*.
42 N'Bessa, "Porto-Novo et Cotonu"; Ciavolella, Cotonou Histoire d'une Ville; Gervais-Lambony, *Lomé;* Spire, *L'Etranger et La Ville;* Choplin, "The West African Corridor."
43 Souaré, "Interview avec Mamady Souaré"; NEPAD, "Abidjan Lagos Corridor One"; Choplin, *Matière grise de l'urbain*.
44 Spire, *L'Etranger et La Ville*.
45 Merrifield, "The Urban Question under," 910.
46 Hertzog, "The Lagos-Abidjan Corridor"; Hertzog, "Heading to Town"; Hertzog, "Urban Migration in West Africa."
47 Hertzog, *Parcours de Migrants*.
48 Melly, *Bottleneck*.
49 Larkin, *Signal and Noise*, 329; Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting."
50 Harvey, "The Enchantments of Infrastructure"; Harvey, *Roads*; Klaeger, "Rush and Relax"; Klaeger, "Dwelling on the Road"; Manji, "Bulldozers, Homes and Highways"; Baptista, "The Road of Progress"; Filippello, *The Nature of the Path*.
51 Glele, "La Periurbanisation," 461.
52 Ciavolella, "Cotonou Histoire d'une Ville".
53 Melley, *Bottleneck*.
54 Melley, *Bottleneck*.
55 De Boeck and Baloji. *Suturing the City*
56 Kapuscinski, *Ebène*, 306–307.
57 Igué, *L'Etat-Entrepôt Au Bénin*.
58 Banque africaine de developpement, "Corridor Abidjan-Lagos."
59 *Pike,* "The Limits of City," Castriota, "Estudos Urbanos."
60 Ministère, "Projet d'Agenda Spatial."
61 Présidence, "Programme d'Actions Du Gouvernement."
62 Bakewell, "Keeping them in Their Place"; Collyer, "From Preventive to Repressive."
63 McGee, "The Emergence of Desakota."
64 Spire, *L'Etranger et La Ville*, 56.
65 Topalović, "Architecture of Territory."

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F. 1 Martin Lozivit
F. 2 World Urbanization Prospects (United Nations)
F. 4 Stefane Brabant
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F. 6 Anon. source: British Library
F. 7 Sources: Serge Grusinski, Les quatre parties du monde, Paris: La Martinière, 2004; P. Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite négrière entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos*, Paris: Mouton, 1968; Atlas Historique Larousse, Hachette et Bordas; P. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery. A History in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 ; *Histoire générale de l'Afrique*, Unesco/Nouvelles éditions africaines, 8 vol., Paris, 1980–1998; J. Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire*, Hatier: Paris, 1972.
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F. 18 BBC, The Guardian, Le Monde diplomatique, Le Monde, Migreurop, Migrinter (Poitiers)